# **Teaching Vocabulary**

**1. Objectives of teaching vocabulary**

Learning vocabulary is a lengthy and complex process which requires adequate mastery of form, meaning and usage. Through this process, the learners should be able to:

1. spell and pronounce the words correctly when they use them either in writing or speaking
2. Understand without difficulty the meaning of the words correctly upon hearing them or reading them
3. Use vocabulary in appropriate grammatical sentences or utterances, knowing under what circumstances it occurs, the relationships between interlocutors, and the mode of the discourse- spoken or written, etc.

**2. Consequences of ineffective vocabulary presentation**

Any ineffective vocabulary teaching and learning may lead to undesirable results such as:

* Inability to retrieve learnt vocabulary while communicating in the language
* Inappropriate use of the vocabulary items in different situations as in the following sentences:
* My car was badly injured in the accident. (damaged)
* We shall discuss about the problem. (talk)

The choice of words is as important as knowing their meanings, since what is correct in one situation may not be correct in another.

* Ignorance of varieties of language. That is, using vocabulary at the wrong level of formality either of situation or the relationship between the speakers of the language.
* Using vocabulary in meaningless or in an unidiomatic way. For example: Her name is familiar with me (to).
* Incorrect use of grammatical form, stress, pronunciation and spelling. Examples: Words of different forms but of identical pronunciation such as genes/jeans, knight/night, in/inn, none/nun; or words of similar forms but pronounced differently, such as: wood/mood, book/food, bough/tough, through/hiccough, or words that function both as verb and noun such as record (noun) /record (verb).

**3. Methods of vocabulary presentation**

There are two main ways to present (introduce) vocabulary. You can either show the meaning in some way or you can use language that the students already know in order to make clear the meaning of the new lexical item. There is a less used third way of presenting vocabulary through sounds.

**3.1. Ostensive means**

Ostensive means by showing. You can hold up things or point to them. This approach is widely used with beginner classes, but can also be used with advanced learners. Ostensive techniques cannot be limited to only things which can be found in the room. There are also ways to show the meaning of words and concepts from the world outside the school as shown below:

**A. Realia**

They are real things. They are easily carried and can be brought to school such as a piece of bread or fruit, a stick, toys, eggs and so on. Use your imagination also. Crashes and skids can be represented by the use of model cars or planes.

**B. Pictures**

Objects which are not easily carried or which are unavailable can be represented by pictures. You can make your own pictures. Use the board to make rapid sketches of simple things. Complex things must be drawn at home on a flashcard. Abstract concepts such as last week, tomorrow, late or early can be conveyed by use of a cardboard clock and a calendar.

**C. Body**

Your body and those of students can be used to get meaning across. These are the techniques you will use:

1. Facial expression, to show feelings (eg. Happy, smiling, hot , thirsty, angry, tired)
2. Gesture using hands and arms to show a range of meanings (eg. Fast, small, curving, wide, rolling)
3. Mime and action, to show many verbs and some adverbs (eg. To eat, to wake up, slowly, angrily)

**3.2. Verbal definition**

There are several ways to define the meaning of a new word using teacher talk. A linguistic approach is not suited to beginner classes as they do not have a large enough vocabulary to understand your explanation. You can use any of the following means to help comprehension.

**A. Word sets**

Word sets are groups or related words, such as child, boy, girl, youngster, teenager. You can use the words in a set that the students already know in order to introduce new related words. A concept like clothing can easily be conveyed by giving different examples of items of clothing. The same would apply to other general words of that sort (transport, furniture, vegetables). You can work in reverse to present a more specific word. For example, to present the word canary, you would start form the already known concept of bird.

**B. Synonyms**

Synonyms are words which mean more or less the same thing. Take the word coach, for example. It is a bus, but one that makes long distance journeys. Synonyms are best shown on the board using the mathematical sign for equals:

fierce = savage

Unhappy = sad

Shore = beach

Residence = home

**C. Antonyms**

Antonyms are words which have an opposite meaning. For example poor is the opposite of rich while dirty is the opposite of clean. The sign to indicate an opposite meaning is an equals crossed through, in this way: Hot ≠ cold

Full ≠ empty

**D. Cognates**

Cognates are words in the students' own language that have the same or very similar form as the English word. If the students' mother tongue or second language is related to English there will be many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of such words available and readily comprehensible. It would be illogical to ignore this rich and readily available language resource.

