# ENGLISH VOCABULARY ENHANCEMENT TECHNIQUES PRACTISED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SINDH

*Roshan Ali Mugheri*
*Dr. Syed Ismail Shah Bukhari*

## ABSTRACT

*Vocabulary differs from learner to learner because it is aggregate of words in the use or comprehension of a specified learner. Vocabulary is considered as a vital component of reading ability. There is a close link between the learner's reading ability and vocabulary. There is a powerful cyclical relationship: reading expands vocabulary, and this expansion improves reading ability, competence and performance, which further stimulates vocabulary expansion. This paper highlights the skill of inferring meaning from text and analyzes relationship between expansion in vocabulary and proficiency in reading skill.*

## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is defined as a range or system of symbols or techniques constituting a mean of communication or expression in a language. Vocabulary is in no way less important than language structure because vocabulary works as the vital organ and the flesh while language structure works as the skeleton of language. Nation and Coady (1988:98) hold that "vocabulary knowledge would seem to be the most clearly identifiable subcomponent of the ability to read." Reading is an important means by which new words are understood and learned. Nation and Coady (1988:104) argue that the learner can guess between 60 per cent and 80 per cent of the unknown words in a text if the density of unknown words is not too high. These remarks of Nation and Coady are applicable in the University of Sindh Jamshoro where looking up every new word a learner does not know in a text, in the dictionary creates two main problems. Firstly it takes time. Secondly it interrupts the learner's reading tempo and he/she loses the thread.

## WORD IN CONTEXT

It is suggested that making an educated guess at what the word means is faster and is sufficient for most purposes. Often this

gives a learner just a general idea. Sometimes the word is impossible to guess. But this is how it builds up a picture of what a word means in English. There are three stages to attack a word in the context.

For example: *regeneration*

**Stage 1:**

Division of word and root: re /generate/tion

Root: generate

Re: again

Generate: produce/create

**Stage 2:**

Part of speech: tion shows that it is a noun

**Stage 3:**

Guess meaning from context: regeneration means reproduction/ recreation.

## VOCABULARY TEACHING

The selection and grading of vocabulary teaching have been problematic in the past. The more concrete words relating to daily life activities, interests and needs of learners are taught at lower levels and more abstract words or ideas at the higher levels. Another criterion of vocabulary teaching is frequency and coverage. Frequency consists of most commonly used words which should be taught first. Coverage consists of more useful words which represent more things than only one particular meaning. Jeremy Harmer (1991:159) explains active and passive vocabulary and discovery techniques. Active refers to vocabulary that was taught to learner but he/she is still expected to use it. Passive refers to vocabulary that is recognized by learner when encountered but he/she is not able to produce. Yet there is no constant status of vocabulary item because active becomes passive and passive becomes active due to its permanent usage or non-usage by the learner. Discovery techniques make learners independent to find out rules and meanings, to activate and share their previous knowledge by themselves rather than spoon feeding by the teacher. However, active and passive vocabulary and discovery techniques may be very helpful to solve learner's problem of new vocabulary in texts/materials taught in the University of Sindh Jamshoro.

New words may be taught through some form of presentation and explanation in the class. Realia is the effective classroom technique to show the things to the learners that stand for certain words. Board drawings, wall pictures, charts, flashcards, magazine pictures and other visual aids may be used in the class for vocabulary development. Some words are better taught through mime, action and gesture in the class.
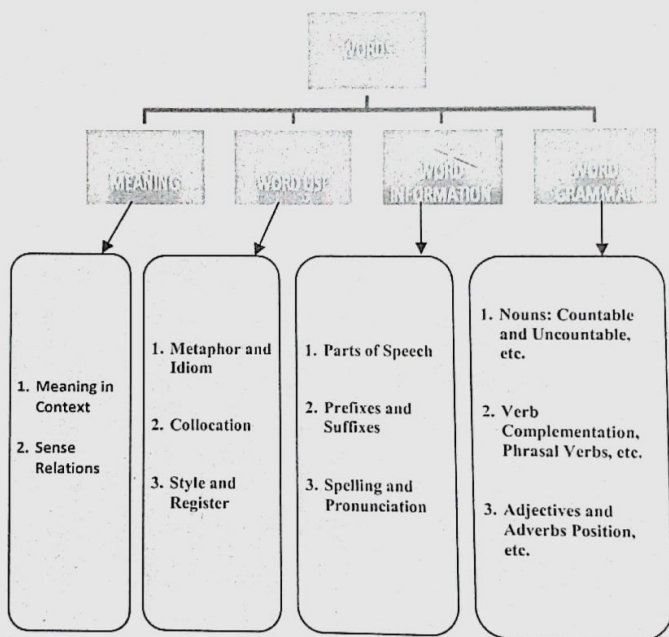
The role-play activities are very useful in this regard. The meaning of a word may be taught by contrasting it. For example, high contrasting with low, right contrasting with wrong and beautiful contrasting with ugly, etc. The mind map technique may be adopted to ask learners to divide a list of words into related groups.

The learners usually face a new text, which causes discouragement and apprehension in them due to the meaning of unknown elements, which have always more than one meaning. Sometimes the meanings of words are inferred in their relation to other words that is called sense relations. The meanings of words keep on changing, stretching and limiting by how those are used in the text. The use of collocation influences word meaning. For example there is formation of compound words (head+ache, stomach+ache and ear+ache) but it is incorrect to form(throat+ache and leg+ache) etc.

