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**M**aster **T**wo **C**lasses(**L**ing)  **D**idactics of **L**anguage **S**kills **C**redits**. T: B**erkani

**TEACHING SKILLS : TEACHING VOCABULARY**

**Course outline**

* Historical perspectives
* Strategies for teaching vocabulary

**Introduction**

The other “half” of form-focused instruction is vocabulary—the thousands of lexical building blocks that are available to the average user of a language. As we consider vocabulary teaching, be reminded again that lexical items are basic to all of the four skills, and so vocabulary is not a “skill” as we normally use the term. The skill comes in the efficient storage (competence) and adept retrieval (performance) of those units.

**1.Historical Perspectives** While traditional language-teaching methods highlighted vocabulary study with lists, definitions, written and oral drills, and flash cards, there was a period of time when “the teaching and learning of vocabulary [were] undervalued” (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 5). In the zeal for natural, authentic classroom tasks and activities, vocabulary focus was swept under the rug. Further, as teachers increasingly perceived their role as facilitators and guides, they became more reluctant to take the directive and sometimes intrusive steps to turn students’ focus to lexical form

Toward the end of the twentieth century, we saw a revival of systematicattention to vocabulary learning across a number of proficiency levels and contexts. Ranging from very explicit focus, such as that found in Michael Lewis’s (1993, 1997, 2000) Lexical Approach, to more indirect approaches in which vocabulary is incorporated into communicative tasks, attention to lexical forms is now more central to the development of language curricula (Nation, 2001, 2003, 2005; Read, 2004).

One of the recent “hot topics” in vocabulary teaching is whether learners are better served in the long run with incidental exposure to lexical items (that is, as a by-product of communicative activities), or with intentional, explicit focus on vocabulary. In the earlier years of CLT approaches, “the concept of incidental learning offered the seductive prospect that, provided the learners had access to sufficient comprehensible input, L2 vocabulary acquisition would largely take care of itself” (Read, 2004, p. 147). However, Schmitt (2008) observes that many features of vocabulary require deliberate attention, as learners may not notice the features of use if they are focusing on the meaning of task. In fact, research shows that intentional vocabulary focus accounts for significant gains in acquisition (Laufer, 2003; Read, 2004).

A further development in vocabulary teaching is the rapid growth of corpuslinguistics and the volumes of raw data that are now available in corpora that encompass spoken and written language, genres of each, as well as data from a number of varieties of world Englishes. Researchers (e.g., Conrad, 2005; Liu & Jiang, 2009; Reppen, 2010) have described numerous ways in which corpus linguistics has improved our collective capacity to expose learners to real-world language. We have ready access not just to statistics such as word frequency counts, but more important, collocations (words that tend to appear in the company of other words). Concordancing enables learners (and textbook writers) to see words in context (McCarthy, 2004). And these voluminous corpora provide data banks through which we can more closely examine and appreciate associations between grammatical and lexical units (Hunston & Francis, 2000).  
 Current practices in teaching vocabulary, especially in view of the technology of corpus linguistics, are clearly not simply a rebirth of the same methods of half a century ago. Rather than viewing vocabulary items as a long and boring list of words to be defined and memorized, lexical forms are seen in their central role in contextualized, meaningful language. Learners can be guided in specific ways to internalize these important building blocks of language.

**2. Strategies for teaching vocabulary** Below are some guidelines for the communicative treatment of vocabulary instruction:

**2.1. Allocate specific class time to vocabulary learning** In the hustle and bustle of our interactive classrooms, sometimes we get so caught up in lively group work and meaningful communication that we don’t pause to devote some attention to words. Noting the incremental nature of word learning (Zimmerman, 2014), it is important to have students meet target words several times. Webb and Nation (2013) note that at least somewhere between 7–16 encounters of any new word are required for gaining necessary knowledge. Furthermore, the spacing between the repetitions is also important to keep in mind. For example, spreading 20 minutes across a few days at progressive intervals will be much more effective for long-term recall than spending 20 minutes all at once (Webb & Nation, 2013).

**2.2. Help students to learn vocabulary in context**

The best internalization of vocabulary comes from encounters (comprehension or production) with words within the context of surrounding discourse. Data from linguistic corpora can provide real-world actual language that has been printed or spoken. Rather than isolating words and/or focusing on dictionary definitions, learners can benefit from attending to vocabulary within a communicative framework in which items appear. Students will then associate new words with a meaningful context to which they apply. For example, for a beginning level of students, pictures, realia, and gestures can be used to describe meaning in context. For a more advanced level of students, encourage them to consult online corpora (e.g., the British National Corpus, or the Corpus of Contemporary American English: COCA) to gain knowledge of patterned sequences, particularly collocations or words that go together (Liu & Jiang, 2009).

Learner’s dictionaries also offer good resources for clear definitions and examples sentences drawing on a limited number of words. Unlike commonly used online/electronic dictionaries designed for native speakers, good learner’s dictionaries (e.g., the *Oxford Basic American Dictionary for Learners of English* or *Merriam-Webster’s Learner’s Dictionary*) additionally include information about collocation, grammatical forms, register, word parts, and so on (Zimmerman, 2014).