**E. Illustrative sentences**

You can use a sentence or a sequence of sentences to create a linguistic context in which the meaning of the unknown word is illustrated. Most words that cannot be explained in the easier ways above can be presented in this way. In the two examples that follow one has a good illustrative setting, the other has not.

Can you see why this is so?

**Example 1**: Hates

My father hates potatoes, but he loves rice. He likes carrots, beans and most other vegetables, but he refuses to eat potatoes. He hates them.

**Example 2:** Traffic

There is a lot of traffic in cities. Traffic is a nuisance. Traffic is dangerous too.

**Comment:** The first illustrative sentence is long, vague and therefore unclear. The verb hates could be understood in different ways. By contrast, the second one is short, precise and clear.

Of course, the illustrative sentences to be copied by the class, need to be as short as possible. For the two words above, you might write:

To hate: Students hate punishment

Traffic: Road traffic is light at night

**F. Build on general knowledge**

Rely on what the learners know about the world. For example, they know the names of the major towns in their own country. Therefore, the points of the compass might be introduced in this way:

North, South? East, West (drawing the four cardinal points on the board). Our capital city is in the north of the country. Oran is in the west. In the east are the town of Constantine and Setif.

The names of local towns and villages will help the learners understand the difference between near and not far from. The names of local streets will enable you to introduce market place, roundabout and bus terminus. You can also make use of the students' interests and their knowledge of music, sports, school affairs and personalities to introduce new words.

**G. Scales**

You can show the meaning of some types of words by sequencing them along a scale between two antonyms. Imagine that you have to present the words rarely and frequently. Begin by putting the two antonyms never and always on the board. Then, you can illicit other adverbs of frequency that the students already know as in the following example:

0% 100%

NEVER SOMETIMES OFTEN GENERALLY ALWAYS

Next you illicit something that the students do, getting them to use those adverbs: Is there anything that you rarely do? What about flying? Have you ever traveled by air?

**H. Translation**

Translation can be used when no easy alternative presents itself. Faced with a grammar word or a formulaic expression like Have you by any chance…? it is sometimes better to give the mother tongue equivalent, rather than to spend a great deal of time trying to define or show the meaning.

**3.3. Audio presentation**

Many words are more easily presented by a tape recording than by the ways already described. The noises of an argument, a jet plane, a locomotive, a horse galloping, children splashing in water, and so on, are easily obtained or created. The presentation procedure is simple. You just tell the class to listen to the sound of…..

# **Teaching Grammar**

Grammar is central to the teaching and learning of languages. It is also one of the most difficult aspects of language to teach well.

**1. Grammar teaching according to different teaching approaches**

Language teachers who think of grammar as a fixed set of word forms and rules of usage teach grammar by explaining the forms and rules and then drilling students on them. This results in bored, disaffected students who can produce correct forms on exercises and tests, but consistently make errors when they try to use the language in context. These teachers follow the principles of traditional approaches to language teaching such as the Grammar Translation Approach which was based on a prescription of the whole grammar of the language according to what is right and what is wrong in order to enable the learners to master the general rules governing the written form of the language.

However, teachers influenced by recent theoretical work on the difference between language learning and language acquisition, tend not to teach grammar at all. Believing that children acquire their first language without overt grammar instruction, they expect students to learn their second language the same way. They assume that students will absorb grammar rules as they hear, read, and use the language in communication activities. Teachers who use this trend are influenced by such methods as the Direct Method which is based on the assumption that learning a foreign language is very much like learning one’s mother tongue and that therefore grammar instruction is unneccessary.

The communicative competence model balances these extremes. The model recognizes that overt grammar instruction helps students acquire the language more efficiently, but it incorporates grammar teaching and learning into the larger context of teaching students to use the language. Instructors using this model teach students the grammar they need to know to accomplish defined communication tasks.

