

NICOLETA DANIELA PÂRÂIAC

Teaching English through semantic relationships

Pedagogical suggestions

Editura Cartea Vrânceană
ISBN 978-606-95212-3-6

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2021

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ISBN 978-606-95212-3-6
EDITURA CARTEA VRÂNCEANĂ
Casa Corpului Didactic "Simion Mehedinți" Vrancea
Str. Eroilor, nr.2, Focșani, Vrancea
2021

Tehnoredactare și corectură: Pârâiac, Nicoleta Daniela
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Introduction

Words are most powerful tools that we have to express and communicate our thoughts and to create the events of our lives. Our words can create the most beautiful reality or destroy everything that exists around us. Most of us want to use words and expressions whose meaning others understand too.

“When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more or less”.

(Lewis Carroll’ -*“Through the Looking Glass”*)

I decided to write this work on vocabulary teaching through semantic relations because I realized that teaching vocabulary is one of the most challenging activities in class. Students may easily learn new words by heart but do they understand their meaning as easy as that? Is memorizing an efficient technique of learning new vocabulary or should we try something new? Is the simplest way the most efficient one?

The research attempts to find a solution to improving Romanian learners’ performance in using English vocabulary and to investigate a variety of techniques that can influence the students’ achievement in enriching their English vocabulary mastery.

Chapter 1 deals with methodological aspects of teaching English. Each and every day is a challenge to work with children, especially primary and secondary students, whose main worry is the time left for them to play outside or surf the internet. In a world full of technological temptations we are forced to keep up with it, trying to come in front of the students with the most creative ideas for teaching. An experienced language teacher always adopts the teaching methods, deciding on the most appropriate techniques and applying the most appropriate methodology for the learner's objectives, learning style and context.

Chapter 2 presents the result of an intervention study. This section discusses principles of effective vocabulary and relates them to powerful cognitive processes for learning.

Many teachers still use conventional methods: reading, identifying unknown words, writing their definitions from dictionaries, translation so the students are easy to lose interest.

To improve learner's understanding teachers must use more efficient techniques. From this understanding comes the real knowledge and communication.

Chapter I

Pedagogical suggestions on teaching English through semantic relationships

In the practice of teaching English there is a variety of methods that have been and are still being used, some more effective, others less effective. This chapter attempts to present the most frequently discussed and used methods. Of the traditional ones, I have stopped on the Grammar Translation Method, the most popular of the traditional, though very controversial, Audio-lingual Method and Presentation, Practice, Production.

The modern methods chosen are more numerous, which can be explained by the variety of teachers teaching English and the territories where it is taught, which makes the English language teaching experience an extensive experience and raises valuable discussions. So, I have stopped on the Direct Method, The Silent Way, Suggestopedia, Community Language Learning, The Total Physical Response Method, the Communicative Method (for method information see Harmer, 2004 and Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Of course, the selection

of these methods is subjective, the criteria by which they were chosen to be their efficiency and the degree of popularity.

III.1. Traditional methods

III.1.1. The Grammar Translation Method

Considered simple and efficient, it is the classical method whose main objectives are the study of grammar, vocabulary and literature. The approach is a deductive one, with the emphasis on conscious learning. The ability to receive the written message and the ability to express it is the most practiced skill. The native language of the students is widely used, the techniques used are translations, reading texts, grammar and vocabulary exercises.

The teacher's roles are as follows: student manager, coordinator and evaluator, classroom interaction taking place especially between teacher and students (frontal approach). Student correction is very important, because emphasis is placed on accuracy.

III.1.2. The Audio-Lingual Method

It developed in the US during the Second World War. The

main objective is that students learn to use the language in a communicative way, automatically.

Vocabulary and grammar are presented in the form of dialogues that are learned by repetition and imitation. Students pay attention and carry a sequence of what they are doing, but despite of learning it in class, teachers can make activities to be performed at home so they can practice writing and reading. The grammar is inductively taught. Exercises that develop the ability to receive the written message and the capacity for written expression are based on communicative activities. The techniques used are: dialogues, role plays, rehearsals, grammar exercises and vocabulary. Student's native language is not used.

The teacher is the one who controls the students and the one who offers them the model of language, the students being imitators of this model. There is also interaction between teacher and student, but also between students. Student errors are not considered essential. The evaluation is oral.

III.1.3. Presentation, Practice, Production

It is a method for teaching structures (e.g. grammar or vocabulary) in a foreign language, “a variation on Audio-

lingualism in British-based teaching”¹ as Jeremy Harmer observes. It is divided into three phases, moving from tight teacher control towards greater learner freedom. In the first step the teacher introduces the elements of language to be assimilated. He begins the lesson by setting up a situation, either eliciting or modeling some language that the situation calls for. Presentation may consist of model sentences, short dialogues illustrating target items, either read from the textbook, heard on the tape or acted out by the teacher.

Students practise the new language in a controlled way, using reproduction and repetition techniques. They drill sentences or dialogues by repeating after the teacher or a recording, in chorus or individually. Other practice activities are matching parts of sentences, completing sentences or dialogues and asking and answering questions using the target language. The third step concerns the use of the language presented and assimilated in an original and authentic way by the students. Students will be able speak, using the target language, with ideally, little or no support from the teacher. They are encouraged to use the new language for their own purposes and meanings or in a similar context introduced

¹ Harmer, J.2004.*The practice of English language teaching*, Third edition, Pearson Education, p.80.

by the teacher. It can be a role play, a simulation activity or a communication task.

Because it is a method based on communication, the evaluation is done this way, too. It is important that the students get as many opportunities to speak using the newly acquired language. Therefore, a teacher shouldn't be drowning them out by speaking at length, over the top of them to correct any errors. This obviously differs from the practice where students expect the teacher to assist them as they rehearse, not produce, the newly acquired language.

As with the audio-linguistic method, vocabulary and grammar are inductively taught. Communication is a priority, and the native language is not used. The model is the teacher, who coordinates the activity.

III.2. Modern methods

III.2.1 The Direct Method

The inventor of the method is C. Berlitz. Its main objective is to teach students to communicate in a foreign language. It sought to immerse the learner in the same way as when a first language is learnt. Translating is not allowed, the teacher using the real world, pictures, pantomime to suggest meaning, so native language is not used at all.

Grammar is inductively taught. Students practise vocabulary in context. All four dimensions of language teaching are developed: the ability to speak, the ability to listen, the ability to write and the ability to read. The techniques used are: conversation, loud reading, exercises, compositions, repetition. The role of the teacher is to be a student's partner. Interaction takes place between teacher and students, but also between students and students. Self-evaluation is often used. There is no formal evaluation. This is in the form of an interview and the writing of a written text.

The weakness in the Direct Method is its assumption that a second language can be learnt in exactly the same way as a first, when in fact the conditions under which a second language is learnt are very different.

III.2.2 The Silent Way

It is a method introduced by Caleb Gattengo, the basic principle is that teaching must be subordinated to learning and the teacher should be silent as much as possible in the classroom and the learner should be encouraged to produce as much language as possible. Students have an active role, being responsible for their own learning. They practise a lot, the main areas of emphasis being

pronunciation and grammar. All four dimensions of language teaching are developed: speaking, listening, writing and reading. Native language is only used when necessary.

The role of the teacher is to help students. The teacher is silent but very active. He speaks only to give some suggestions. There is interaction between students. Mistakes are considered normal, thus the students are encouraged to self-correct. Emphasis is placed on continuous evaluation.

The Silent Way shares a great deal with other learning theories and educational philosophies, such as: learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather than remembers and repeats what is to be learned, learning is facilitated by accompanying (mediating) physical objects, learning is facilitated by problem solving involving the material to be learned, let us consider each of these issues in turn.

III.2.3 Suggestopedia

The inventor of the method is G. Lozanov. The method consists in applying the pedagogy suggestion study, developed to help students overcome learning barriers. The main objective is to accelerate the process of learning using mental powers. The

students stay as comfortable as possible (soft chairs, music, a pleasant atmosphere). They get new names and new occupations, creating even new biographies along the course.

There are two stages of the lesson: one receptive and one active. Students participate in various activities: read, play dialogues, practice various games, drama. Elements that are emphasized are the vocabulary, the ability to speak orally, the ability to receive the written message and the capacity for written expression. Grammar is not considered as very important. Student's native language is used if necessary. Errors are not corrected immediately, focusing on fluency. There are no formal tests, assessing classroom performance.

