

Vol. 6, Issue-1  
February 2015

ISSN: 0976-8165

# The Criterion

An International Journal in English



*6th Year of Open Access*

Poetry | Fiction | Research Papers | Author Interviews | Book Reviews

**Chief Editor**  
Dr. Vishwanath Bite

**Managing Editor**  
Madhuri Bite

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>

## **Vocabulary: Active and Passive Vocabulary: Various Techniques of Teaching Vocabulary**

**Gunaprova Gogoi**

Assistant Professor  
Pithubar Girls' Degree College  
Dibrugarh, Assam.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the types of vocabulary and its techniques of teaching in the classroom. English is a living language and so it is difficult to be precise about the exact number of words in the languages. New words are constantly being added while others disappear through lack of use. We each have our own personal vocabulary which is unique to us. Obviously there is a great deal of overlap from one person to another, but the exact set of words that one person has in his vocabulary will be distinct from the next person's.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Vocabulary is the set of lexical items in a language; it is also called the 'lexicon'. The term lexicon is known in English from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when it referred to a book containing a selection of a language's words and meanings; arranged in alphabetical order. The term itself comes from Greek 'lexis' word. It has taken on a more abstract sense, especially within linguistics, referring to the total stock of meaningful units in a language-not only the words and idioms, but also the parts of words which express meaning, such as the prefixes and suffixes.

Words are referred to as 'the building blocks of language'. These are powerful tools. We need a rich supply of words so that we can select the correct tools for the job as we would with any other task we tackled. We need a good vocabulary. A good vocabulary is that which (a) fills our needs, (b) gives us confidence, (c) helps us to understand, (d) is varied and (e) is exact.

### **TYPES OF VOCABULARY:**

On the basis of its application, vocabulary is divided into two types: Active Vocabulary and Passive Vocabulary.

#### **ACTIVE VOCABULARY:**

Active vocabulary consists of those words over which one can use in his speech and writing. He knows the meaning of those words accurately. Active vocabulary refers to the productive side of language. It consists of the words one uses confidently because he understands their meanings and usage.

In order to give the proficiency in spoken and written language, words must continuously be added to the active vocabulary of the students. Active vocabulary of a language calls for:

- a) The use of right word in right place.
- b) The spontaneous recall of words.
- c) Grammatical accuracy i.e., use of correct tenses, inflections and word order.
- d) In speech, fluency and ability to reproduce correct sounds, pronunciation, intonation, rhythm etc.

### **PASSIVE VOCABULARY:**

The Passive Vocabulary consists of those words, meaning of which can be understood when they appear in speech or writing of others but which we cannot use in our own speech and writing because we are not fully conversant with them. In passive vocabulary, the person does not know the precise meaning of a particular word and he does not make use of those words in communication. Sometimes he can understand the meaning of that word only to a certain extent depending on the context. Passive vocabulary refers to the receptive side of language. Passive vocabulary calls for:

- a) A recognition of vocabulary in speech or writing.
- b) An acquaintance with major grammatical items or forms.
- c) The skill of stimulating rapidly the sense of large word groups.

It is observed that an undergraduate student has 3000 to 5000 active vocabulary whereas the same student has 5000 to 10,000 passive vocabulary.

A good communicator tries to turn passive vocabulary into active vocabulary. It is obvious that words from passive vocabulary shift to active vocabulary after some years. There is no hard and fast rule of acquiring active vocabulary. The one and only requirement is the student's enthusiasm and effort with some proper directions.

The teaching of vocabulary has not been accorded a place of prominence in the syllabus at any stage of education. It has been relegated to a secondary status in favor of syntax of the university level. The undergraduate student must have enough foundation both in terms of vocabulary and syntax. Of the two, vocabulary is more fluid and hence it should be given as much importance as the choice of structures in the English curriculum. Vocabulary teaching is very essential especially where students are from regional medium schools and have limited exposure to English.

A language teacher must know the techniques of teaching vocabulary which he should apply in the classroom. Before applying the techniques of teaching vocabulary, a language teacher must know the principles of vocabulary teaching. These principles are-

- 1) To find out the frequency of the word.
- 2) To find out the applicability of words related to different contexts – selection of vocabulary items is very important.
- 3) An easier word should be taught first.
- 4) Sequencing or gradation or ordering of items is necessary.
- 5) Improvement or enrichment of vocabulary refers to both active and passive vocabulary.

- 6) Guessing the meaning from the context or acquaintance with the usage.

