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## EFFICIENT VOCABULARY TESTING TECHNIQUES

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**Abstract.** The article deals with the problem of teaching vocabulary. Different aspects of vocabulary (pronunciation, spelling, grammar, collocation, meaning, word formation) are considered alongside with efficient vocabulary testing techniques.

**Keywords:** item, denotation, connotation, appropriateness.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

To know a language means to master its structure and words. Thus, vocabulary is one of the aspects of the language to be taught in school. "Vocabulary can be defined as the words we teach in the foreign language" [4, p. 60]. But this definition does not seem quite accurate as a new item of vocabulary may be more than a single word (e.g. merry-go-round) which is made of three words but express a single idea. There exist also multiword idioms such as "to be over the hill, to beat about the bush, to be on steep learning curve, to learn the ropes" where the meaning of the phrase cannot be deduced from the analysis of the component words. Thus it is more appropriate to talk about vocabulary "items" rather than "words".

### 2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Learning the vocabulary of a foreign language is not an easy business since each vocabulary item has its form, meaning and usage. And each of these aspects may have its difficulties [3, p. 133].

While teaching vocabulary items we should take into account the following things:

- 1) pronunciation and spelling: the learner has to know what a word sounds like (its pronunciation) and what it looks like (its spelling).
- 2) grammar: we might note tense forms, transitive or intransitive verbs, plural forms of nouns, adjectives or verbs together with their following prepositions and so on.
- 3) collocation: it makes a particular combination sound "right" or "wrong" in a given context. e.g. "to take a decision" but "to make a conclusion".
- 4) aspects of meaning

- a) denotation  
e.g. "a cat" denotes a kind of animal
- b) connotation  
e.g. "a dog" has positive connotation of friendship in many countries but in Egypt it is a symbol of death.
- c) appropriateness: you should differentiate between formal and informal discourse and certain dialects.  
e.g. a boy – a guy, a thing – stuff.
- 5) word formation: you may teach the common prefixes and suffixes as well as the combination of two words.

"Vocabulary acquisition is increasingly viewed as crucial to language acquisition. However, there is much disagreement as to the effectiveness of different approaches for presenting vocabulary items. Moreover, learning vocabulary is often perceived as a tedious and laborious process" [2, p. 64].

There are a lot of ways to present a new lexical item to learners so that they can grasp its meaning:

- concise definition (as in a dictionary; often a superordinate with qualifications: for example, a cat is an animal which...)
- detailed description (of appearance, qualities...)
- examples (hyponyms)
- illustration (picture, object)
- demonstration (acting, mime)
- context (story or sentence in which the item occurs)
- synonyms
- opposite(s) (antonyms)
- translation
- associated ideas, collocations [4, p. 63].

After presenting new vocabulary items you might wish to check your students' knowledge of them. There are many different types of vocabulary-testing technologies. The following ones are recommended:

#### **Example 1**

Choose the letter of the item which is the nearest in meaning to the word in italics:

He was *reluctant* to answer.

- a) unprepared b) unwilling c) refusing d) slow

Only denotative meaning is tested, the testee does not need to know the words connotations, spelling, pronunciation, grammar, or how they would be used in a context.

#### **Example 2**

Choose the letter of the definition which comes closest in meaning to the word *elated*.

- a) ready and willing b) tense and excited c) tending to talk a lot d) in high spirits

The testee chooses more careful and subtle distinctions in meaning.

#### **Example 3**

Draw lines connecting the pairs of opposites.

A	B
brave	awake
loathsome	expensive
female	succeed
cheap	delightful
inclined	cowardly
asleep	unwilling
fail	male

Only meaning is tested.

**Example 4**

Which of the prefixes in Column A can combine with which of the words in Column B? Write out the complete words.

A	B
in	fortunate
be	thrown
dis	normal
ab	believe
il	mortal
mis	attentive
im	legal
de	fool

Here the only thing that is being tested is whether the testee is aware of the existence of the (combined) word [1, p. 137].

**Example 5**

Underline the odd one out: plum, apple, pear, lemon, knife, orange

Only meaning is being tested, and you have no way of being sure that all the items are known. But this is at least more interesting to do and usually easy to mark.

**Example 6**

For each of the following words, write a sentence that makes its meaning clear.

1.island 2.surgeon 3.ignore 4.poverty

Spelling and pronunciation of the items are not tested, but most other aspects are. This is a bit boring to do and difficult to mark objectively, but does check the testee's knowledge fairly well.

**Example 7**

The teacher dictates the words from Example 6, the students write them down.

Dictation tests aural recognition and spelling only. However, if learners can recognize and spell an item correctly they probably also know what it means.

**Example 8**

The teacher dictates the mother-tongue equivalents of the words in Example 6, the students write down the target-language versions.

This checks if students know meaning and spelling only. There is the problem that the mother-tongue translation may be inexact or misleading.

**Example 9**

Fill in the gaps:

In the seventeenth \_\_\_\_\_ Spanish ships sailed \_\_\_\_\_ to Central and \_\_\_\_\_ America to fetch gold for the Spanish \_\_\_\_\_. The ships were often attacked by \_\_\_\_\_, who infested the 'Spanish Main' (the sea \_\_\_\_\_ north-east of Central and South America).

This tests meaning, spelling, to some extent grammar and collocation. But testees may write down possibly acceptable items that are not in fact the originals or what you intended.

**Example 10**

Complete the passage using the words from the list:

area, century, pirates, government, regularly, South

In the seventeenth \_\_\_\_\_ Spanish ships sailed \_\_\_\_\_ to Central and \_\_\_\_\_ America to fetch gold for the Spanish \_\_\_\_\_. The ships were often attacked by \_\_\_\_\_, who infested the 'Spanish Main' (the sea \_\_\_\_\_ north-east of Central and South America).

Meaning is tested here, also to some extent grammar and collocation. This version is easier to do and mark than Example 9.

**Example 11**

Students are given sentences in the mother tongue to translate into the target language or vice versa.

Translation can test all aspects of an item, but there is the usual difficulty of finding exact equivalents across languages and it may be tricky to mark.

**Example 12**

Finish the following sentences:

1. I feel depressed when...
2. I never have an appetite when...
3. It was a great relief when...

This tests (denotative) meaning only; but is 'personalized' and interesting to do and read.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

So it is now clear from the information provided above that the acquisition of vocabulary is just as important as the acquisition of grammar, pronunciation and other aspects of the language. Words are considered to be elements of the language used in the act of communication. Thus vocabulary is necessary to give students something to say when learning language structures. To know a language means to master its structure and words.

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Стаття стосується проблеми навчання лексики. Розглядаються різні аспекти лексики (вимова, орфографія, граматики, сполучуваність, значення, словотвір) разом з ефективними способами перевірки її засвоєння.

**Ключові слова:** лексична одиниця, денотація, конотація, контекстуальна відповідність.