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A Different View on Teaching Vocabulary

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Abstract

The article gives suggestions on how teaching vocabulary can be enhanced using emotions and imagination. There are several examples provided to support the suggestions.

Key words

Grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, feeling, logical analysis, memorizing



Nowadays rapid and inevitable changes occur in many spheres of our life, and the system of education is not an exception. There has also been a constant change in the teaching methods and techniques all over the world in every subject, thus English vocabulary teaching methods and techniques need desirable and radical changes from the perspective of the demanding job market in the globalized world. Thornbury states "If you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much. You will see most improvement, if you learn more words and expressions. You can say very little with grammar, but you can say almost anything with words" (Thornbury, 2002).

Vocabulary is a very important means to express our thoughts and feelings, either in spoken or written form. All the same many learners consider learning vocabulary a boring and tiresome job. They take efforts to study lists of words (spelling, pronunciation, meaning, synonyms, etc.) only to realize a few hours later that their results are hardly satisfactory. Learners can be discouraged by the number of words in English and their complex usage. Although the communicative approach has become the mainstream in language teaching, learners are still very passive recipients of knowledge and play only a minimal role. As a result, teachers keep looking for the innovative ways to make learning

and teaching vocabulary easier and more pleasant.

Teaching vocabulary should not only consist of teaching specific words but also be aimed at equipping learners with strategies necessary to expand their vocabulary knowledge. It goes without saying that teaching vocabulary in context, combining vocabulary with reading and writing activities, and providing the learners with different lexical information about the words enhance their vocabulary.

I think that using logical and emotional stimuli while learning and teaching vocabulary might be quite useful. There are various vocabulary techniques employing logical and emotional stimulation. Traditionally, emotion and logic can be found in the following: numerous vocabulary games (crossword, bingo, puzzle, domino, and movement games), impact of the colour (cards, posters, drawings, pictures, photos), music effects (songs, sounds of the nature), logical and associative activities (lexical-semantic symbols, logical schemes). But these activities are preferably aimed at memorizing but not at the comprehension of lexical items.

Having analysed the traditional approaches I can say that while teaching vocabulary the teacher should pay attention to the logical and emotional arrangement of the vocabulary items. In other words, a teacher should identify the leading and the secondary stimuli. Thus, the list of technical, economi-

cal, ecological vocabulary items falls into following stages: "comprehension – logical analysis – feeling – memorizing (revision)". In this case logical stimulus precedes the emotional one.

Nowadays, emotion is considered to be a purely psychological category and its application in methods of teaching English is a controversial issue. There is a great gap between the theoretical research and practical aspect of this issue. So, there appears a need for entirely new vocabulary strategies, based on the emotional stimulation. It is true to say that a dominating emotion and learner's involvement and interest in the communicative situation ensure its emotional colouring. This factor greatly influences the vocabulary learning and the retention of the words in the speech. So if the vocabulary is emotionally coloured (likes and dislikes, favourite season, sport, etc.) the teacher benefits from using the model: "comprehension – feeling – logical analysis – memorizing (revision)", where the logical element follows the emotional one.

It is widely believed that learners' imagination ought to be stimulated and developed. Yet, few teachers understand what imagination is and how to use it when teaching vocabulary. It should be mentioned that the cognitive side of learning vocabulary gets a great deal of attention, but the affective side is also important as the emotion and cognition can't be separated. Learners' feelings and emotions can determine the effectiveness of their learning, and imagination can also be crucial to memory because it facilitates the storage and recall of new vocabulary. Our imagination, thoughts, feelings and emotions as well as automated functions all operate simultaneously. So, emotion, as a basic element of imagination, is a hook that helps learners to remember events. If we want our learners to remember important vocabulary items, we need to hook them to a positive emotional episode.

Learning English through imagination also produces a nonthreatening atmosphere for students, who usually feel anxiety when speaking English in a formal classroom setting. Rather than being stifled, the classroom atmosphere should be sufficiently relaxed, so the learners shouldn't be afraid of speaking. To enhance the English classroom atmosphere and encourage learning, the advertisements, warnings, posters, bulletin, boards, pictures, puppets, drawings and photos are posted on the walls. Relaxed atmosphere is the first key step in creat-

ing images. If teachers want students to remember new vocabulary it needs to be learnt, practiced and revised in a "memorable way". So, using imagination is one of such techniques, because it employs a variety of key elements: colours (visual images), music and songs (auditive images), movements and gestures (kinesthetic images), etc.

It is a well-known fact that learners memorize words better if they draw their own pictures and create their own audial images. Teacher can offer the learners to listen to the sounds of nature and imagine the place where they are now. Then comes pair or group discussion of what they feel, what season it is, what the weather is like, etc. Thus, imagination makes learners and teachers be more creative.

Imagination facilitates new words revision in an enjoyable context, thus it makes classroom vocabulary study an amusing and satisfying experience for teachers and learners alike. It encourages, entertains, teaches, and promotes fluency. If not for any of these reasons, it should be used just because it helps students to see the beauty of the language but not just difficulties that from time to time seem overwhelming.

At the speaking stage the most efficient combination is emotion + logic (equal positions). For example, such activity as "What is strange about bird swimming (dog flying...?)" engages learners' logical thinking and focuses their attention on the personal and emotional attitude to the topic.

The above-described approach to the vocabulary teaching gives good results with the learners of different types of intelligences (logical, musical, spatial-visual, etc.). Thus, vocabulary techniques, based on the emotional and logical stimulation, employ both conscious (logical) and subconscious (emotional) way of thinking. It increases learners' motivation of learning and memorizing new words, and ensures their stable retention in the long-term memory. Moreover, the use of emotional and logical stimuli when teaching vocabulary makes vocabulary flexible and automatic. ■

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