DEVELOPING TASKS FOR THE TEACHING AND TESTING OF VOCABULARY FOR ESL STUDENTS

ABSTRACT
OF THE
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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary plays a tremendously important role in language learning just as other components of language. In my opinion the dearth of vocabulary is one of the most serious causes of students’ failure to express themselves in English classrooms. Thereby students are not able to use English outside the classroom in real life situations in spite of studying English for several years. I suppose that this study may be useful for teachers and students in terms of familiarizing them with relatively new techniques which can be useful in their vocabulary improvement.

Aim of the Thesis:

Vocabulary learning has always been a most important area of interest for individuals who have a desire for learning a second language. This thesis aims at increasing teachers’ and students’ awareness of the significance of vocabulary in English teaching and learning and the necessity of using tasks to instruct English vocabulary in classroom contexts. The goal of this study is to show the impact of vocabulary development tasks in learning words which would raise the language proficiency levels of students in foreign language classrooms. Besides, one of the purposes of this study is to examine the current vocabulary learning and teaching situation. The aim of this work is also to demonstrate a number of ways in the form of some new tasks that can be employed for teaching vocabulary to learners.

Significance of the Work:

This study is important as it focuses on vocabulary teaching which has not yet acquired the position that it deserves in syllabus designing, materials production, or classroom teaching. Vocabulary tasks may offer students a meaningful authentic context through which they can enhance their knowledge of vocabulary. They provide an encouraging effect on vocabulary identification and retention.

This study is significant as it discusses vocabulary as an aspect of form. Teaching of form was de-emphasized in Communicative Language Teaching, but now it is realized that neglect of form in teaching produces individuals who may be fluent but not accurate in their language production. Besides, form-focused instruction is also recognized to be necessary in second-language, acquisition-poor environments.
Having a good knowledge in all English skills particularly the talent to communicate in English is important for success in one’s life. In the age of the globalization of the English language and the information technology revolution, vocabulary learning has acquired a special significance as almost everybody is in need of knowing at least a handful of words to understand and to convey meaning in the context of travel, use of internet, mobile phones. It has been revealed through research that for communication of meaning, vocabulary holds a more crucial role than grammar (Wilkins, 1972; cited in Zhi-liang, 2010). In addition, this thesis is hoped to be a favourable reference for different types of tasks, not only for teachers and students but also for persons who face problems in learning vocabulary.

The work shows that vocabulary must have a central place in the program of study/set of courses and that student needs to be provided abundant opportunities to understand meanings of words. They do not need to be taught only the meanings of words as they come up in classroom work, but they are also required to be given various opportunities to use the words so that these may become a part of their productive vocabulary and a basis for further learning. Through tasks learners are given chances to encounter and explore new vocabulary without direct teachers help, and to utilize this vocabulary to meet meaningful task goals.

Outline of the Thesis:

The study comprises six chapters apart from an introduction and a conclusion. In the introduction the aim of the research, the rationale and significance of the work, and the outline of thesis have been presented. The conclusion is again a brief summary of the work with implications and suggestions for teaching.

The first chapter is Review of literature which contains five main sections. It firstly presents definitions of vocabulary along with the types of vocabulary. Secondly, it explores the different aspects of vocabulary. Thirdly, the chapter underlines the significance of vocabulary. No matter how highly developed a learner’s awareness of grammar, without having knowledge of words, conveying of thoughts, ideas and feelings is not possible. The last section deals with research studies on the vocabulary learning and teaching as well as on vocabulary learning strategies.

The second chapter, Vocabulary Teaching: Past and Present traces vocabulary teaching from the past to the present day and discusses some current
trends in vocabulary teaching and learning. The goal of the chapter is to identify, describe and evaluate methods of vocabulary instruction in the past as well as those which are currently used. This chapter gives an overview of nine twentieth-century approaches and methods to language teaching and examines how vocabulary learning and teaching were considered and what techniques were applied for teaching vocabulary in each of them. Finally, it also attempts to present the theoretical postulates of various researchers on vocabulary learning and teaching.