The words can adopt their different shape, grammatical value and context. The words modify not only their shapes but also meanings as per addition of various prefixes and suffixes to base/root words. This whole process of written, read, spoken and changed forms of word is described by Jeremy Harmer (1991:158) in the following figure.

## Figure

## KNOWING A WORD

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **WORD** | | | |
| **MEANING** | **WORD USE** | **WORD INFORMATION** | **WORD GRAMMAR** |
| 1. Meaning in Context<br><br>2. Sense Relations | 1. Metaphor and Idiom<br><br>2. Collocation<br><br>3. Style and Register | 1. Parts of Speech<br><br>2. Prefixes and Suffixes<br><br>3. Spelling and Pronunciation | 1. Nouns: Countable and Uncountable, etc.<br><br>2. Verb Complementation, Phrasal Verbs, etc.<br><br>3. Adjectives and Adverbs Position, etc. |

The conversion of words from one part of speech into another is full of interest and fun for learners in class. The addition of prefix and suffix changes shape, meaning, and class of a word. However, it fulfills two-fold purpose of increasing vocabulary and class identity of words and then their correct usage in a sentence.

Donald E.P. Smith (1960:21) explains the multidimensional model of the intellectual processes operating in reading ability as under:

1. Unit: Here the reader deals directly with the intrinsic meaning of words, guessed from inference.
2. Class: The function of the word, its type or use is the core of the various intellectual processes which help to reveal its meaning.
3. Relations: The meaning of a word is recalled by reference to its relationship to other words, as synonyms, antonyms, rhyming and slang associations.
4. Systems: System of words emphasizing size, mood and intensity, yield clues to the meanings of the words that form the continuum.
5. Transformations: Recognition of meanings through structural analysis demands the ability to deal with the reciprocal effects of affixes and base words.
6. Implications: Here the reader obtains the implied meanings of words from their connotations and the contextual influence of idioms, figures of speech, tone and mood rather than from the common denotational meanings.

These ideas, propagated by Smith & Donald (1960) are practical and pragmatic. It indicates that reading is not merely a technical process, but it is also an intellectual process. The above mentioned six steps are needed to be practiced for the improvement of reading ability of learners.

## CAUSES OF VOCABULARY DIFFICULTIES

The learner has various distinct vocabularies such as speaking, writing, reading and listening. They all continue to develop at various ages. Seegers (1949:181) argues that reading vocabulary is definitely largest, listening second, then writing and finally speaking. Thus, Seegers (1949) emphasizes the fact that

each study begins with reading. It means that reading is basic skill which develops the rest of skills of listening, writing, and speaking.

However, the learners of English at the under-graduate level in the University of Sindh, Jamshoro have following causes of vocabulary difficulties:

- The teaching material is overloaded with new vocabulary without adequate contextual clues to meaning.
- The imbedded, involved and complex sentence structures also cause contextual clues very vague and ambiguous for the majority of learners.
- Lack of word analysis by phonics causes hurdles in vocabulary development.
- The use of technical vocabularies and special usage of common words related to the content fields cause great impediment in the vocabulary development.
- Idiom is a lexical item consisting of several words, with a meaning that can not be deduced from the meaning of the individual words.
- Metaphor, metonym and similar kinds of transferred meaning are always potential problems. Like idioms, they do not mean what they seem to mean.
- The learners face sub-technical vocabulary that occurs in most specialized disciplines.
- The super-ordinates are words of more general meaning viewed in relation to other words of more specific meaning which can also be referred to by the more general term.
- The use of Irony causes the mismatch between the words and the intention of the writer in the text.

Dorothy F. (1980) suggests 8 Cs and a G are for vocabulary teaching: Collocations, Clines, Clusters, Cloze Procedures, Context, Consultation – Checking, Cards, Creativity, and Guessing. But these 8Cs and a G are neither included in the revised Remedial English course nor practised in classes at the under-graduate level in the University of Sindh Jamshoro. These components of Dorothy F. are needed to be taught for vocabulary development of learners of English.

Addy (1941:22) holds the opinions of 250 teachers and supervisors through a survey on basic methods to develop vocabulary of learners. The use of dictionary, context, incidental and informal attention to words by the teacher are ranked as the most effective. While vocabulary card files, lists of words either from the teacher or textbook, exercises of word classification or using them in sentences are ranked as least effective. The words taught in context are certainly remembered by the learner in comparison to the words learnt as single items. Glicksberg (1940:197) argues that the unnatural isolation of words in lists divorces them from their contextual settings which determine their particular meanings and thus interferes with any direct transfer from the list to the pupils reading vocabulary. Niles (1955:147) describes that learners learn words largely by direct experience or vicarious experience as through visual aids. The importance of learning words through context, structure, etymology, dictionary use and vocabulary manuals is also fruitful. In fact, above mentioned opinions of Addy (1941), Glicksberg (1940) and Niles (1955) are effective and useful techniques of improving vocabulary.

Deighton (1960:82) suggests the following measures for the effective teaching of vocabulary:

7. Word parts with invariant meanings
8. English base-words (combined with affixes)
9. Words with common elements, as base words and derivatives, words with similar affixes
10. Synonyms
11. Antonyms and contrasting words
12. Derivations
13. The study of figures of speech.

## CONCLUSION

No doubt, vocabulary is an important component, which contributes to an improved performance in reading ability. The process of inferring lexical meaning does not only lead to the comprehension of new words in text but also to its integration into the learner's vocabulary. The learners need to learn word-attack skills and contextual clues for efficient, effective, and successful reading. Eventually vocabulary expansion helps the learners in the

development of reading ability, at all levels, and in all academic spheres.

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