### **TECHNIQUES OF TEACHING VOCABULARY:**

There are a good number of techniques of teaching vocabulary some of which are discussed below:

- 1) Showing pictures or using Audio-visual aids: To a certain extent, the language teacher should have the mastery over the skill of drawing so as to teach vocabulary. He should produce some picture of animals, birds, fruits, vegetables etc. The teacher can also use some other audio-visual aids to teach vocabulary properly.
- 2) Showing real objects or models: The objects which the teacher can easily bring in the classroom should be shown to the students. For example, stick, stone, maps, clock etc.
- 3) Miming or performing an action: To teach some words, the teacher should actually perform the action like walking, writing, laughing etc. in the class.
- 4) By framing illustrative sentences: These sentences should be such that meaning of the words flashes from the context clear as crystal. For example, the train left the station at 7.55. I could not catch it. I missed the train.

It should be always kept in mind that this type of sentences should be simple in structure.

- 5) By associating with other words: The teacher should try to associate a new word with the word that is already known to the students. This can be done by asking and giving examples of synonyms and antonyms. Referring to a thesaurus is, too, a useful method.
- 6) Identifying the lexical set: Ability to identifying the lexical set is very essential in teaching vocabulary. For example, accelerator, breaks are the words of the some lexical set.
- 7) Breaking words into component units: The meaning of words should be explained by breaking words down into their component units and providing the meaning of each unit separately, and then giving the combined root + affix meaning. For instance, words such as 'inject', 'eject', and 'deject' could be explained as follows:

Inject = in(inside) + ject (throw) = to insert, as in 'inject a syringe'.

Eject = e (away) + ject(throw) = to throw out, as in 'eject oneself from an airplane'.

Deject = de(down) + ject(throw) = to throw down' to make low in spirits.

Despite some limitations, the analytical method will at least give us the core meaning from which other meanings have diverged.

- 8) Exposure of different contexts: Learners should be exposed to different kinds of contexts in which a word may be used, to ensure its proper usage. One context does not ensure mastery of the word. The teacher should give proper guidance to the students to work with the new words actively, regularly and systematically.

- 9) Selecting the bases and their order of presentation: The selection of bases and their order of presentation should be made in accordance with their frequency of use and proliferation, i.e., those that are more prolific should be introduced first. It has been asserted that more than 240 words have sprouted out of the Latin word 'spectare' meaning to 'see'.
- 10) To give some importance on word-formation: The teacher should teach the different affixes (prefixes and suffixes) and their functions should be taught in order to give proper interpretation of a new word. Words can be grouped into clusters on the basis of their affixes. Knowing the meaning of a prefix or a suffix will definitely help learners to understand the meaning of a word.
- 11) Crossword puzzles: Crossword puzzles help in studying vocabulary. Almost all the English newspapers have crossword puzzles. The teacher should produce adequate crossword puzzles for the sake of teaching vocabulary. This is a useful tool in building one's vocabulary.
- 12) Word games: Sometimes the teacher should conduct some word games among the students in the classroom. This will help the students a lot because the process of learning vocabulary becomes an entertaining work.
- 13) Giving equivalents in mother-tongue: Most of the students may not be acquainted with all the terms in the target language. But those terms can be taught through the medium of their mother-tongue. The barrier of understanding the meaning of some specific words can be removed in this way.
- 14) Encourage the students to use a dictionary: Students should be always encouraged to use a dictionary. It is always beneficial to use a monolingual dictionary. To get a wide exposure to the language, it is an essential act which the students should be advised to perform.

These are the basic techniques of teaching vocabulary. A teacher can use various innovative techniques at his will while teaching vocabulary. The vocabulary teaching will become unfruitful until and unless the teacher creates a cozy atmosphere in the classroom.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Vocabulary is one of the major problems confronting EFL learners. Because of their anemic vocabulary, they cannot communicate their ideas as clearly as they would like to and they cannot grasp the ideas transmitted to them. Their listening-comprehension, writing and reading abilities are hampered by their limited vocabulary. Therefore, there is a need of systematic vocabulary building program which should come under the curriculum of language teaching. The importance of knowing the meaning of words is attested by the inclusion of a separate vocabulary component in college and scholarship tests such as TOEFL and GRE.

## **Works Cited:**

- Ellis, R, 1990: Instructed Second Language Acquisition. Oxford. Basil Blackwell.  
Bill, W.F.L. : The Techniques of Language Teaching, Longman.

Tomkinson :The Teaching of English in India.  
Dr. Abha Rani Bisht :Teaching English in India.  
Trivedi Ghanchi : Techniques of Teaching English.