

BUILDING VOCABULARY IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ÖZET

Yabancı Dilde Kelime Yapımı

Kelime öğretimi, ikinci bir dili öğrenmede önemli bir yer kapsar. Bu başarılı kelime öğretiminde bazı yöntemler ve kelime hakkında belli açıklamalarda bulunan bir makaledir.

Kelime öğretimi, ilgisiz kelimelerin bulunduğu bir listeyi öğrenciye verip ezberletmek değildir. Bu konuda yapılması gereken en önemli nokta, kelimenin gerçek anlamını ve kullanımını elde ettiği bir "durum" ve cümle içinde öğretilmesi gerektiğidir. Kelime öğretimi, dersin doğal akışı içinde olmalı, yapılan ders planında "kelime çalışması" diye ayrı bir bölüm bulunmamalıdır. İngilizce'de anlaşılabilir bir şekilde konuşabilmek için kullanılan kelimelerin doğru seçilmesi, telaffuzunun ve vurgusunun çok iyi yapılması gerektiğinden, kelime öğretiminde yalnız anlam ve kullanım değil bu noktalar da sistemli olarak verilmeli ve devamlı pratik yapılmalıdır.

SUMMARY

Building vocabulary takes an extremely important part in learning a second language. For that reason, many books, articles have been written on the vocabulary and the methods how to teach it in a most effective way.

This article introduces major points about vocabulary and some methods to the successful teaching of it in English language.

Building vocabulary doesn't mean teaching a list of words. As far as the intelligibility is concerned, it needs to be built in a context because all the other words surrounding it help give its exact meaning and usage. It is unavoidable for a teacher of foreign language to set a context and give it in the natural fluency of the lesson. There shouldn't be a separate section in the lesson labelled "vocabulary work". Modern teaching of a second language should be based on how people learn their own language, and taking care of the students need and level the teacher should systematically present and have students practised the vocabulary.

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The building of vocabulary is now receiving increasing emphasis although it had been neglected in some approaches. Being one of the subject matters of a foreign language, vocabulary takes place an extremely important part in learning and teaching of a foreign language.

It must be remarked that all the words in a language are not considered as its vocabulary. A word form should be accepted as two or more lexical items if it has more than one meaning. It will be useful to make clear the distinctions and relations between words and lexical items with an example:

e.g. (1) He likes fishing at that bay.

(2) No 3 bay in the ship is for sick.

"bay" in the first sentence and "bay" in second one aren't the same. The word "bay" has a very different meaning in sentence (1) from the meaning of "bay" in sentence (2), although they have the same form. As they have the same form, they're the same word, whereas they are different lexical items as they have different meanings. It is the context that shows which meaning of "bay" is being used.

The lexical item as one kind of unit of meaning is a useful one to the teacher because it helps to make clear what it is that is being taught. That's why a difficult word like "chimpanzee" which has only one meaning may be easier to teach than a simple word like "get" which has, in fact, several different lexical items.

"In a situation that Mary meets her friend at the station:

Mary — Hello Joan, I'm sorry I'm late. When did you arrive?

Joan — Hello Mary. I got here at five-twenty.

Mary — Did you get your suitcases?

Joan — Yes, here they are.

Mary — I got your telegram yesterday. I am happy to see you could get over your illness.

Joan — Yes, so am I.

As we have seen above, the word "get" has different meanings in all sentences.

Vocabulary item in total isolation has no meaning. It needs a system and a setting to give it both function and meaning. The way a word is used leads to its meanings. As a word form has several different lexical items and a word has its exact meaning in the context, both teacher and student should pay attention to the context and make distinctions between the same word.

The most difficult thing in any skill (listening, speaking, reading and writing) of the language is, perhaps, to be unable to understand or find necessary words. Of course, there is more to learning a foreign language than mastering its vocabulary. In fact, there can't be a person who masters all the words of a language, even if it is his mother tongue. Thus, it is necessary to classify vocabulary while we're building it. A person learning a foreign language uses some words more frequently and easily while he can't use the others in his speaking or writing actions because he learns some words actively and some passively. Active items are learned for purpose of production, both oral and written, passive items are for recognition or reception only. Passive vocabulary of a person is much larger than that of his active vocabulary. This fact proves how difficult it is to produce a word correctly. The student has to know its correct form, pronunciation, spelling, exact meaning and the usage of it in the

correct contexts if he wishes to use it actively. One of the advantages of productive words is a matter of choice. However, while choosing the word to produce he must take the risk of being misunderstood by the others if he doesn't make a correct choice. All the words that a student learns during a lesson needn't become a part of his active vocabulary; some may remain "passive". The vocabulary for active use should be systematically practised in drills and presented in a meaningful context and easily demonstrable situations. We know that words will become and remain active only if they're practised frequently.

