TEACHING VOCABULARY 1

Penny Ur

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1. Some basic facts about vocabulary

Reviewing terminology

word

lexeme

morpheme

denotation

connotation

collocation

Defining *vocabulary*

The lexical items of a language; including words and lexical chunks, but not grammatical items.

Lexical words, composed of one morpheme

big, man

or more than one

going, beautiful

lexical chunks (also called lexical phrases, phrasal expressions, memorized sequences, formulaic utterances, idioms etc.)may take the form of:

a) **Fixed expressions**

1. Compound words:

hyphenated

swimming-pool, English-speaking

 or not

 bookcase, signpost, backup

2. Phrases

strictly speaking, call it a day, in any case

Fixed expressions contd.

3. Clauses or sentences

What's the matter, as I was saying, How are you?

Note: Proverbs and some idioms and clichés are a particular class of fixed sentence expressions.

All's well that ends well. No news is good news.

Break a leg! Let's call it a day!

b) <u>Semi-fixed expressions</u>

Expressions that vary in subject, object, tense of verb etc.

[take] [something] into account, [hold] [someone] responsible, [ ] [have] a good time

Sub-sets of these are <u>phrasal verbs</u>

take up, get away with, put up with

<u>Idioms</u> may be semi-fixed:

[lose] [one's] head

c) **Collocations**: words which tend to link with specific other words

verb or adjective + preposition:

angry (with), afraid (of), wait (for);

adjective + noun:

a tall person / a high building, a quick look / fast runner.

verb + noun

to wage a war, to tell the truth, to make a mistake, to do homework, to commit [a crime];

verb + adverb

work hard, sleep soundly

How many chunks and collocations can you find here?

A young emperor penguin took a wrong turn from the Antarctic and ended up stranded on a New Zealand beach – the first time in 44 years the aquatic bird has been sighted in the south Pacific country.

Local resident Christine Wilton was taking her dog Millie for a walk on Peka Peka beach on the North Island's western coast when she discovered the bird. "It was out of this world to see it ... like someone just dropped it from the sky," Wilton said.

Conservation experts say the penguin is about 10 months old and stands about 80cm (32 inches) high. Emperor penguins are the tallest and largest species of penguin and can grow up to122cm high and weigh more than 34kg (75lbs).

Colin Miskelly, a curator at Te Papa, the Museum of New Zealand, said the bird was likely to have been born during the last Antarctic winter. He said emperor penguins can spend months at a time in the ocean, but did not know what might have caused this particular one to become disoriented. Miskelly said the penguin appeared healthy and well fed, with plenty of body fat, and probably came ashore for a rest.

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2. What do learners need to know about a lexical item?

Aspects of lexical knowledge:
receptive and productive

Form:

spoken (receptive and productive)

written (receptive and productive)

grammatical variations

Meaning:

denotation

connotation

L1 equivalent

Use

grammatical links

collocations

frequency

register, appropriateness

Other items with associated meanings

synonyms

antonyms

Associated words in semantic sets (e.g. *red, yellow, green...*)

hyponyms (e.g. *dog* is a hyponym of *animal*)

superordinates (e.g. *animal* is a superordinate of *dog, cat...*)

Discussion

How important is each for you to teach when presenting a new item (at the level you are teaching)?

✓✓ = essential

✓ =important

?= less important, or not sure

x= not necessary (at this level)

Form and meaning

- spoken form
- written form
- grammatical variants
- denotation
- connotation
- L1 equivalent(s)

Use

- grammatical links
- collocational links
- frequency?
- register, appropriateness?

Associated meanings

- synonyms
- antonyms
- semantic sets
- hyponyms
- superordinates

Form and meaning

- spoken form ✓✓
- written form ✓✓
- grammatical variants ✓
- denotation ✓✓
- connotation ✓
- L1 equivalent(s) ✓✓

Use

- grammatical links ✓
- collocational links ✓
- frequency?
- register, appropriateness?

Associated meanings

- synonyms x
- antonyms x
- semantic sets x
- hyponyms x
- superordinates x

Task

What else besides form (spelling, pronunciation) and meaning (basic, most common meaning) would you want to teach your students about the following items (choose a list appropriate for the level of one of your classes).

Foundation: *back begin ready mean(v) right short time,*

Intermediate: *absolutely else free responsible save spend worry*

Proficiency: *apology praise convenient accurately foreigner severe update*

For example…

Short

Pronunciation (American/British?)