# **2. Objectives and Techniques for Teaching Grammar**

The objective of grammar instruction is to enable students to carry out their communication purposes. This goal has three implications:

* Students need overt instruction that connects grammar points with larger communication contexts.
* Students do not need to master every aspect of each grammar point, only those that are relevant to the immediate communication task.
* Error correction is not always the instructor's first responsibility.

### 3. Overt or contextualised grammar teaching

### 3.1. Overt Grammar Instruction

Adult students appreciate and benefit from direct instruction that allows them to apply critical thinking skills to language learning. Teachers can take advantage of this by providing explanations that give students a descriptive understanding (declarative knowledge) of each point of grammar.

An important part of grammar instruction is providing examples. Teachers need to plan their examples carefully around two basic principles:

* Be sure the examples are accurate and appropriate. They must present the language appropriately, be culturally appropriate for the setting in which they are used, and be to the point of the lesson.
* Use the examples as teaching tools. Focus examples on a particular theme or topic so that students have more contact with specific information and vocabulary.

### 3.2. Contextualized Grammar Instruction

In the communicative competence model, the purpose of learning grammar is to learn the language of which the grammar is a part. Teachers therefore teach grammar forms and structures in relation to meaning and use for the specific communication tasks that students need to complete.

Compare the traditional model and the communicative competence model for teaching the English past tense:

**Traditional model:** grammar for grammar's sake

* Teach the regular -ed form
* Teach the doubling rule for verbs that end in d (for example, wed-wedded)
* Hand out a list of irregular verbs that students must memorize
* Do pattern practice drills for -ed
* Do substitution drills for irregular verbs

**Communicative model:** grammar for communication's sake

* Distribute two short narratives about recent experiences or events, each one to half of the class
* Teach the regular -ed form, using verbs that occur in the texts as examples. Teach the pronunciation and doubling rules if those forms occur in the texts.
* Teach the irregular verbs that occur in the texts.
* Students read the narratives, ask questions about points they don't understand.
* Students work in pairs in which one member has read Story A and the other Story B. Students interview one another; using the information from the interview, they then write up or orally repeat the story they have not read.

### 4. Error Correction

At all proficiency levels, learners produce language that is not exactly the language used by native speakers. Some of the differences are grammatical, while others involve vocabulary selection and mistakes in the selection of language appropriate for different contexts.

In responding to student communication, teachers need to be careful not to focus on error correction to the detriment of communication and confidence building. Teachers need to let students know when they are making errors so that they can work on improving. Teachers also need to build students' confidence in their ability to use the language by focusing on the content of their communication rather than the grammatical form.

Teachers can use error correction to support language acquisition, and avoid using it in ways that undermine students' desire to communicate in the language, by taking cues from context.

* When students are doing structured output activities that focus on development of new language skills, use error correction to guide them.

Example:   
Student (in class): I buy a new car yesterday.   
Teacher: You bought a new car yesterday. Remember, the past tense of buy is bought.

* When students are engaged in communicative activities, correct errors only if they interfere with comprehensibility. Respond using correct forms, but without stressing them.

Example:   
Student (greeting teacher) : I buy a new car yesterday!   
Teacher: You bought a new car? That's exciting! What kind?

# **5. Developing Grammar Activities**

Many courses and textbooks, especially those designed for lower proficiency levels, use a specified sequence of grammatical items as their organizing principle. When this is the case, classroom activities need to reflect the grammar point that is being introduced or reviewed. By contrast, when a course curriculum follows a topic sequence, grammar points can be addressed as they come up.

For curricula that introduce grammatical forms in a specified sequence, teachers need to develop activities that relate form to meaning and use.

* Describe the grammar point, including form, meaning, and use, and give examples
* Ask students to practice the grammar point in communicative drills
* Have students do a communicative task that provides opportunities to use the grammar point.

For curricula that follow a sequence of topics, teachers need to develop activities that relate the topical discourse (use) to meaning and form.