While building vocabulary, we should pay special attention to the distinction between content and function words. Function words have almost no meaning when considered in isolation. They are the words usually without a complete meaning, but they show grammatical relations of the language. Although function words take a smaller part in the vocabulary, they are more important than content words. It is impossible to communicate meaningfully in a language having no function words. Function words include articles, prepositions, auxiliaries, connectors, pronouns adverbs, question words, intensifiers, etc.

Function words should be taught as grammatical signals in correct contexts because sentences have meaning by means of these words.

e.g. You *are* a hard-working student.

You *can be* a hard-working student.

e.g. I bought *a* book yesterday

I bought *the* book yesterday.

e.g. You must come on Monday *or* Tuesday.

You must come on Monday *and* Tuesday.

Function words need to be learned as quickly as feasible in a logical order and sequence.

Content words are symbols for things, actions and qualities. For example, chair, book, sit, come, red, etc.

We express our emotions, feelings and ideas by means of language. While using language we choose certain words because they convey some kind of feeling or judgement. Every person chooses different words to define or express the same thing because each of them has different feelings and opinions about it. For example, denotatively there may be, in fact, no difference at all between being *fat*, *plump* or even *obese*. The fat person, the plump person and the obese one may all be the same person, but different persons choose different words while defining him. The choice of one word rather than the other will probably indicate how the speakers feel about the person. The speaker decides which connotation of a word he'll choose according to his feelings about it.

There are also associations of a word similar to its connotations. Whereas connotations relate to the system of the language, associations relate more to the individual or the culture. For example, a word like "market" may have different associations for someone coming from a rural area, as opposed to a city dweller.

Clearly there isn't much to be done about the private individual associations, but the teacher should know that associations, related with the culture of the target language, and certainly the connotations of a particular word are part of the "meaning" which has to be learned while building vocabulary.

Stress

Stress functions partly phonemically in words and partly as a feature of longer phrases or sentences. Stress is a feature of words because the word contrasts phonemically with its minimal pair partner and it gives shape to a word as spoken.

English doesn't have as rigid a system of stress patterning as some other languages. For example, the stress may fall always on the first syllable in Czech and Turkish, in Polish it falls on the penultimate, that is next to the last, and in Persiau it falls on the last syllable. But in English the stress pattern of a word determines its pronunciation of the individual vowel sounds; therefore getting the correct stress is often extremely important as far as "intelligibility" is concerned. Only in the stressed syllable the vowel gets its full value, the other unstressed vowels tend to be neutralized. Depending on the degree of stress given to one syllable rather than another, the following words can be different words: concert, project, desert, record, etc.

Although English language doesn't have a rigid system of stress patterning, there is still a fixed stress pattern for any particular word. It is very easy to learn this simply by means of experience. We can make a few generalizations. For instance, stress regularly falls on the first syllable of the suffix "otion" and the suffix "ity" is always preceded by a stressed syllable. As a feature of phrases and sentences stress determines the rhythm of English.

Stress together with rhythm and intonation are very important for making a person's English intelligible. Thus, teachers should become conscious of the stress and intonation patterns. The best way is to use tapes and practise repeating the same sentence over and over again and to make no change in given intervals.

As far as the matter is considered, the most effective way of getting correct stress patterns is to listen to the native speaker's speech in its natural fluency and make more practice on it.

Pronunciation and Spelling

In spite of the fact that all human have structurally similar vocal organs, the noises produced by these vocal organs are combined differently in each different language. And the difference in the sound system gives each language its particular quality. Pronunciation is learned best through imitation of the teacher or of a tape or record. But the teacher is preferred to any electronic or mechanical device for the first presentation of the new sound. If the teacher feels that his command of the language is not adequate, the use of the tape or record can be justified before his live presentation. The aim of the teacher while teaching goes on all the time because the students always listen to the model pronunciation he provides, and the students will imitate or mimic that model. For that reason, the teacher must be sure that his model pronunciation is intelligible. He should teach the pronunciation whenever necessary; when a pronunciation mistake is systematic, he must stop whatever they are doing and do a few minutes practice on the problem sound; it should be at a fast pace.

In English language sound must be associated with the symbol since the English sound-symbol relationship causes so many problems? but forms are pronounced identically.

For example:

snack / sⁿaek /

snake / sneik /

Also there are words which have very similar forms but have different pronunciation.

For example:

tough / t^haf /

though / θ^oðv /

sough / s^haf /

sought / s^o:t /

The rules of English pronunciation are very complex, so the students fall in difficulty about how they pronounce a symbol correctly. Another systematic sound confusion in English is that some sounds such as /i:/and/i/are pronounced in the same way as in the example of "bit" — "beat" or "seat" — "sit":

/i:—i/

English writing has a very confusing spelling system as it is based as much on word origin as on sound. There isn't a clear relationship of one sound to one symbol.

