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POTENTIAL STRATEGIES IN VOCABULARY LEARNING

‘Without grammar very little can be conveyed,

without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed’

D. Wilkins

During the last decade, vocabulary learning and the current demand in building up a repertoire of lexical items spontaneously have turned out to be of great concern. Thus, the present article investigates an international experience in vocabulary learning to borrow valuable instructions and strategies in this important field. However, a range of linguists and scientists provide us with effective recommendations in vocabulary studies, but in this article the focus is laid on Michael McCarthy and his secret to vocabulary learning.

It is out of the question, that words are the building blocks in a language. By learning the lexical items we start to know the target language. Therefore, the role of vocabulary in learning language is claimed to be of great importance and demand these days.

An international reputation in the field of vocabulary studies has Michael McCarthy, Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Nottingham. He has written a number of popular titles including English Vocabulary in Use and is also Academic Consultant to the Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs and the Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms. To McCarthy’s opinion there is a secret to vocabulary learning and it is discovered in his a few written books on vocabulary and spoken language. As a matter of fact, Michael McCarthy dwells that the successful learners are those who develop techniques and disciplines for learning vocabulary. It might just be *a question of keeping a notebook; using a dictionary properly; disciplining yourself to look over your notes; to read a lot outside your class.*

It seems a commonly accepted truth that the more independent you become as a learner, the better and stronger your vocabulary becomes. It’s not just a question of learning new words, but knowing how to use them as well. The professor thinks that learners need to develop an awareness

of how words are used. Moreover, almost every word in the English language has more than one meaning and usage. The good vocabulary learner is constantly thinking about language in use and observing language in use. That's why they call their books Vocabulary in Use, because they want the learners to focus on how these words are really used in different contexts, styles, times of formality and so on.

At the beginning of Vocabulary in Use book there are some useful tips for both teachers and learners. To his mind, they are very important because you can never teach enough vocabulary within a fixed number of hours on a course, or in school. If you think that you need about two thousand words to take part in basic every day conversation, and probably about ten thousand words to read school and high school texts, you soon realize that even the best teacher and materials in the world cannot teach you everything. That is, good teaching materials should give you advice on becoming a better learner outside the classroom, as well as teach you a number of words.

Overall speaking, he completed English Vocabulary in Use Elementary, Upper-intermediate and Advanced. Teachers and learners found the upper-intermediate and advanced level both useful and user-friendly. The elementary level keeps the familiar of the in Use series, with explanations and examples on the left-hand side of the page, and exercises on the right. It's a convenient format for a self-study, as the learner can complete each unit within an hour at home, or within a lesson at school. Thus, this gives you a sense of achievement – and they can clearly see their progress as they work through the units.

The elementary level presents the most frequently-used words for communication. However, it is a real challenge to explain words and illustrate them when the learner's vocabulary is limited. There needs to be a greater emphasis on visual explanations, the example sentences need to be much clearer and, of course, the choice of words need to be carefully researched. Therefore, vocabulary is not just words. When we talk about our vocabulary, we mean the words we know and our ability to use them. Nevertheless, some potential problems disappear if learners bear in mind following four ways to think about words:

Meaning. When we meet a new word, the first thing we want to know is what it means. For example, you will find a word for a type of fish – salmon. Only one kind of fish is called salmon, so that is easy.

Pronunciation. When you learn a new word, make sure you can say it. Make sure you know which syllable is stressed. If you are unsure, ask a teacher or use a dictionary with CD-ROM which gives the pronunciation.

Collocation. Collocation is the way words combine with other words. There is little point in knowing the word *decision*, unless you know the verb which goes with it – *to make a decision*. We say that *make* collocates with *decision*. In the same way *heavy* is an adjective which collocates with *rain* but not *sun*.

Expressions. Expressions are groups of two, three, four or more words which always go together. For example, if you are in a shop and an assistant approaches you, you can say, ‘I’m just looking’. If you are interested in finding out more about someone, you can ask them, “What do you do for a living?” Remember that you often need to translate whole expressions, not just individual words.

Generally speaking, vocabulary is important because it is words which carry the content of what we want to say. However, grammar joins groups of words together, but most of the meaning is in the words. In addition, the more words you know, the more you will be able to communicate. You can say a lot with words. There is not much you can say with grammar alone.

Although, compared with other languages, English grammar is quite simple: there are no cases and nouns don’t have gender. However, English contains more words than any other world language – hundreds of thousands. Very often English has two words when other languages only have one. For example, we can talk about two things being the same or identical. Questions can be hard or difficult. Therefore, to learn vocabulary is not an easy thing but it can be enjoyable. The main way we increase our vocabulary is by reading a lot of natural English regularly. As a student you can also learn by studying and doing vocabulary exercises. Frankly speaking, the bigger your vocabulary, the better you can express yourself!

To summarize above elicited arguments and points, it’s worthwhile for every practitioner to remember that vocabulary and grammar are both important to master the language properly. One point to note about vocabulary learning is that with a bigger vocabulary you will be able to talk about more things. Moreover, with better grammar, you will be able to talk about them more fluently and more accurately. The information on vocabulary studies mentioned above is supported by the phenomenon that experience is vital to improve your studies and, furthermore, focus on it puts vocabulary learning firmly on classroom agenda. Finally, it should be concluded that giving vocabulary a high profile when teaching shows its importance and significance to students.

Resources:

1. Interview with Professor Michael McCarthy // ІНОЗЕМНІ МОВИ. – 2002. – № 3. – С.39.

2. Chris Gough. English Vocabulary Organiser: 100 topics for self-study. National Geographic Learning. – 2002. – 224 p.
3. Wilkins D.P. W(h)ither language, culture and education in remote Indigenous communities of the Northern Territory? – Australian Review of Public Affairs. – 2008.