* Provide oral or written input (audiotape, reading selection) that addresses the topic
* Review the point of grammar, using examples from the material
* Ask students to practice the grammar point in communicative drills that focus on the topic
* Have students do a communicative task on the topic

# **6. Using Textbook Grammar Activities**

Textbooks usually provide one or more of the following three types of grammar exercises.

**Mechanical drills:** Each prompt has only one correct response, and students can complete the exercise without attending to meaning. For example: George waited for the bus this morning. He **will wait** for the bus tomorrow morning, too.

Mechanical drills are the least useful because they bear little resemblance to real communication. They do not require students to learn anything; they only require parroting of a pattern or rule.

**Meaningful drills:** Each prompt has only one correct response, and students must attend to meaning to complete the exercise. For example: Where are George’s papers? They are in his notebook.  
(Students must understand the meaning of the question in order to answer, but only one correct answer is possible because they all know where George’s papers are.)

Meaningful drills can help students develop understanding of the workings of rules of grammar because they require students to make form-meaning correlations. Their resemblance to real communication is limited by the fact that they have only one correct answer.

**Communicative drills** require students to be aware of the relationships among form, meaning, and use. In communicative drills, students test and develop their ability to use language to convey ideas and information.

# **7. Assessing Grammar Proficiency**

**7.1. Authentic Assessment**

Just as mechanical drills do not teach students the language, mechanical test questions do not assess their ability to use it in authentic ways. In order to provide authentic assessment of students’ grammar proficiency, an evaluation must reflect real-life uses of grammar in context. This means that the activity must have a purpose other than assessment and require students to demonstrate their level of grammar proficiency by completing some task.

To develop authentic assessment activities, begin with the types of tasks that students will actually need to do using the language. Assessment can then take the form of communicative drills and communicative activities like those used in the teaching process.

For example, the activity based on audiotapes of public address announcements can be converted into an assessment by having students respond orally or in writing to questions about a similar tape. In this type of assessment, the instructor uses a checklist or rubric to evaluate the student’s understanding and/or use of grammar in context.

**7.2. Mechanical Tests**

Mechanical tests do serve one purpose: They motivate students to memorize. They can therefore serve as prompts to encourage memorization of irregular forms and vocabulary items. Because they test only memory capacity, not language ability, they are best used as quizzes and given relatively little weight in evaluating student performance and progress

**Teaching Pronunciation**

The teaching of pronunciation is an important aspect of foreign language methodology. Pronunciation drills are an integral part of effective English language teaching. These drills help pupils overcome problems that arise from the interference of the mother tongue. Thus, when a speaker of any language is introduced to English at any age, he will have acquired the phonological system of his mother tongue. If he has no remedial work on pronunciation at an early stage of learning the foreign language, he will establish incorrect forms of English sounds. Features and habits of the mother tongue will condition the way he pronounces English. It is essential, therefore, to start teaching the sounds and intonation patterns of English from the first day of learning the language. This procedure will foster good habits of pronunciation in young learners.

With advanced learners, pronunciation practice may be done within the context of more difficult activities. For example, learners should be exposed to authentic aural materials such as conversations, radio broadcasts, plays and so on. Such materials will help learners identify and discriminate English sounds. They also enable them to hear English voices other than the teacher’s, and they provide the learner with a modal for imitation.

1. Special problems encountered by a foreign learner of English

Because English spelling is not regular, foreign learners of English encounter a problem in the phonological structure of some English words which results in poor pronunciation. The following are the most important problems that may face a foreign learner of English:

1.1. Orthography vs. Pronunciation

A learner who has not heard or practiced words like ‘enough, though, through and cough ’ is likely to make mistakes through false analogy because the visual configuration of such words is misleading.

The same problem is found with ‘double o’: words such as look, took, book, shook, good, wood, which are commonly with a short /u/ sound; whereas other ‘double o’ words such as too, food, mood, shoot and moon are usually pronounced with a long /u:/ sound.

A third type of these words is those which have an initial position /n/ sound with different spellings such as: knot, gnu, mnemonic, and pneumonia. Such words are often mispronounced.