III.2.4. Community Language Learning

The method comes from learning counseling, developed by C.A.Curran, who sees teachers as linguistic advisers. The main objectives are language learning in a communicative way and learning about one's own learning. The emphasis is on communication, the development of pronunciation, the ability to receive the oral message, the ability to receive the written message, and the discussion of some grammar elements. The native language

of students is used just to make them feel safe. Interaction takes place between teacher and students as well as between students. The role of the teacher is similar to that of a counselor who supports and encourages students. Mistakes are corrected by the teacher. Assessment consists of an oral or written test at the end of the course.

III.2.5. The Total Physical Response Method

The Total Physical Response Method is introduced by J. Asher. The method attaches great importance to the development of the oral message reception capacity. One of the most important goals is for students to enjoy the learning experience. The method is designed to reduce stress in learning a foreign language.

The initial part of the lesson consists of modeling, the teacher giving orders, doing actions with the students. In the second phase of the lesson, students demonstrate that they have understood the commands.

At the initial stage the teacher speaks and the students answer non-verbal and later roles change. The mother tongue is used only at the beginning, the teacher being the coordinator of the students, the students being his imitators. Students will talk when

they feel they are ready. The teacher is tolerant of students' mistakes. The evaluation consists in checking the understanding by doing some activities.

III.2.6. Communicative Language Teaching

The main objective is student fluency. Emphasis is placed on communication. All four dimensions of language teaching are developed: the ability to speak, the ability to listen, the ability to write and the ability to read. Grammar is learned through practice. Student's native language is not used. The techniques used are: discussions, debates, role plays, written communication activities, drama, etc.

The roles of the teacher are those of facilitator and manager of student activity, but also of their partner, the interaction taking place especially among students. Authentic and interesting materials are used. Errors are especially tolerated during communicative activities when emphasis is on fluency. Students are evaluated both orally and in writing.

There is no evidence that traditional methods are better or more efficient than modern ones or vice versa. The conclusion of the numerous researches on this subject is that traditional methods

coexist with modern ones in teaching English, each with its advantages, elements that can be used at any time. The “eclectic approach”, as Chastain calls it (1988), is therefore the most effective in teaching, the methods used to adapt to the class of students.

III.3. Difficulties in learning English

Acquisition of any foreign language involves a series of challenges and difficulties the foreign speaker encounters. The difficulties we face when learning a foreign language depend, to a great extent, on our own native language, on the connection that exists between the mother tongue and the language we want to acquire.

Certainly, a Romanian or an Italian will learn French, for example, more easily than a person whose native language is German. Likewise, a German will learn English much easier than a person whose native language is Chinese.

If we strictly refer to English, the difficulties a speaker might encounter can be grouped into some categories:

a) Pronunciation difficulties

English has a series of sounds that does not exist in other languages. In addition, there are great differences between pronunciation and spelling, hence the many errors we make. There are words that say the same, but they are written differently and have different meanings (flower -floare vs. Flour - făină).

b) Grammar difficulties

Time and appearance can cause problems for speakers. The continuous aspect does not exist in many other languages, including in Romanian, which makes it quite difficult to understand it and how it works.

c) Vocabulary difficulties

It is probably the category that poses the most problems to an English learner.

The diversity and complexity of synonyms (there are many synonyms with subtle differences between them in English, but impossible to refer to for a non-native speaker: fat = gras (offending term);plump = gras (polite term for fat);chubby=grasuț, durduliu-when we speak about a healthy, cute child);verb phrases (verbs which, in combination with certain prepositions change their basic meaning), prepositions, collocations (expressions consisting of nouns and verbs) , of idiomatic expressions is probably the most

difficult aspect in the acquisition of English, regardless of the mother tongue of the learner.

Since the topic discussed in this chapter is almost inexhaustible, I would like to stop on some practical examples. The chosen examples are those with which students most often face the classroom.

- ADVICE vs. ADVISE

ADVICE is an uncountable noun in English. Its equivalent in Romanian is *sfat/sfaturi*.

I need some advice

ADVISE is a verb expressing the action of giving advice.

If you feel sick, I advise you to stay in bed.

The two words above are homonyms and sound almost the same but their meaning is totally different.

- BORROW vs. LEND

Both mean *a împrumuta*, but TO BORROW means take and use (something that belongs to someone else) with the intention of returning it, while TO LEND means grant to (someone) the use of (something) on the understanding that it shall be returned.

I borrowed the book from my friend.

My friend lends me the book when I need it.

Borrow and lend are relational antonyms and their relationship is called converse relation. Sometimes they are referred to as complementary antonyms because one exists only because of the other.

- GOOD vs. WELL

GOOD is an adjective, therefore it accompanies an adjective..

She is a good mother.

WELL is an adverb, therefore it accompanies a verb.

He speaks English well.

However, WELL can be used as an adjective maning *bine, sănătos*.

I don't feel well.

Although they are synonyms good and well are not interchangeable because they represent different parts of speech.

The following examples of homophones cause great confusion among non-native speakers due to their sameness in pronunciation.

- ITS vs. IT'S

ITS is the possessive form of the pronoun IT and means *a lui, a ei*, when we refer to animals, objects, natural phenomena.

The bird lost some of its feathers.

IT'S represents the short form of IT IS or IT HAS (GOT/BEEN).

Where is the bag? It's on the table. (= is)

It's been a long time since we last saw each other. (= has been)

- LAY vs. LIE

LAY is a transitive verb followed by an object.

Please, lay the books on the table! (=put)

LIE is an intransitive verb and it is not followed by a direct object.

Lie down next to me!(= to sit next)

- THAN vs. THEN

THAN is a conjunction used for comparisons.

Tom is taller than me. (- than)

THEN is an adverb of time and means *after that*.

He went out and then he locked the door. (=after that)

- THEIR, THERE, THEY'RE

THEIR is a possessive adjective in the third person, plural.

Their books are on the table. (– cărțile lor)

THERE is an adverb of place.

Do you want to sit here or there ?

THEY'RE represents the short form of *they are*.

They're right here, in the garden. (- ei, ele sunt)

- TO, TOO, TWO

TO may be either preposition or infinitive marker.

He is going to the market. (El merge la piață)

He wants to help me. (to help – verb la infinitiv)

TOO means *also* or *very*.

He speaks English. He speaks French too. (also)

Don't put too much sugar in my tea!(very)

TWO is a number.

I've got two brothers. (doi)

Chapter II

Methodological aspects of teaching vocabulary

II.1 What words should we teach?

The word knowledge allows students to comprehend a text. A student's proficiency in reading comprehension is determined by his/her level of word knowledge. Therefore, it is vitally important to teach the specific words children need to understand the message of the texts they interact with, learn the information in those contexts, and have the expected results.

Vocabulary enhancement is especially important English language learners for their ability to read and comprehend texts. The selection of vocabulary words to teach English language learners can be grouped into three tiers.

Tier 1 words

Tier 1 commonly appear in spoken language. These are words that English language learners typically know. Due to their

frequent usage in various contexts and with nonverbal communication, Tier 1 words rarely need explicit instruction.

E.g. *-flower*. This is a word that may be unknown to English language learners, but it can be easily taught by pointing to a picture of a flower during text discussion.

-bounce. A word like *bounce* can be easily instructed during text discussion by using a ball.

Teaching Tier 1 words

Many Tier 1 words are unknown to English language learners at the beginning of the learning process. Different types of Tier 1 words require various teaching strategies:

a) Some Tier 1 words cannot be demonstrated and do not have multiple meanings, but students will need to know them. An example of this is the word *aunt*. A simple explanation of the word's meaning during the story reading will be enough.

b) Some Tier 1 words are simple cognates (like *family/familie* or *victory/victorie*). The cognates in this category consist of words that are high-frequency words in Romanian and English. They may not require substantial instruction because students may know the word meanings in Romanian. The teacher

can merely state the English cognate and have students provide the Romanian cognate. Or, the teacher can provide the English cognate and students can say both the English word and Romanian cognate.

c) It is also important to point out false cognates and give the correct translation. Examples of false cognates are: *magazine/magazine* (shops) and *camera/camera*(room). There are also some false cognates that have multiple meanings in one language, and one or some of those meanings do not coincide with the meaning of the other language.

Tier 2 words

Highly used, Tier 2 words are more intricate than Tier 1 words and, at this level, they also may be more abstract. These include:

1. Words that are important and useful to understanding the text, such as: character, setting, plot, even numbers, and country.
2. Words that have connections to other words and concepts, such as: between, among, by, combine, and estimate.
3. Words for which students understand the general meaning, but need greater precision and specificity in describing a concept or a person, such as: sets, tables (for math or science, or for a table of

contents), shy, ashamed, and stubborn.²

Teaching Tier 2 words

Tier 2 words are high frequency words used in grade-level texts.. Tier 2 words represent challenges to students who primarily meet them in print, because of their lack of redundancy in oral language. They can be worked in a variety of ways so that English language learners build rich representations of them and connect them to other words and concepts.