**2.3. Engage in “Unplanned” vocabulary teaching** In all likelihood, most of the attention you give to vocabulary learning will be unplanned: those moments when a student asks about a word or when a word has appeared that you feel deserves some attention. These impromptu moments are very important. Sometimes, they are simply brief little pointers; for example, the word “clumsy” once appeared in a paragraph students were reading and the teacher volunteered:  
**T:** Okay, “clumsy.” Does anyone know what that means? [*writes the  
word on the board*]  
**Ss:** [*silence*]  
**T:** No one? Okay, well, take a look at the sentence it’s in. “His clumsy  
efforts to imitate a dancer were almost amusing.” Now, was  
Bernard a good dancer? [*S1 raises her hand*.] Okay, Mona?  
**S1:** Well, no. He was very bad dancer . . . we see this in next sentence.  
**T:** Excellent! So, what do you think “clumsy” might mean?  
**S2:** Mmm, . . . not graceful?  
**T:** Good, what else? Anyone?  
**S3:** Not smooth, eh, . . . uncoordinated?  
**T:** Great! Okay, so “clumsy” means awkward, ungraceful, uncoordinated. [*writes synonyms on the board*] Is that clear now?  
**Ss:** [*most Ss nod in agreement*]  
 Sometimes, such impromptu moments may be extended: the teacher gives several examples and/or encourages students to use the word in other sentences. Make sure that such unplanned teaching, however, does not detract from the central focus of activity by drifting into a long and possibly irrelevant tangent.

**2.4. Encourage students to develop word-learning strategies** A number of clues are available to learners to develop word-attack strategies. Consider the following examples (Kruse, 1987; Ur, 2012):

* ***Suggestions for teaching vocabulary development (adapted from Kruse, 1987; Ur, 2012)***

1. **Word building  
   a.** *Suffixes*, examples: good*ness*, famili*ar*, happi*ly*Practice word formation through exercises in which the student adds and subtracts suffixes  
   **b.** *Prefixes*, examples: *in*formal, *un*natural, *inter*national  
   Substitute various root stems with prefixes (*inter*+action);  
   Add prefixes (violent  *non*violent)  
   **c.** *Roots*, examples: *help* + ful, extra + *ordinary*
2. **Definition clues  
   a.** *Parentheses*, example: We saw a panther (large black cat) on  
   the Safari.  
   **b.** *Synonyms* and *antonyms*, example: A birthday is an observance,  
   that is, a remembrance of someone’s day of birth.  
   **c.** *Superordinates*, example: *animal* is the superordinate of *dog,  
   lion, mouse***3. Inference clues  
   a.** *Specific*, example: Peru is trying to *restore* some of its  
   deteriorated monuments. Machu Picchu is being partly rebuilt  
   by curators.  
   **b.** *Restatement*, example: Some products are designed to stop  
   *perspiration*, but this bodily secretion of salty liquid can  
   actually help to cool you.  
   **c.** *Contextual cues*, example: The old dog *snuffled* and *moped*as he sadly walked from room to room.  
   **4. Word associations  
   a.** *Linking meaning*, example: fat + pig, tall + tree  
   **b.** *Collocations*, example: tell the truth, make a copy

Considering that only a small fraction of the word list can be covered inside the classroom, it is necessary for students to develop effective strategies for learning vocabulary on their own. Word-learning strategies refer to “the planned approaches that a word-learner takes as an agent of his or her own word learning” (Zimmerman, 2014, p. 297). Once they encounter unknown words, they  
can try to figure out how the words are used by asking questions such as:  
• Is the word countable or uncountable?  
• Is there a particular preposition that follows it?  
• Is it a formal word?  
• Does it have positive or negative connotations? (Zimmerman, 2014, p. 298)

An effective way to encourage word-learning is to urge students to use *vocabulary notebooks* to enter new words, and to review them daily, once they identify their learning goals. Studies show that in order to understand television shows learners need to know about 3,000 word families and have knowledge of proper nouns (Web & Rodgers, 2009). If they wish to read novels and newspapers comfortably, they need to have a vocabulary size of 8,000–9,000 word families (Nation, 2006). The fact that increasing vocabulary size will influence the degree to which they can understand and use language may motivate them to be determined to expand their vocabulary notebooks.

Unfortunately, professional pendulums have a disturbing way of swinging too far one way or the other, and sometimes the only way we can get enough perspective to see these overly long arcs is through hindsight. Hindsight has now taught us that there was some overreaction to the almost exclusive attention that grammar and vocabulary received in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century.  
So-called “natural” approaches in which grammar was considered damaging were equally over reactive. Advocating the “absorption” of grammar and vocabulary with no overt attention whatsoever to language forms went too far. We now seem to have a healthy respect for the place of form-focused instruction—attention to those basic “bits and pieces” of a language—in an interactive curriculum. And now we can pursue the business of finding better and better techniques for getting these bits and pieces into the communicative repertoires of our learners.

* **Main Resource :**

Brown,H.D and Lee,K.(2015) *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language*

*pedagogy (4th ed.).*White Plains,NY: Pearson Education.