

Vocabulary Matrix: Understanding, Learning, Teaching

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This book has been designed in an attempt to provide not only English teachers but also learners with an essential knowledge of vocabulary. With ten chapters on different, but related, topics, the book offers some very useful information on exactly how words play their unique and significant role in language learning and teaching. The topic includes how vocabulary is closely related to grammar, how learners acquire second language vocabulary, and what should be the focus of vocabulary instruction. Each chapter has three sections: Part A: What do we know about this? Part B: What are the problems for learners?, and Part C: How do we teach it? The writers logically support their viewpoints of vocabulary pedagogy with several previous studies on vocabulary acquisition undertaken by well-known scholars in the field.

Whereas Chapter 1 is an introduction to vocabulary in general, e.g. word formations, phonological aspects of words, vocabulary size appropriate for pedagogy and acquisition, Chapter 2 primarily concerns lexical semantics, i.e. how words and their meanings are connected. The concepts of synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and register and connotation are presented. The writers also mention how cognates, words in two different languages derived from the same origin, can sometimes lead learners to develop vocabulary learning problems (McCarthy, 1990). Furthermore, the chapter discusses which kinds of words should be directly introduced to students and suggests various methods of teaching abstract vocabulary, sense relations, etc.

In Chapter 3, the notion of collocation, “how likely it is that two words will occur next to each other, or very near to each other (p. 28)”, is dealt with. In particular, collocations and meaning, register and collocations and differences between weak and strong collocations are clearly explained and exemplified. Learners’ collocational errors seem to emanate from native language influence (Nesselhauf, 2003), overuse and underuse of collocations, and word creation through merging words together or bottom-up. In terms of collocation instruction, teachers are encouraged to adopt both deductive and inductive approaches. The former concentrates on an explanation of the principle first, followed by examples, while the latter pertains to data-driven learning, where learners are given plenty of examples so that they themselves can constitute rules or frequently-and naturally-occurring combinations.

Grammatical relationships between words are the main focus in Chapter 4. The concept of colligation, which is the way words co-occur in grammatical patterns, is contrasted with collocation, which, instead, highlights lexical patterns. Modern corpus-based dictionaries are regarded as a truly useful source for EFL/ESL learners since they supply learners with word meanings as well as grammar. A significant

number of scholars in lexicography agree that grammar and lexis are inseparable and the instruction of one at the expense of the other is not at all advisable (Biber et al, 1999; Carter & McCarthy, 2006). In addition, negative transfer from learners' L1 is apparently a major source of problems. Teachers, accordingly, should develop lessons and materials based on the "actual" typical errors resulting from their students' L1; this may, in fact, enhance the students' vocabulary learning skill as well.

Chapter 5 discusses multi-word items, e.g. compounds, prepositional phrases, phrasal verbs, and lexical chunks. There are several difficulties for learners with regard to multi-word items, e.g. transparency of meaning, fixedness, frequency and usefulness, pronunciation, syntax, and guessing meaning from context (Willis, 2006). The suggested multi-word item instruction methodology is that teachers should consider context and level. "With advanced learners, a more inductive approach can be adopted, whereby learners are left to work things out on their own." (p. 58). In contrast, when teaching lower-level students, teachers need to offer more support and guidance on function and pronunciation.

Chapter 6 deals with idioms, whose meanings are difficult to identify from each individual component word. Idioms can be placed on a continuum, from more transparent, i.e. easy to understand, to more opaque. Idioms are also fixed in their form; some occur very frequently, whereas some do not. What seems to be the problem for learners studying idioms is that they tend to learn words separately rather than as a chunk. Moreover, learners are often unaware of them. One of the suggestions is teachers should introduce common idioms, together with frequent chunks, downplaying obscure, rare ones.

Chapter 7, links back to some of the key concepts introduced in Chapter 2, and involves word relations, including synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, homonyms, and metaphors. Learners evidently have problems with these words due to a lack of one-to-one correlation between words. For instance, many synonyms do not share the same collocates, word partners, which may account for why learners often misuse collocations that are more likely to occur with one synonym but not another. The authors recommend that teachers avoid or reduce teaching words and their relations in isolation because doing so "runs the risk of generating errors of overgeneralization" (p. 84).

Chapter 8 describes the relationship between vocabulary and discourse analysis. Lexis is crucial for text unity construction, and a good number of features are involved: lexical cohesion, lexical chains and topics, stance, and register. Learners are apparently faced with problems of the four English skills when it comes to an analysis and production of continuous spoken or written English. From a pedagogical viewpoint, learners are expected to be given strategies to enable them to process and produce new language, such as *inferencing*, identifying lexical relations, and *dictogloss*.

In Chapter 9, mental lexicon or words in the mind is the focal point. Much like a computer, a learner's mind functions like a hard disk processing, storing, and

retrieving words. Looking at how the mind organizes vocabulary, this chapter presents the different processes that determine the ways in which mental lexicon is organized: input, storage, and retrieval. The problems pestering students are the sheer volume of new words with which they have to deal. Furthermore, word elements are also problematic for them, such as spelling, pronunciation, form, meaning, derivation, collocation, and connotation and register (Schmitt, 2010). To tackle such problems, theories in second language acquisition (SLA) are reviewed, including Behaviorism, Cognitivism, The Lexical Approach, etc.

Chapter 10 is centered around the sociolinguistic aspects of vocabulary. The influence of media on how people use language, and the vocabulary used in spoken and written genres are discussed. What poses problems for learners is an “awareness deficit”: whether a word is taboo, sexist, or politically incorrect. In addition, learners often fail to use words appropriately according to varieties and registers (Gilquin & Paquot, 2008). Instructional device is to have students work with pairs of words from contrasting registers, encouraging them to utilize dictionaries and other resources, such as the Internet, to identify to which registers the words belong. Teachers may also find it very helpful to explicitly promote strategy learning in vocabulary classroom, placing an emphasis on social use of words.

Readers of *Vocabulary Matrix: Understanding, Learning, Teaching* should find the book readable, accessible, and insightful. The contents are arranged in a well-organized and systematic fashion, helping even learners who are new in lexicology easily follow. EFL/ESL teachers are also expected to considerably benefit from the pedagogical implications provided at the end of each chapter, and they can grasp certain magnificent ideas or tips to ameliorate their vocabulary teaching. Apart from learners and teachers, researchers interested in vocabulary study may also use this book as a stepping stone to enter into the research realm of lexis due to the fact that basic concepts are well illustrated, and the references are comprehensively given for subsequent study.

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