Tier 2 words require different teaching strategies:

a) Some Tier 2 words will not need elaborate discussion, because they can be easily taught by demonstration. These include words with multiple meanings, such as *trunk*, which can be taught by using gestures to show that it is part of an elephant, part of a tree, part of our body, and the back of a car.

b) In addition, many Tier 2 words are cognates. In this tier, they are high frequency words in Romanian and low frequency words in English. This means that Romanian-speaking English language learners will have a head start with these words (such as *coincidence/coincidență*, *admire/admira* and *apostrophe/apostrof*)

² <http://www.ldonline.org/article/14343/>

because they will know both the concept and an approximation of the label in English.

c) The Tier 2 words that should be focused on for pre-teaching including words that cannot be demonstrated and are not cognates.

Tier 3 words

These words are not frequently used. They are found mostly in content books in the upper grades or in specific content areas or domains. Examples include witticism, isotope, procrastinate, amoeba, or words that are not demonstrable or cognates. These words are rarely encountered in the early grades, but if they do appear, translation or a brief explanation is needed in English or in the English language learners' first language.

Teaching Tier 3 words³

a) Use a combination approaches when teaching Tier 3 words. Always try to **find an image** that is related to the target

³ <http://www.empoweringells.com/a18-tier-3-words/>

word because English language learners, comprehend ideas better when associated with images.

b) Try to **highlight the features** of the Tier 3 word. When we point out the features, English language learners begin to form a definition using the features. For example, if the target word is “photosynthesis”, then a feature might be that it is only found in plants. Another feature of photosynthesis is that it makes food. If an image also depicts the word’s features or actions, it becomes an even better way to scaffold learning.

c) The third approach is to **provide a non-example**, a word that does not fit the target word’s definition. This strategy is best used when the English language learners have already learned the features of the target word. When a non-example is offered, a comparison can be made between the target word and the non-example.

d) The approach that produces the most enduring understanding of a vocabulary word is: **providing multiple contexts**. Provide multiple situations in which the Tier 3 vocabulary word is used.

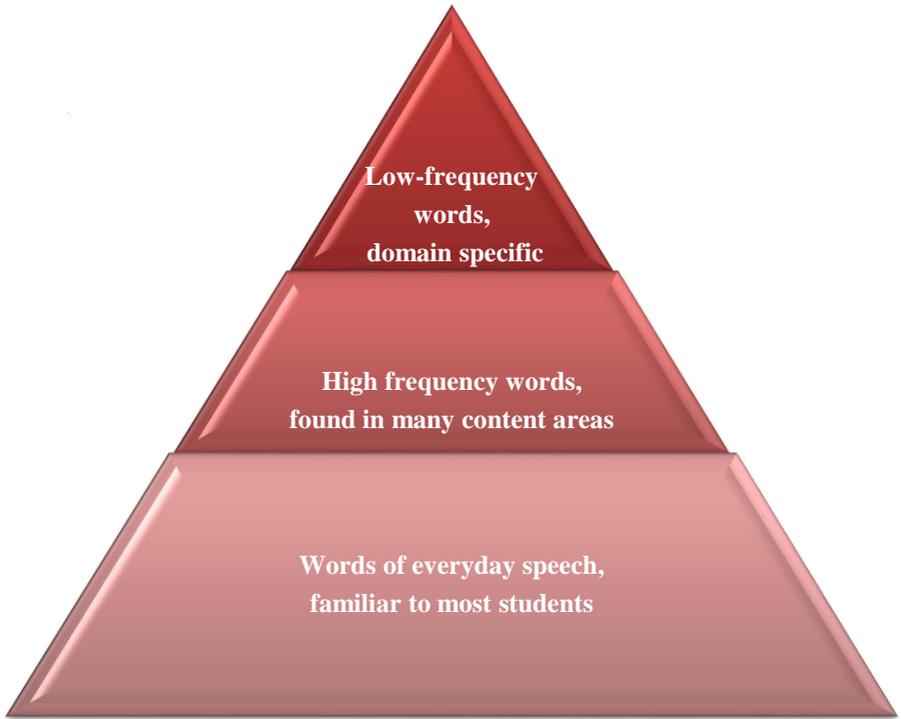


Figure IV.1 Common Core Tiered Vocabulary

How do we teach students to acquire words?

According to various researches, effective vocabulary instruction should include the following three elements:

1. Definition and context information about a word

Traditional vocabulary instruction has taught students to look up word meanings and memorize them. Dictionary use teaches students about multiple word meanings, as well as the importance of choosing the right definition to fit the certain context. But this teaching approach provides only superficial and short-term learning of words. Students who just memorize the meanings of words, often have trouble applying the information in contexts and often make mistakes about the meanings.

To have a good knowledge of a word, students need to see it in context and learn how its meaning relates to the words around it. Contextual analysis involves deducting the meaning of an unfamiliar word by exploring the text it belongs to. A method that includes definitions as well as context can generate a complex knowledge of word meanings. When students are given several sentences that use a word in different situations, they start to see how a word's meaning change and shift depending on context. Consider the changes in the word *run*, as it appears in the following sentences:

E.g. *The shop had a good run today.*

He used to run alcohol during the war.

Although the verb *run* conveys the idea of moving at a high speed, the meaning is different in the two examples above. Students must see words in various contexts in order to learn them thoroughly.

"If we can get students interested in playing with words and language, then we are at least halfway to the goal of creating the sort of word-conscious students who will make words a lifetime interest."⁴

2. Multiple exposures to a word in different contexts

"Repetition is the mother of all teachings", says an old proverb. One of the most important principle of effective vocabulary learning is to provide multiple exposures to a word's meaning.

Students have to see the same word several times in order to place it in their long term memory. Word meanings are

⁴ Graves, M.F. 2000. A vocabulary program to complement and bolster a middle-grade comprehension program. In B.M. Taylor, M.F. Graves, and P. Van Den Broek (eds.), *Reading for meaning: Fostering comprehension in the middle grades*. New York: Teachers College Press.

accumulated gradually that is why vocabulary instruction must provide student the opportunities to encounter words repeatedly in multiple different contexts. A word that is encountered once has about a 10 percent chance of being learned from context. When students see a word repeatedly, they gather more and more information about it until they acquire an idea of what it means. Dale and O'Rourke have summarized the four stages of word knowledge as follows:

1. I never saw it before.
2. I've heard of it, but I don't know what it means.
3. I recognize it in context—it has something to do with . . .
4. I know it.

The more exposure students have to use a word, the more likely it is that they will be able to define, comprehend and remember it later, thus, using several examples of a word in different contexts reinforces word knowledge

3. You Can Do It!-Encourage students to participate actively in their vocabulary learning

Students remember words better when they connect new meanings to knowledge they already have. This type of active

processing occurs when students work with words in some of the following ways:

1. produce antonyms and synonyms
2. rewrite definitions
3. identify examples and non-examples of the word
4. use more than one new word in a sentence
5. create sentences that contain the new word
6. create scenarios or stories in which the word is used
7. create silly questions using the word

Each of the above activities consolidates definitional or contextual information about the word and gives students the opportunity to own the word for themselves. Group discussion of word meanings also helps students learn new vocabulary by having to actively participate in their own learning.

II.2 Strategies to improve vocabulary retention

Vocabulary learning strategies represent a subcategory of language learning strategies, which are defined by Oxford as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and

more transferable to new situations”.⁵Moreover, being defined as thoughts and behaviors, deliberate actions that students undertake in order to acquire new vocabulary knowledge, devices or procedures used by learners to develop their own interlanguage, all these definitions of vocabulary learning strategies share the idea of actions students undertake in order to discover meanings, retain them in long term memory, remember them whenever necessary and use them in everyday language

They all contribute to the process of language acquisition in various ways depending on the individual. Effective vocabulary development is a multifaceted process requiring a combination of direct instruction, discussion, and active encouragement of independent learning strategies. On their own and in the classroom, students draw on a variety of methods to learn the thousands of words they acquire each year.

The following are some general strategies and specific techniques to keep in mind as teaching vocabulary.

Encouraging Wide Reading

Getting the students to read more may be the most valuable

⁵ Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York: Newbury House.1990, p.9.

thing teachers can do to improve their vocabulary. Direct instruction plays an essential part in students' vocabulary development. Though, most of the words they learn will be acquired through incidental learning, as they read on their own. Researchers present the following scenario to demonstrate the effectiveness of wide reading and to point out once again, if needed, that wide reading is the main way for students' word acquisition.

a) Reading for an hour a day, in and out of school at a rate of 150 words per minute, a student will interact with 2,250,000 words in the course of reading.

b) The student will encounter from 45,000 to 112,500 new words, if 2 to 5 percent of the words encountered are unknown words

c) It is known that students learn between 5 and 10 percent of previously unknown words from a single reading. Using the lower number given above for unknown words encountered during the reading program, we see that a student would learn at least 2,250 new words from context each year.