1.2. Homographs

The same problem is confronted with words which have similar spellings, but are pronounced differently. Examples: cow/ slow, brown/ shown, now/ mow, imply / simply, **ˈ**present/ pre**ˈ**sent, **ˈ**conduct/ con**ˈ**duct.

1.3. The plural form

The plural morphs sometimes present a problem to foreign learners of English as they confuse /s/ and /z/ or /iz/. These phonological patterns are conditioned by the sound that immediately precedes them.

1.4. Verbs: Present and Past forms

The principles governing the pronunciation of third person singular forms of verbs are the same as those for the pronunciation of regular plural nouns. Examples:

/s/ /z/ /iz/

Looks runs passes

Lets robs pushes

Hopes arrives catches

The /t/ sound of the past tense occurs after all unvoiced consonants except /t/; and /d/ allomorph occurs after all vowels and all voiced consonants except /d/; whereas the /id/ sound occurs only after the sounds /t/ and /d/.

**2. The role of the teacher**

The English language teacher is expected to be aware of such problematic words so as to overcome the inconsistency of sound-symbol correspondence. And it is necessary for him to have contrastive knowledge of the mother tongue and English sound systems in order to be able to predict problems before they occur.

Moreover he should know the problems which may affect the learning process. The contrastive knowledge will help the teacher to identify problem areas and to handle them more effectively. To fulfill this goal, the teacher has to design learning activities that will elicit learners responses, requiring the use of vocabulary items or grammatical structures which contain the target sounds he wishes them to practice. In this way, the teacher contextualizes pronunciation practice and ensures meaningful communication, which is the central purpose of language study.

3. Procedures and techniques of presentation

3.1 Teaching pronunciation of sounds

The time available for pronunciation instruction in a typical English language lesson is often limited. The teacher thus has to remedy his learners’ pronunciation through identifying their most common problems and giving them practice exercises and activities, rather than rules.

The best method of teaching the sound system is repetition and imitation for beginners. However, after initial training, pronunciation drills can be contextualized so that repetition drills may become essential to real communication in the language. Situations and activities should be meaningfully related to learners’ interests and experience and the exercise material are to be natural and realistic.

One of the easiest ways of having learners practice sentences (containing the target sound) in a meaningful context is to ask them questions which stimulate responses containing the troublesome sound under study.

For example, to practice with the phonemes /s/ and /z/ the teacher may construct a drill like the following:

Teacher: Ask Salim if he reads a newspaper everyday.

Pupil: Salim; do you read a newspaper everyday?

Salim: No, I don’t.

Pupil: No, Salim doesn’t read a newspaper everyday.

Teacher: Ask Ali what kind of fruits he likes.

Pupil: Ali, what kind of fruits do you like?

Ali: Melons.

Pupil: He likes melons.

3.2. Teaching stress and intonation

In teaching intonation and stress variation in speech, the teacher may use the following technique:

1. He writes on the board a simple sentence using vocabulary the students have already learned
2. Then, he draws attention to the teaching point and gives its linguistic meaning to make the activity meaningful.
3. He reads the sentence as it would normally be spoken.
4. It is desirable to indicate on the board intonation lines, or to indicate up or down arrows at the end pf the sentence.
5. Learners repeat
6. The teacher then gives aural exercises in discrimination. He may change the place of stress or one of the function words within the sentence in order to produce phonemic difference. For example, a change in the intonation of a declarative sentence can transform it into a question:

Teacher: She is in hospital.

Pupil: Statement

Teacher: She is in hospital?

Pupil: Question

Placing stress on different parts of a sentence results in phonemic difference, as in this example:

1. Did **ˈ** she go to school yesterday? (or her sister?)
2. Did she go to school **ˈ** yesterday? (or last week?)
3. Did she go to **ˈ** school yesterday? (or to the beach?)

Generally, dialogues offer excellent material for the practice of stress, rhythm juncture and above all for the practice of oral fluency. If a sentence is uttered incorrectly, learners are to repeat it two or three times until they master the required intonation before they go on to the next sentence.