Spelling (*sh, or)*

The fact that it usually means קצר not נמוך

Some common collocations: *a short time, a short story*

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3. The importance of vocabulary learning

Background research and theory

Laufer, B. (1997). The lexical plight in second language reading: Words you don't know, words you think you know, and words you can't guess. In Coady, J. & T. Huckin (Eds.), *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition* (pp.20-34). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

No text comprehension is possible, either in one's native language or in a foreign language, without understanding the text's vocabulary. This is not to say that reading comprehension and vocabulary comprehension are the same, or that reading quality is determined by vocabulary alone. Reading comprehension (both in L1 and L2) is also affected by textually relevant background knowledge and the application of general reading strategies, such as predicting the content of the text, recognizing the text and text structure, and grasping the main idea of the paragraph. And yet, it has been consistently demonstrated that reading comprehension is strongly related to vocabulary knowledge, more strongly than the other components of reading …(p.20)

In other words:

Vocabulary is not the only factor (also background knowledge, strategies) but the main one.

Evidence that it is the main predictor of success in reading comprehension. High correlation bet vocab knowledge and success in reading comprehension (Laufer and others)

Syntactic complexity didn't make any difference.

Reading strategies are usable only if know vocab, can't transfer otherwise.

Words are more important than background knowledge.

Experience and reflection

Can you understand what this text means?

…day, … lion and … bear …be … forest …see… goat …path… jump …goat …kill …, then start… fight… …decide …eat ….

As compared to:

One … a …a…were in a. they (Vpast) a ….. on the …they (Vpast) on the …. and (Vpast) it, (Vpast) (Ving) to (Vbase form) who would (Vbase form) it.

Bottom line:

Vocabulary is probably THE most important component of language proficiency to learn for comprehension…

… and even more so for production.

BUT

How much time do teachers spend talking about grammar in lessons? Vocabulary?

How much space in workbooks is occupied by grammar exercises? Vocabulary?

4. How much vocabulary do students need to know?

How much vocabulary (%) do you need to know in order to understand a text?

What would you guess? 80%? 85%? 90%? 95%?

Answer:

Answer: readers probably need to understand 95-98% of a text in order to understand the main gist...

... and in order to guess the rest from context (Schmitt, 2008).

Let's try it out.

Extract from a speech by Obama: Can you say what he is talking about? What the missing items are?

That is the work we began last year. Since the day I took office, we renewed our focus on the _____ who _____ our nation. We have made substantial _____ in our homeland _____ and disrupted _____ that threatened to take American _____.
(86%)

And now? (95%)

That is the work we began last year. Since the day I took office, we renewed our focus on the _____ who threaten our nation. We have made substantial _____ in our homeland security and disrupted plots that threatened to take American lives.

(95%)

That is the work we began last year. Since the day I took office, we renewed our focus on the terrorists who threaten our nation. We have made substantial investments in our homeland security and disrupted plots that threatened to take American lives.

Conclusion

With 85% of the text unknown, it is difficult to get the gist.

Even with 95% we cannot be sure of guessing unknown words correctly.

According to research

...Students need to know 5,000 – 8,000 vocabulary items families in order to understand an unsimplified text (Schmitt, 2008).

But it appears that most 4- or 5- point students in 12th grade know about 3000.

Hence - difficulty with the Bagrut reading texts (60% of the grade).

What can be done?

5. Vocabulary in the Israeli curriculum and materials

Goals of the vocabulary component in the curriculum

1. Quantity: To make sure that enough vocabulary is taught (i.e. a minimum number of items for each level);

2. Selection: To make sure that the most important items are covered at elementary and intermediate levels.

1. Quantity

By the end of 6th grade: 1200 items

By the end of 9th grade, another 2000: 3200 items altogether

By the end of 12th grade, another 2200: 5400 items altogether

	Foundation	**Intermediate**	**Proficiency**
	1200 new items (about 400 a year)	2000 new items (600-700 a year)	2200 new items (700-800 a year)
Altogether	1200 items	3200 items	5400 items

So, assuming students learn English in school about 30 weeks a year

They should be learning…

… at least 12 new items a week in elementary;

… at least 20 new items a week in Junior High;

…at least 30 new items a week in High School.

Probably in the younger classes, nearly all of these need to be deliberately taught.

In older classes, some of the responsibility can be taken by the students themselves.

2. Selection

A core list of items (words and 'chunks') that must be taught.

About half or less of the total number required according to the table.

Task

If you were composing a list of 'core' items that are essential for learners of English…

… what would be your criteria?

Criteria

Frequency

How do we know which items are most frequent in the English language?

Intuition?

Research?

Intuition

Which would you say were the top 10-12 most frequent full verbs in English

(not counting *be, do, have,* modals like *can, should, might*)?

The most common adverbs?

According to research

The most common verbs:

say	*go*	*get*	*make*
see	*know*	*take*	*think*
come	*give*	*look*	*use*

The most common adverbs:

so, then, more, now, just, also, well, only, very, even

Were your intuitions good?