To be really efficient, wide reading should include texts with varied levels of difficulty. Students reading texts too accessible or too difficult for their level will not dramatically increase their vocabulary. When students read texts that consist mainly of

unknown words, they usually become frustrated. To help them get the most efficiency of incidental learning, they should read some books for fun and others for a challenge.

Motivating students to read can be a difficult task, but the big challenge for teachers is not simply getting students to read, it is getting them to enjoy it.

Here are a few suggestions for making reading attractive to students at all ability levels:

a) Organize some class time to independent silent reading. This time may be helpful for students who have never done extensive reading for pleasure. Reading for a length of time in class will enable students to do this on their own outside of class.

b) Offer a variety of books in class and recommend books for students to find in the library and to read outside the class.

c) Promote social interactions related to reading. Setting a time for a book discussions might motivate students to read more and help them understand their reading better.

d) Stress the interest you have in reading by telling students about books you are reading. During students' silent reading time, read a book of your own to show that reading is an activity that you enjoy, too.

Emphasizing Learning from Context

Most of the words learnt through incidental reading are learned through context. Students learn from context trying to createt relationships between the new word and the text in which it appears. They also learn words through repeated exposures to various contexts, achieving more comprehension of a word's meanings and functions by studying it several times in different contexts.

Experts still discuss about the effectiveness of teaching students how to use context clues because some studies show that teaching students how to identify and use context clues is an effective technique for increasing vocabulary,⁶ others suggests that learning words from context is an innate skill that all readers use. Children of all abilities learn at the same from context: advanced readers are no more efficient at learning from context than less advanced readers, they simply read more. All experts, however, stress that it is crucial to make students aware of the importance of using context clues as an essential tool in word acquisition.

⁶Texas Reading Initiative/Texas Education Agency. 2000. *Promoting Vocabulary Development*. Austin, TX: Texas Reading Initiative/Texas Education Agency.

Here are some techniques for improving students' awareness of the importance of context clues:

- a) Model basic strategies for using context clues when reading text.
- b) Provide explanations of how, when, and why to use context to figure out word meanings.
- c) Provide guided practice in using context.
- d) Remind students to apply the skill when reading on their own.

Activities such as the Word Wizard chart can be used to make students aware of learning words in context. While discussions over unfamiliar words in class are made, they can be added to the chart. If a student comes across the word again when reading and notes its context, his/her name goes up on the chart. Students can be provided with periodic rewards for being Word Wizards.

Another way to stress the importance of learning from context is to have students assess their knowledge of a new word by using a checklist such as the following:

	Can define	Have seen/heard	Don't know
claustrophobia		✓	
colleague	✓		
task		✓	
deluge		✓	
lead	✓		
fledgling	✓		
innate			✓
acquire		✓	
replica	✓		

*Table IV.2 Knowledge Rating Checklist
How much do I know about these words?*

Group activities in class can also make use of these checklists. Students can keep these checklists in a portfolio along with a list of words they are interested in. Encouraging a general understanding of words as fun and interesting in themselves will help students aim their own vocabulary development.

Using context is an important technique that students will

often employ. However, in learning when to use context clues, students also need to know when not to use this strategy, because it is not always the best way to derive the meanings of new words, since many texts do not signal the meanings of words explicitly.

Using Prefixes, Suffixes, and Roots

Experts reached the conclusion that the upper intermediate students show efficiency in using word parts to figure out the meanings of words. Most of the English words have been created through the combination of prefixes and suffixes with base words or root words. Students will possess the most important information necessary for vocabulary growth if they understand how this process works.

Using word parts can be a particularly useful strategy in reading content-area texts.

In the primary grades students start learning the changes of prefixes such as *un-*, *re-* and *dis-* on base words. Later, in the intermediate grades they continue to learn about prefixes and an increasing number of suffixes such as *-ion*, *-ment*, *-ance*, etc.

For example, science texts often include words that use the same word parts repeatedly, such as *extra-* in *extraordinary*,

extraterrestrial. Knowing that “*extra*” means *outside, beyond* can help students recognize these words in context and add to their comprehension of these words.

Teaching word-part strategy must start by telling students that words can be composed of affixes—prefixes and suffixes—and roots. Learning to break words into affixes and roots will make some long words more accessible for students who may be intimidated by the length of words such as *interdependent*. Teaching how to break words into parts may be necessary.

To do this, you can teach them to cover prefixes such as *inter-* in the word *interdependent*, and see if they recognize the rest of the word. Then cover the suffix *-ent*, leaving *depend*.⁷ Further modeling and practice with adding and removing prefixes and suffixes such as *un-* and *-able* will give students facility with breaking words down into parts.

In teaching word parts, the parts function to affect word meaning must be stressed. You may want to point out that prefixes such as: *a-*, *dis-*, *un-*, *il-*, *im-*, *in-*, *ir-*, and *non-* form opposites of adjectives, nouns and verbs or new word families.

7

<https://www.nwf.org/pdf/2013%20NASA/Promoting%20Vocab%20Development.pdf>

Suffixes have less stable meanings, but learning to recognize common suffixes such as *-tion*, *-less*, *-ed*, and *-ing* will help students know a word's function. For example, remembering that *-tion* indicates the word is a noun and that *-ed* usually forms the past tense of verbs can make it easier for readers to figure out words using these suffixes.

Once students have learnt the concepts of prefixes, suffixes, and roots, they can be easily taught specific word parts.

Rank	Prefix	% of All Prefixed	Suffix	% of All
1.	<i>un-</i>	26	<i>-s, -es</i>	31
2.	<i>re-</i>	14	<i>-ed</i>	20
3.	<i>in-, im-, il-,</i>	11	<i>-ing</i>	14
4.	<i>dis-</i>	7	<i>-ly</i>	7
5.	<i>en-, em-</i>	4	<i>-er, -or</i>	4
6.	<i>non-</i>	4	<i>-ion, -tion,</i>	4
7.	<i>in-, im- (in)</i>	3	<i>-able, -ible</i>	2
8.	<i>over-</i>	3	<i>-al, -ial</i>	1
9.	<i>mis-</i>	3	<i>-y</i>	1
10.	<i>sub-</i>	3	<i>-ness</i>	1
11.	<i>pre-</i>	3	<i>-ity, -ty</i>	1
12.	<i>inter-</i>	3	<i>-ment</i>	1
13.	<i>fore-</i>	3	<i>-ic</i>	1
14.	<i>de-</i>	2	<i>-ous, -eous,</i>	1
15.	<i>trans-</i>	2	<i>-en</i>	1

16.	<i>super-</i>	1	<i>-er</i>	1
17.	<i>semi-</i>	1	<i>-ive, -ative,</i>	1
18.	<i>anti-</i>	1	<i>-ful</i>	1
19.	<i>mid-</i>	1	<i>-less</i>	1
20.	<i>under- (too</i>	1	<i>-est</i>	1
	<i>All Others</i>	3	<i>All Others</i>	1

*Table IV.3 The Most Frequent Affixes in Printed School English*⁸

The table above shows a list of the most commonly used prefixes and suffixes in printed school English. Teaching students just a few of these affixes and how to break down words into parts will make them easier to tackle. Learning prefixes, suffixes, and some roots will give students more tools for vocabulary growth which can greatly improve their vocabulary development.

Using Graphic Organizers

Encouraging wide reading, using context, and employing word parts are excellent long-term strategies for vocabulary development. The following are some additional activities that can

⁸ Stahl, Steven A. *Vocabulary Development*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books, 1999.

deepen students' word knowledge and expand direct instruction of vocabulary.