Chapter three is Form Focused Instruction which presents the rationale for the teaching of L2 form in the communicative language classroom. It must be pointed out that vocabulary is considered here as an aspect of form. This chapter is an attempt to explore the nature of focus on form and investigates its place in the task-based language teaching classroom. The chapter starts with a brief introduction to form-focused instruction, and then goes on to distinguish between meaning-focused and form-focused instruction. Form-focused instruction is again of two types: focus on form and focus on forms (Long, 1991; cited in Ellis, et al. 2002). It has been pointed out that because of the inadequate results obtained from focus on forms and focus on meaning instruction and their unavoidable insufficiencies, focus on form instruction with its several techniques is found to be a better option for classroom instruction. Focus on form instruction does not emphasize the significance of the communicative language teaching only, but it also highlights the importance of occasional and explicit study of L2 grammatical forms. Focus on form is a term referring to the merging of implicit as well as explicit grammar instruction within communicative ESL lessons, thus integrating communicative language use with traditional grammar-based instruction.

Chapter four titled Task-based language teaching and Teaching of vocabulary, deals with the task-based language teaching and learning which aims to enhance the skills of learners to communicate effectively. Tasks are a basic component of TBLT in language classrooms since they provide a context that triggers learning processes and increases L2 learning. It is necessary to keep in mind that TBLT is an approach rather than a method. This chapter introduces a task-based approach to language learning and teaching that is different from traditionally used methods. In this approach, the performance of a task is considered as the central feature in the language-learning process.
The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of the growth of task-based theory and research. The chapter first of all discusses the correlation between communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT); and then explains the move towards task-based language teaching from the CLT paradigm. It also discusses the framework for designing tasks along with the key elements that form a task. In addition the chapter also examines the role of vocabulary teaching in task-based language teaching. Finally, it then deals with the advantages and disadvantages of the approach with regard to its effectiveness for teaching and learning, and proposes some pedagogical solutions.

Using the method of TBLT in English classes creates a real purpose for language use and offers a natural context for language learning. On the whole the purpose of task-based methodology is to generate opportunities for language study and skill-enlargement.

Chapter five, A study of pedagogical tasks, starts with a list of definitions of tasks in language teaching literature proposed by some researchers. The chapter also provides the various components that comprise a task that go towards forming up a task, including goals, input data, procedures, activities, teacher and learner roles, and task settings. At last it touches upon the classifications of tasks.

Chapter six, the final chapter is Designing vocabulary tasks. The aim of this chapter is to provide a compilation of some useful vocabulary learning tasks provided by different language teaching practitioners. Most of the tasks presented are classified on the basis of the learning strategy they apply. Thus, these tasks can also be used for strategy instruction. In the final section of the chapter the researcher has provided some self-developed tasks which are different from the tasks usually found in textbooks and workbooks. They can be specially helpful for ESL students in enriching their vocabulary. The rationale for using these tasks has also been provided in the chapter.

As vocabulary knowledge plays a significant role in L2 teaching/learning, activities that help vocabulary learning have achieved importance. In view of this, using tasks, compared with the traditional methods of instruction, has currently been emphasized. The subsequent implications of the study are the following:
1. Vocabulary instruction should be a primary concern in teaching English as a second or foreign language, because it is the vital part of communication.

2. Vocabulary instruction is a difficult process which needs careful preparation/attention by teachers and active participation by students.

3. Vocabulary should be taught in contexts and incorporated with the other language skills. Teaching vocabulary in isolation or through wordlists is ineffective.

4. Co-operative learning plays an important role in vocabulary instruction.

5. Teachers of Indian ESL students should try to use and even design their own tasks which suit their students' needs. For example, translation-based tasks, not in the form of word lists, but those which employ continuously running texts and hence give an idea of the context and thus are more communicatively oriented, might be a good alternative to monolingual tasks and can add variety to and enhance interest in the process of vocabulary learning. The familiarity with the L1 words used in the task make the learning of new L2 items easier.

6. In the teaching of words and expressions, varieties such as formal, informal should be recognized. Hence, the researcher has designed tasks on this aspect of vocabulary teaching and recommends the use of such tasks.

7. Further, etymology can help learners understand and generate a large number of related items, thus making them richer in vocabulary in a short period. The researcher has provided an example of such a task and recommends such tasks for ESL learners.

8. Students enrolled in a spoken English course should also be given practice in idiomatic language and phrasal verbs, so that their spoken language does not appear to be bookish; and such a task has also been designed by the researcher in the chapter on tasks.

To sum up, a good knowledge of vocabulary makes a great impact on the learners' development of other features of language such as reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking, and writing. Hence, proper care should be taken in selecting and implementing appropriate vocabulary teaching/learning techniques in language classes.