In any case, intuitions need support from:

corpora

research

teacher judgment

Criteria for inclusion in the Curriculum

1. Frequency
2. Practical usefulness (classroom)
3. Relevance
4. Easiness

Not necessarily included:

cognates

lexical sets

Why not cognates?

Many are not the same for all the students' L1 (e.g. _banana_);

No consensus as to which are the most important ones;

Teachers and materials writers can select their own and include.

Why not lexical sets?

The research indicates that words that are a list of similar items (colors, clothes, parts of the body) are not learnt well if presented together.

Lexical sets

It appears from research that learning items in lexical sets (e.g. names of colors, names of animals, parts of the body etc.) do not lead to good learning.

Research on learning semantic sets

Tinkham (1993)

Does it help learners to master a new set of lexical items if they are all members of a semantic set (same part of speech, same kind of meaning: e.g. clothes, animals)?

Learners were presented with two sets of items from an artificial language, and told their 'meanings'; one set all related to the same domain, the other did not.

shirt = <u>mosh</u>ee   rain =<u>mosh</u>ee

jacket = u<u>mau</u>   car = blai<u>kel</u>

sweater = blai<u>kel</u>   frog = u<u>mau</u>

rain = <u>ach</u>en   shirt = <u>ach</u>en

car = <u>nal</u>o   jacket = kaw<u>vas</u>

frog = kaw<u>vas</u>   sweater = <u>nal</u>o

The learners consistently learned the <u>unrelated</u> items better.

The research was later replicated, with similar results.

Waring (1998), Erten & Tekin (2008), Papathanasiou (2009)

When asked, learners said that they found they were confused because words had similar meanings.

I.e. if you learn two words with similar meanings (or forms?) the learning of one 'interferes' with learning the other.

But words linked to each other **syntagmatically** and ***thematically*** are learnt well.

e.g. *blue + sky* is better learnt than *blue + red + yellow...*

mother + love + home .... better learnt than *mother, father, son, daughter, sister, brother...*

So...

The vocabulary presented in elementary textbooks should be based not on semantic sets or pairs, but on thematic and syntactic links.

Further implications 2

The teaching of lexical sets leads to teaching relatively infrequent words (e.g *toes, purple*).

We have an enormous amount of vocabulary to teach: why waste effort on infrequent items that will not be useful to learners?

Further implications 2

Any pairs or groups of words that might get confused should probably not be taught simultaneously as new items.

Antonyms: arrive / depart

Synonyms: big / large

Synforms of various kinds:

Homophones: accept / except

Homonyms, homographs: bear, entrance

Semantic associations may be useful for:

a) The teaching of a new item 'hooked' on one already known which is semantically linked to it (e.g. teaching *miserable* when they already know *sad*).

b) The design of practice exercises, e.g. 'odd one out' or 'suggest an opposite'.

Samples from lists. Note that:

1. Verb past forms provided only when irregular

2. Chunks are provided under 'headword' alphabetical order: so *in front of* after *from*

3. Meaning illustrated by brief sample uses, e.g. grade

    I study in sixth grade.

friend
from
in front of
full
funny
game
garden
get, got
girl
give, gave
glad
glass
go, went
go on, went on
going to
good
good at
goodbye
grade

I study in sixth grade.

great
green
grow, grew
guess
half
half past
hand
hang
happen
happy
hard
have, had
have to, had to
he
head
hear, heard
hello
help
her

herself
here
high
him
himself
his
hold, held
home
hope
hot
hour
house
how
How are you?
hundred
I'm hungry
idea
if
immediately
important

million

mine

  The car is mine.

minimum

modern

moment

more

more and more

more or less

Moslem/ Muslim (n/adj)

mountain

mouth

museum

must

nation

nature

neat

necessary

neither …nor

nervous

newspaper

noise

normal

north

not only

note (n)

note (v)

notice

a number of

object (n)

occur

odd

  Your behavior is odd.

offer (v)

offer (n)

office

oil

once again

once more

at once

one another

move onto …

operate

operation

opinion

in my opinion

opportunity

opposite

ordinary

orange (n)

orange (adj)

order (v)

order (n)

  put in order

in order to

How can such requirements be implemented in practice?

1. Textbook writers

- All the 'core' items in materials for Foundation and Intermediate levels.

- A large number of items in order to enable learners to reach the target quantity.

2. Teachers

- Awareness of need to teach most frequent items.

- Awareness of need to teach also 'chunks'.

- Awareness of need to teach a lot of vocabulary.

So both writers and teachers need...

… a repertoire of effective teaching strategies to help them achieve good vocabulary learning by the students.