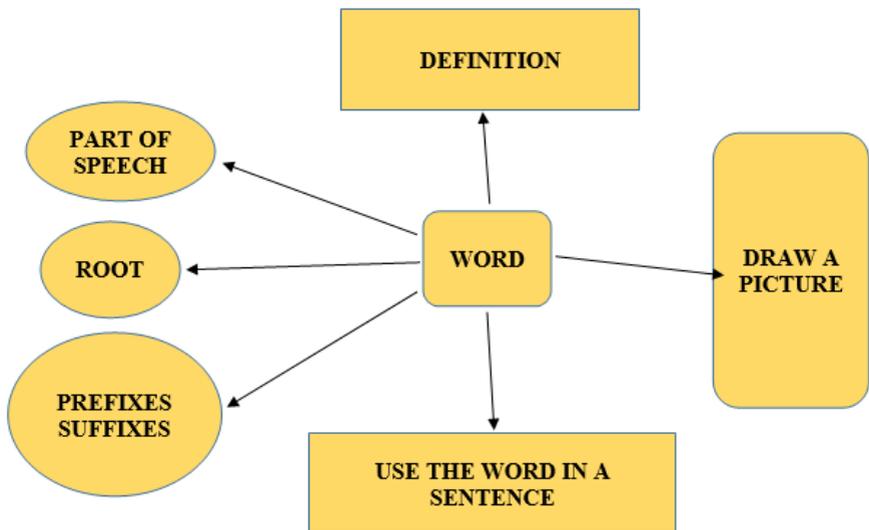


Figure IV.4 Vocabulary map

Linear array organizers

Linear array organizers help English language learners develop their vocabulary knowledge by visualizing gradation between two related words. It is an appropriate post-reading activity to examine subtle differences between words. Illustrating

how each word has a specific meaning, this technique help students write their ideas using the most appropriate words.

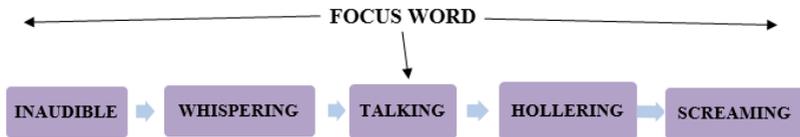


Figure IV.8 Linear array organizer

Concept of definition maps

Concept of definition maps such as the following are graphic organizers that show the elements of a typical dictionary definition, including:

- The category to which the word belongs, labeled, “What is this?”
- Characteristics of the word, labeled, “What is it like?”
- Examples and non-examples of the word.⁹

⁹ Stahl, Steven A. *Vocabulary Development*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books, 1999.

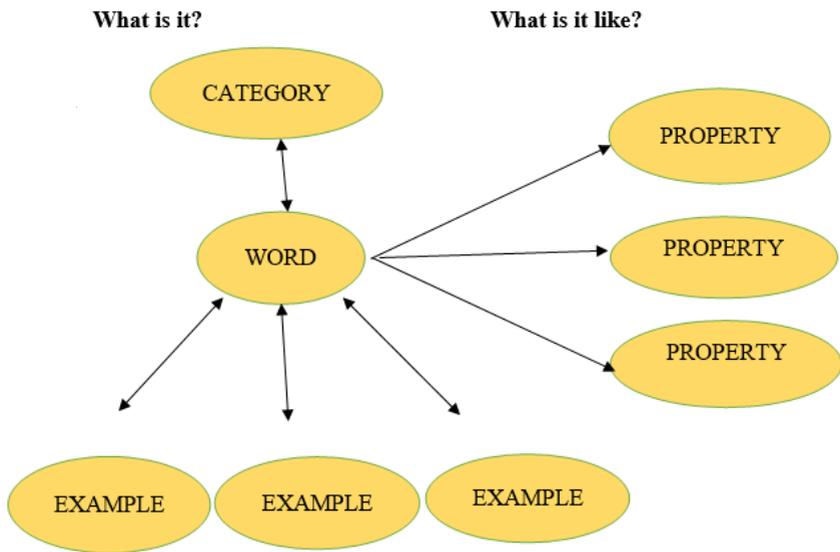


Figure IV.5 Concept of Definition Map

Using their prior knowledge and consulting dictionaries, students fill in the maps by referring to context.

Word	
Definition	
Synonym	
Antonym	
Use the word in a sentence	
Draw a picture	

Table IV.6 Word chart

Comparing and contrasting: Venn diagrams

Venn diagrams are another good graphic organizer to use, especially when teaching students to compare and contrast related concepts such as *domestic and wild*, *day and night*, *virus and bacteria*, *nation and country*, and *poetry and prose*. It is an effective and concise graphic tool used mostly in post-reading contexts. The following diagram helps to clarify the similarities and differences between two related ideas:

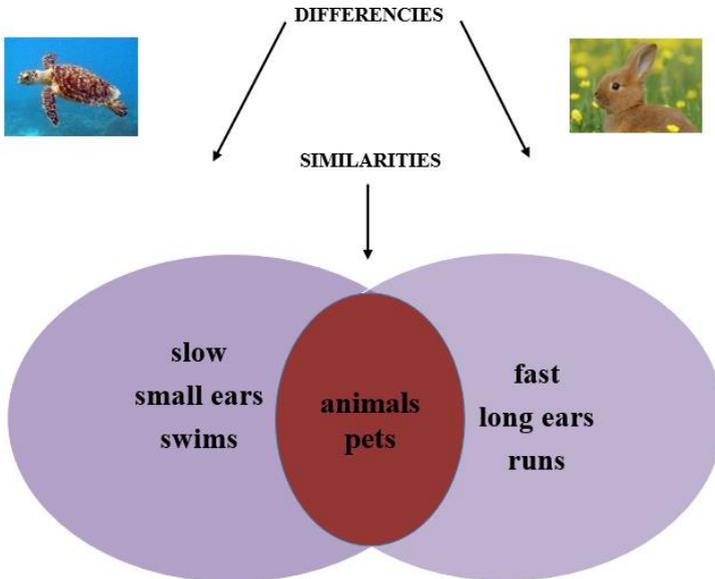


Figure IV.7 Venn Diagram

Using graphic organizers will provide students with more exposures to words they are acquiring and will help them solidify the knowledge they've gained.

Semantic maps

Evolution in lexical semantic has determined the progress of the semantic field theory, semantic networks, grids or maps, strategies which organize words according to their relational lexical meanings. The semantic field theory implies that the lexical content of a language should be approached as a collection of interrelating networks or relations between words rather than a cluster of individual words but. It is notable that words may be grouped together according to different criteria. Fruits, for example, may be grouped in terms of color, shape or physical features. They can be grouped in terms of nonphysical features such as type, taste, place to grow, etc.

Semantic elaboration consists of a series of techniques as semantic feature analysis, ordering, pictorial schemata and semantic mapping.¹⁰ Semantic mapping and semantic feature

¹⁰Sokmen,A Current trends in teaching second language vocabulary. in. Schmitt&M,Michel (Eds.) 1997. *Vocabulary*:

analysis draw learners' previous knowledge and use dialogue to bring forth information about word meanings.

Semantic feature analysis is similar to semantic mapping, except that it uses a grid rather than a map. Following examples will illustrate the two techniques.

Regarding the word meaning and remembering the word meaning, many researchers agreed that semantic mapping is effective for long-term memory.

Semantic elaboration focuses on word meaning association between words. Words appear to be organized into semantically related sets in mind and thus the associations attached to a word will affect the way that it is stored in the brain. Moreover, knowing a scale of association for a word helps understand its whole meaning and helps remember the word form or its meaning in appropriate context¹¹.

The diagramming is the result of the associations a word has. Johnson, Pittelman and Heimlich (1986) described semantic mapping as “categorical structuring of information in graphic form”.

Description, acquisition and pedagogy Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 237- 257.

¹¹ Nation, I.S.P. 2001. *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge University Press.

There are several starting points for semantic mapping. It can involve the recall of a previously read story, a recent or current event, a film, a unit of study or simply learners' general knowledge of a topic. The discussion that starts during the graphic representation of the semantic map makes it contribute to vocabulary learning and the skill is important in the way that the teacher encourages students and supports their participation in the dialogue.

Semantic maps can be used to develop students' understanding of a particular concept or group of thematically related words.

In the example below, in teaching about bees, you might target the following vocabulary words: *small*, *insect*, *sting*, *queen*, and *honey*. Then, begin instruction by having students brainstorm words related to the concept of bees. As they try to remember words related to the theme, list their words on the board, making sure to include the targeted words.

Discussion is the key to semantic mapping. During the brainstorming session, determine students discuss and define all of the words on the list. Help students improve their understanding of the words by asking them to group related words together to create a semantic map such as these ones:

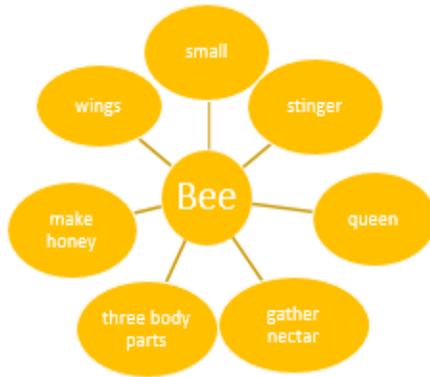


Figure IV.8

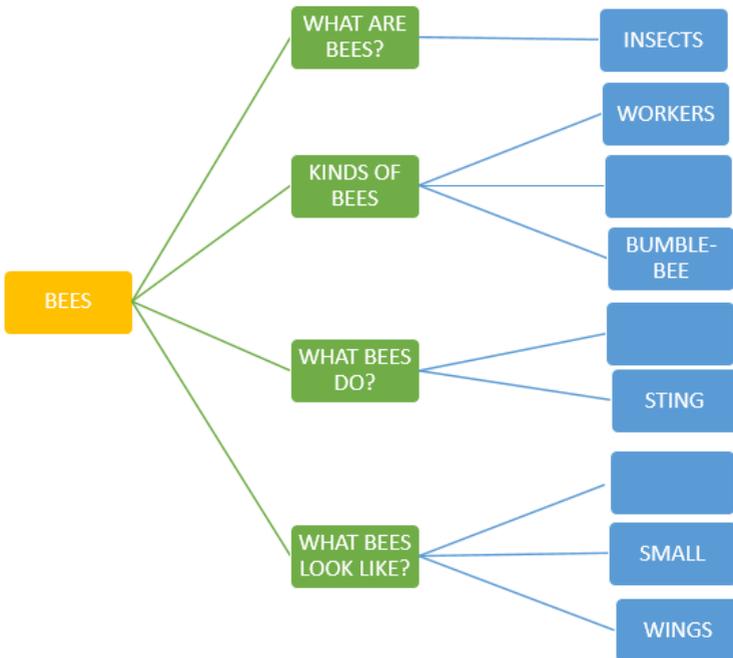


Figure IV.9

Some target words can be highlighted, and some sections can be left blank in order to be filled in by the class with other categories after reading the selection. Semantic mapping is a good technique to use in content-area teaching, in which vocabulary words are thematically related. The technique works best as a group activity, because speaking helps students with smaller vocabularies learn other words that are talked about. Advanced learners will benefit from the extra exposure to words they have already learned.

Semantic feature analysis

Another efficient technique to use in teaching is the semantic feature analysis. Words that share content are semantically related. This technique makes use of a grid, such as the following. The left-hand column contains the names of members of the category. For a unit on living creatures, you might write words such as: *bedroom, living room, kitchen, garage, garden, bathroom* and *attic*. The top row of the grid lists features of the category's members such as: *sleep, have dinner, play, wash the dishes, and keep the car*. Students must be encouraged to add words to the column or the row during discussion.

	<i>sleep</i>	<i>dinner</i>	<i>play</i>	<i>wash the dishes</i>	<i>keep the car</i>
<i>bedroom</i>	+	-	+	-	-
<i>living room</i>	+	+	+	-	-
<i>kitchen</i>	-	+	-	+	-
<i>garage</i>	-	-	-	-	+
<i>garden</i>	?	+	+	-	+
<i>bathroom</i>	-	-	-	-	-
<i>attic</i>	?	-	+	-	-

Table IV.10 Semantic Feature Analysis

After seeing the grid, groups of students or the whole class discusses whether the items in the column are an example of the features across the top, marking + for positive examples, -for negative examples, and ? for words that *might* be examples.

This type of activity must imply discussion, which is the key to clarifying the meanings of words.

Semantic mapping in vocabulary teaching and learning

Sokmen (1997) described four techniques for semantic elaboration:

- a) semantic feature analysis

- b) semantic mapping
- c) ordering
- d) pictorial schemata.

Vocabulary consists of a series of interrelating systems and not just an unrelated collection of items, therefore there seems to be a clear for presenting items to students in a systematized manner which will both illustrate the organized nature of vocabulary and at the same time enable students to enhance the items in the coherent way.

Words are related in various ways. Here are two examples:

- a) the meaning of a word depends to some extent on its relationship to other similar words, often through sense relations
- b) words in a word family are related to each other through inflectional and derivational affixes

Semantic mapping has been usually used for:

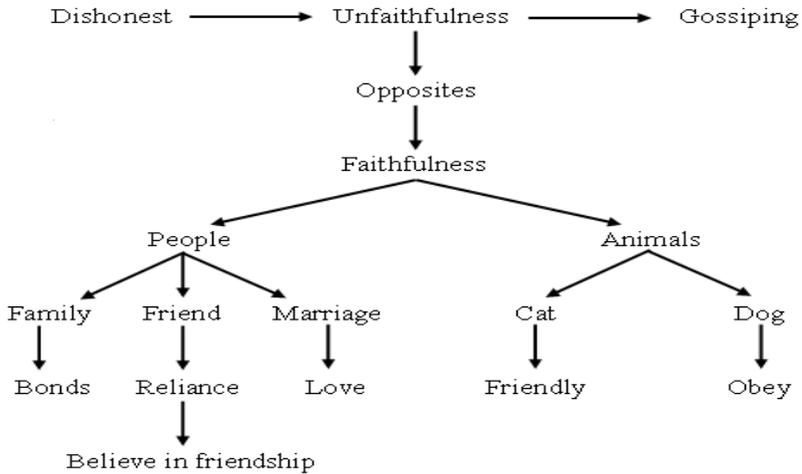
- general vocabulary development
- pre-and post-reading
- teaching of a study skill
- a link between reading and writing instruction
- an assessment technique

Johnson and Pearson (1984) generalized semantic mapping as a strategy of vocabulary instruction as followed:

- write a key word or topic related to classroom work on a sheet of paper, the blackboard, or a transparent slide.
- encourage the students to find as many words as they can related to the selected key word or topic.
- guide the students to make lists with the words by categories.
- have students name the categories.
- encourage students to talk about the relationships between these words.

There is another kind of semantic set which has to do with “stimulus-response pairs”, such as accident-car and baby-mother. Sokmen and Carter shared the same idea that there seems to be a great uniformity in people’s responses to certain stimulus words which ought to be exploited to help students form more effective association¹². In Sokmen’s study, students generated 16 words or phrases when asked to give words they thought of when hearing the word “unfaithfulness”. After clustering words, which went together, they mapped the relationship between these words as followed:

¹² Carter, R., & McCarthy, M. 1988. *Vocabulary & language teaching*. London: Longman, p.71



Semantic mapping for the word “unfaithfulness”¹³

Nation’s study ¹⁴ observed the interaction between the teacher and his students when using semantic mapping. Semantic mapping involves the teacher-learner working together as a team to build a visual framework of connections between ideas, starting from the recall of a read story, a recent or current event, a film, a unit of study or simply learners’ general knowledge of a topic. The

¹³ Sokmen, A. 1997. *Current trends in teaching second language vocabulary*. In N. Schmitt & M, Michael (Eds.) *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition and pedagogy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 237-257.

¹⁴ Nation, I.S.P. 2001. *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge University Press, p.129.

discussion during the constructing of the semantic map makes the activity contribute to vocabulary learning. The way that the teacher enters into a dialogue with learners, encourages them and supports their participation in the dialogue.

This technique helps students remember the number of words they have learnt related to the subjects.

Semantic mapping is commented to be suitable for not only beginning learners but also advanced ones.

Chapter III

Semantic relations in vocabulary acquisition: a personal research

III.1 Introduction to research

Vocabulary represents the first contact a person has with a language. First, the child learns words, be it in his native language or a foreign language. The process is then continued by using more complex structures that will open new horizons and insights.

Vocabulary refers to the “words we use to communicate in oral and printed language”¹⁵, helps meaningful understanding of what is being spoken and makes language recognition easier in a multi-lingual society. If we want to understand what we read, speak, write or listen, we have to highlight the importance of learning new

¹⁵Hanson, S. and Padua, J. F. M. 2014. *Teaching Vocabulary Explicitly*, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, available online at http://prel.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/06/vocabulary_lo_res.pdf

words and using them in different personal contexts, that is *receptive vocabulary* and *productive vocabulary*¹⁶.

Learners of any foreign languages must rely on a variety of strategies to better enhance vocabulary and that learners with strategic knowledge of language learning acquire a language more easily.

It is a fact that if learning something seems difficult to students from the beginning, they will not acquire the new information. This is why it is the teacher's job to find interesting ways, methods and strategies that might encourage and support the learners continue their learning process in a meaningful way.

The teacher's role is an important one, he/she has to be aware of the fact that information will fade away if not practiced in a way that might encourage students and make them aware of the progress they made. Fostering vocabulary development is always supported and efficient if the learning strategies and methods are explicit, intentional and carefully planned by the teacher. Accordingly, classroom teachers need to learn to adapt their teaching methods and materials to meet the needs of English language learners in their classes.

¹⁶ Ibid.82

Vocabulary growth can be challenging for second language learners because they are expected to acquire content vocabulary, idioms, words with multiple meanings, as well as everyday functional vocabulary.

But learning English involves many skills and abilities and one of the most important might be self-awareness. It is a thinking skill that has as main aim the ability to accurately judge one's own performance and behaviour and to respond to different social situations. If a student proves to have self-awareness, he/she will be able to understand his needs, desires, failings, habits and everything else that makes him/her work and function well. This concept will always support learners to keep up with the on going vocabulary instruction and register progress while working or learning a foreign language.

Self-awareness helps them develop willingness, reflect on different words and their meaning and use them properly in learning vocabulary. It is also good for spelling, using words in different contexts or recognizing them while reading different texts. A very important goal in learning a foreign language is to enhance the control the learners prove to have over the learning process.

In order to achieve our goals as language instructors we must use interactive strategies and tools. It is true that we can

enhance our ability and skills in teaching and we can attract a larger number of students in the teaching process and encourage them to learn new vocabulary. Learners seem to be more attracted to what's new and innovative and react better to the modern techniques. If properly used, the teacher will notice increased interest and self-awareness with the students.

A child must understand the meaning of words within a message in order to understand the message as a unit it and more than that, a child must understand that words are linked in sentences and discourse in meaningful ways .He also must use language to communicate complete and meaningful messages.

Semantic activities involve helping children to approach meaning at various levels (word parts, whole words, and sentences / discourse). Activities involving word parts can focus on helping children to see that affixes change the meanings of words or that words with common roots have similar meanings. Activities involving whole words can help children develop vocabulary by focusing on how words are used in contexts or by encouraging them to keep records of interesting and related words. Activities involving sentences and contexts help children to use context to determine word meaning and more beyond that.

III.2 Describing a didactic experiment during the academic year 2016-2017

The didactic experiment took place during the academic years 2016-2017 and the students who participated in the experiment were 8th graders. After reading several research reports, I decided that I have to find out if under Romanian school conditions the opportunity of learning English vocabulary through reading, involving various modern activities would have similar positive effects.

The students were explained that the most important thing in acquiring vocabulary is that it offers them the possibility to communicate with people worldwide.

The learners were also encouraged to see vocabulary as helping them to develop their skills, they were supported every step of the process and they were asked to suggest activities they considered suitable.

The importance of evaluation was underlined, too. There are a number of reasons why teachers assess and the first of them is to determine that there are good intended learning outcomes of the object. The immediate feedback proves how well students performed, how motivated students were and that adequate standards are being maintained.

In Romanian schools, teachers assess according to a curriculum and using certain criteria. The assessment is a set of measurement activities that use “direct observation and recording of student’s performance in the local curriculum as a basis for gathering information to make instructional decisions”¹⁷. If teacher assesses students and then offers immediate feedback, they will learn to define and prioritise what is important to learn, how to spend time learning and how to produce good results.

III.3 Participants and Methods

The research was carried out with a group of 8th graders who is learning English as a foreign language in Vulturu Secondary School. The group has 18 students of 14 to 15 years old.

According to internal school tests and following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the level of English was equated to level B1.(Intermediate). The students, attended a regular class on general language achievement test at the beginning of the research project. The group was tested

¹⁷ <http://project10.info/DetailPage.php?MainPageID=159> (as cited by Denoin, S.L. 1987. *Curriculum- measurement. Teaching Exceptional Children*.p. 20)

again at the end of the research project which was the end of the school year.

The reason for the selection of students of Intermediate level was that even the students who had a good knowledge of grammar rules couldn't express their ideas clearly in meaningful contexts because of their poor vocabulary.

III.4 Aim

The aim of the present study is to show that teaching new words that are semantically related enhances the acquisition of vocabulary. The belief that teaching semantically related words leads to an efficient vocabulary acquisition is clearly reflected in language textbooks. We are so used to this approach that it is hard to think of other ways to organize the classroom contents in order to meet the communicative needs of our students.

To test the validity of teaching vocabulary through semantic relations this study compares it with the alternative technique, that is teaching vocabulary in unrelated items.

III.5 The first phase of the research

The experiment took place during 5 school weeks. The first phase consisted in free discussions about students' interests.

The pupils come from mixed social backgrounds with different perception on learning process, that is why, when setting out on this research all the students were asked about their favourite topics. It was important to know what other kind of interests they have in order to compete with. I asked the students how much time they spend on doing homework, on leisure activities-meeting friends, playing, watching TV, reading, practicing sports.

The result of our discussion was a bit disappointing because I realised that they read less, play less, practice sports less and spend more time in front of the TV and of the computer.

I focused on the type of games and TV programmes they prefer to make a list of preferred topics in order to use for my further teaching materials.

During the first week a pilot test was administered to elicit words that students didn't know. The aim was to identify words semantically related and semantically unrelated that were new to all students.

Unrelated word set: helmet, highway, horn, speed up, windscreen wiper, clutch.

Related word set: engine, gears, steering wheel, seatbelt, tyres, bumper.

The new vocabulary was presented in sessions 2 and 4 as it follows: the unrelated words in session 2 and related words in session 4. The new words were presented in various ways. I used multiple activities starting from matching words with definitions, translations to power points, pictures and songs.

The students participating in the research started to see things differently towards the end of the research. They felt more confident and ready to try new things, they used their level of knowledge and previous knowledge to solve different tasks without being afraid of consequences in case they make a mistake.

Actually, the students were my partners in education, they were encouraged to speak their mind, to say what they like and what they do not like, to bring dynamics into the English class.

Traditional and modern methods and techniques were combined in order to prove maximum efficiency during the learning process and support the students' needs. A perfect environment can be created by an inventive teacher who knows

how to use the old and the new with the proper modern technology in order for learners to progress.

The students' native language was not avoided during activities if their knowledge of English was not at a very high level. It should be used where translation is necessary in order to achieve better understanding of the issue.

III.6 Progressive and final evaluation

Assessing vocabulary can mean assessing other skills too. If vocabulary is developed properly, it is obvious that students can enjoy theoretical and practical confidence. What is necessary to test vocabulary is to underline the importance of validity, practicality, authenticity, transparency and security so that lexical knowledge is assessed correctly.

Vocabulary should be tested the way it is taught. Even if most teachers ask students to learn a list of words by heart and then use it in different contexts, this is not the most efficient way to go.

If vocabulary was taught in a fun, relaxed way, then the evaluation should be the same, meaning we evaluate the same types of exercises and items that were practiced during English class.

Here are some examples of vocabulary tests, I used with my students.

A. Vocabulary tests

They are used to assess recognition or production using multiple-choice questions and matching them with the correct answers / corresponding words. Different levels of comprehension can be tested because their use brings some advantages. They are reliable, there is only one correct answer, they are quick to solve and evaluate, they can be used for all levels of knowledge and most students are familiarized with this type of exercise.

Choose the best word to complete the sentence:

1. A car has 4

- a)wheels
- b)hoods
- c)bonnets

2. The.....helps the driver clear the windscreen..

- a)tyre

b)windscreen wiper

c)number plate

3. You must turn on the.....to see in the dark.

a)trunk

b)headlight

c)steering wheel

4. A.....repairs your car.

a)chef

b)mechanic

d)nurse

B. Sentence completion or gap fill

They are used with all levels the students; such exercises require that students read the sentence, understand its context and use the most appropriate choice. Sentence completion presents many advantages, but also disadvantages. They may take more time if the student is not well prepared and some other words might also fill in the gaped sentences correctly even if this is not what you want to test.

1. Ferrari is a/an.....car. (expensive/cheap)

2. They spend most of their time driving. They are
(nurses/drivers)

3. Telling that this is not a is a lie.
(reliable/unreliable)

4. That's an expensive car. He must be very
(rich/poor)

5. Tom bought a.....car. It was very cheap .
(used/new)

C. Translation

It is the most widely spread method used to test vocabulary. If the synonyms, the antonyms or the definitions offered for a word are not efficient in making the student understand the meaning, then the last resource (and most efficient one) is translation.

Association between the foreign language and mother tongue proves its efficiency in many contexts.

Translate the following idioms into your native language:

1. You are late. Let me give you a lift.

2. I'm so bored. Let's go for a spin.
3. He wrapped his car around a light pole..
4. Slow down! There's a panda car in front of us.

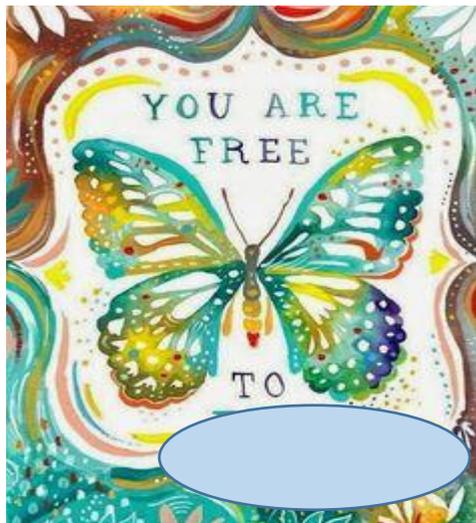
D. Vocabulary in Speaking

Many international examinations (English language examinations) such as IELTS, TOEFL test students' knowledge in its quality and range. The impact the vocabulary has in speaking is what impresses the evaluators and determines students to pass the examination or not. The learners who will be evaluated will receive some images, some questions and some words. They will have to answer the questions and express their opinion concerning some situations.

Talk about cars:

1. Do you have a car?
2. What do you need to drive a car?
3. Are cars expensive?
4. Describe your dream car.
5. New vs. used cars. Pros and cons.

6. Starting from the picture below write a short composition, related to cars, of about 100 words.



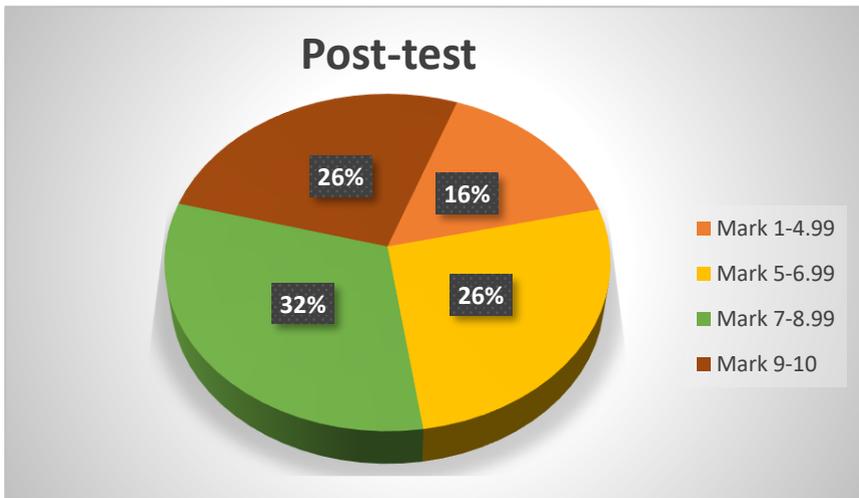
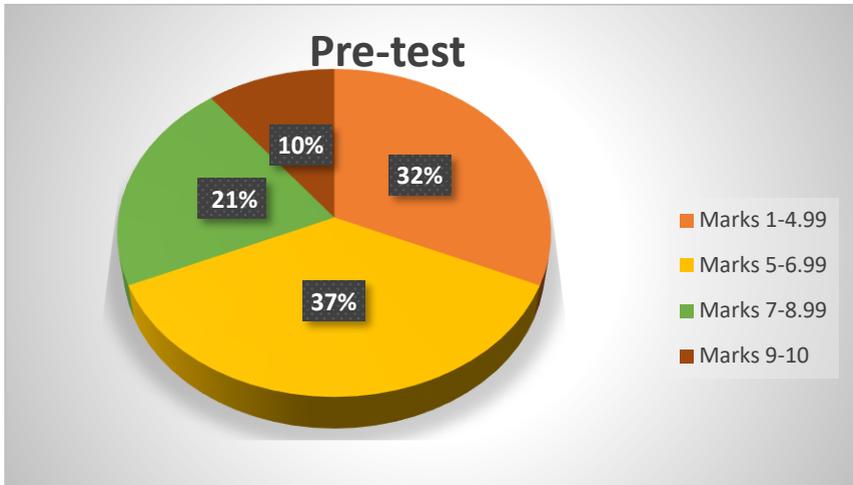
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III.7 Results obtained by students after vocabulary testing

Students were tested in an initial stage and then in the final stage of their academic year. Different types of items were used to test their knowledge concerning vocabulary. At the beginning, students showed some problems concerning the use of vocabulary in order to communicate. I used many types of activities, most of them fun and relaxed in order to enrich the students' vocabulary

¹⁸ <https://ro.pinterest.com/pin/565131453218652510/>

and level of knowledge. The difference between initial testing and final testing for 8th graders can be seen in the figures below.



The results presented clearly favour the presentation of vocabulary in semantically related sets. The two ways of presenting vocabulary are not equally effective, students being able to retain the new words when presented in semantic relations, at least in the short term.

The comparisons above show that students improved their marks and level of knowledge by the time the teacher applied the final test. The variety of exercises was very useful for students because they helped them understand how to deal with the different English language problems.

Students proved a positive attitude towards the problems discussed during class and the way they can deal with them outside class too. The study proved to be effective as I know how my students behave when they acquire new vocabulary structures and use them in communicative instances. The fact that the learners had to use a great variety of learning strategies when the new words were presented contributed to these positive results.

This study was originally motivated by an interest in pedagogical approaches towards the presentation of new vocabulary to English language learners in secondary school.

Conclusions

"I feel good." "It was nice." "That was bad." Students respond to teachers' questions with generic descriptions all the time, leaving teachers to dig deeper to figure out what students are really trying to say. Second-language learners also struggle to use descriptive words in written and oral language and tend to overuse common words, such as *good*, *bad*, and *nice*, due to their lack of knowledge of specific lexical units.

This study was motivated by an interest in pedagogical approaches towards the introduction of new vocabulary to secondary school students.

Over the last few years, the focus turned from the primary importance of teaching grammar structures, to the idea that teaching vocabulary is of tremendous importance.

Foreign language teaching has continuously developed, influencing, the curriculum planning, the choice of syllabus content and, therefore, instructional strategies the teachers used. They can no longer take for granted the validity of old practices and teach as they were taught. Therefore, I wanted to test the effectiveness of presenting new vocabulary in semantically related sets by

comparing it to unrelated semantic sets with a group of secondary school students.

The result favours the presentation of new vocabulary in semantically related sets. The fact that the students had to use a great variety of learning strategies when the new words were presented contributed to these positive results. The strategy is also sustained by the structure of the textbooks.

The focus on practical goals, which are to suit the learner's personal needs, brought vocabulary at the front of foreign language teaching, as it had unjustly been shadowed in traditional teaching.

The process of acquiring a foreign language is a hard work which needs constant effort, energy and determination in order to achieve the ultimate goal of studying it, that is to be able to communicate in the new language.

In everyday use, meaning goes beyond just learning the dictionary meaning. A strong understanding of words helps us know where to use words in a sentence, how and where to use in a social setting, what all the possible meanings are for a word, and what other words might be used in their place.

The emergence of the new methods in teaching vocabulary, as it was shown, came as a response to preceding unsatisfactory approaches that had failed in helping learners achieve their most

important ability – the capacity to communicate in the language they were learning.

Actively engaging students is important in every aspect of the vocabulary instruction: learning the meanings of specific words, making connections between the lexical units, learning strategies to make them good independent learners.

Although much has been said about the nature of language learning, it appears that, in the end, it is up to the teacher to apply the most appropriate instructional methodology, one to suit the learners' needs and all the other specific features of the class, as long as he/she remains connected to the changing methodological realities as to permanently adapt and implement.

Learners are often confronted with communicational breakdowns, related to vocabulary access, which cause difficulties in either spoken or written contexts. Word recognition and knowledge for learners is, probably, the teacher's greatest challenge during instruction.

When confronted with the classroom reality, the teacher notices that the first problem he encounters is the different degree of vocabulary knowledge between students, a problem which has either educational or personal roots. In order to fix this difficulty, the teacher can use different materials, according to their level.

As part of the experiment carried out over a period one year, some students, with lower level of lexical knowledge, were given worksheets and engaged in activities which encouraged them to sustain their interest and work. The students' speaking skills improved, and at the same time, their interest in the target language increased.

The vocabulary activities to which students reacted with the greatest enthusiasm were those based on graphical or computerised help. Fortunately, current technological advancements are the teacher's most important tool for successful instruction. If appropriate strategies for learning are developed, students can take hold of the vocabulary learning process and develop their communicational skills to such an extent that they can use words in their own contexts to express fluently in the target language.

In conclusion, the teacher's main preoccupation during classroom activities, in order to ensure successful development, is to use a diversified range of activities, to create materials to the specific needs of each student and to motivate students into becoming self-conscious language learners.

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Words are most powerful tools that we have to express and communicate our thoughts and to create the events of our lives. Our words can create the most beautiful reality or destroy everything that exists around us. Most of us want to use words and expressions whose meaning others understand too.

“When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean-neither more or less”.

(Lewis Carroll'-*“Through the Looking Glass”*)