Vocabulary at Home and in the Classroom

A child learns the words of his own language in the normal situations of home, from the persons around; they use the words to communicate ideas and express their needs. The child hears them continually and through imitation he establishes them as new language habits. Therefore, words become part of his language as he connects the sounds with their corresponding meanings. He learns speaking and listening activities before going to school. Later when goes to school, he learns how to read and write the words he knows, and also expands his vocabulary store besides the other activities.

Nevertheless, the learner of the target language can't find the normal environment to use the words as frequently and as naturally as possible. The students have to learn the words given by the teacher no matter whether they are meaningful to them or not. In school, words are selected in connection with the grammatical patterns to be taught. In most foreign language learning programmes, need to use the language isn't felt.

On the other hand, need exits in the mother tongue. Knowing the words is a matter of survival and a social competence. The learner of the mother tongue has a protective environment to control his own rate of learning as adults are tolerant of children's ignorance of language. The learner learns what he needs as he needs it. The mother language is exposed to an enarmous quantity of his own language and has many opportunaties and suitable environment for repetition of what he learns.

Modern teaching of a second language should be based on how people learn their own language. Both in foreign language and native language the skills of language are learned in an order:

1- Hearing, 2- Speaking, 3- Reading, 4- Writing.

Simply putting across the meaning of the new words is not the complete solution to the teaching vocabulary. Because we can say that the student knows a

word in target language if he can recognize it in its spoken and written form, recall when he needs, associate the meaning with appropriate object or concept, use it in the appropriate grammatical form, pronounce correctly in speech, spell in writing, use in the correct context, know its connotation and association, use it at the appropriate level of formality.

At the first step, students hear the word several times if we follow the same order in mother tongue while building vocabulary in a foreign or second language. They will be accustomed to pronounce its sound-spelling system and then they will attach meaning to it. Secondly, the student should repeat the form without meaning until he has a clear comprehension of the sounds in the word and then he produces it correctly. As this practice helps him in making rapid identification of the word when it is heard in context, the teacher should be careful when he gives the model pronunciation. Next, the meaning should be given in correct context, thus the student learns the usage of the new word as well. The meaning should be presented in familiar sentences that show the way that the words are used in; but most of the words in English language have more than one meaning. For that reason, it is better to give several examples that show the specific use of the word in the context. Then, there should be more practice on the vocabulary to learn exact usage. If the teacher wants students to turn the vocabulary item into a habit, he should do some more exercises. The practice should be arranged according to the degree of difficulty of the word.

After all these steps, the learner is ready to read the words. The teacher's role is to provide a good reading model and check the learners understanding. When he can read whatever he meets, he is expected to write the items that are taught. He should know the correct pronunciation of the vocabulary item he is going to write. In lessons writing activity may be achieved while the students copy the written forms on the blackboard. As homework the teacher should give compositions about any subject. Written assignment should be based on the items taught.

The Importance of Context

Words very seldom occur in isolation, they get their meaning with the other words that occur with them, i.e. in context. All the other words which surround a word give its meaning. Most teachers realize that the meaning of many words can be different in different context. Words are presented to the students as vehicles for relaying information and ideas, i.e. for communicating in the new language. For that reason, the techniques for teaching vocabulary should be selected and used considering this aspect of the words, not list of unrelated words. A natural atmosphere should be created in the lesson for vocabulary building.

In most cases it is very difficult to understand the specific meaning of a word seen in isolation. Words should be taught and learned in context where the meaning and usage of them are clear.

Let's see some examples in both English and Turkish:

- 1- I know how to play chess.
- 2- I've known Mrs. Wood since I was a child.
- 3- He made himself known to her.
- 4- He's known to the police.

- 5- He knew poverty and sorrow in his early life.
- 6- I don't actually know the man you mention about.
- 7- He is known as a famous musician.

Turkish:

- 1- Soba borusundan kurum düştü.
- 2- Türk Hava Kurumu'na para yardımı yaptı.
- 3- Yeni sekreterin kurumundan geçilmiyor.

English word "know" and Turkish word "kurum" in each sentence have different meanings and usages. They acquire their meanings according to the situations in which they're used. Students can not have a complete meaning of the words if they don't understand the use of them in each of their possible contexts.

In a classroom situation, there should be a systematic presentation of vocabulary. Teaching vocabulary doesn't mean teaching a list of words. Vocabulary should be taught and learned in a context because all the other words surrounding it help give its exact meaning. Therefore it is unavoidable for a teacher of foreign language to set a context and give the vocabulary in the natural fluency of the lesson. He should not set aside a separate section in the lesson plan labelled "vocabulary work". To achieve a good vocabulary teaching, there should be a flexible oral approach that leads the students by easy stages to a reasonable guess as to the meaning of the target item. If the teacher asks the students to explain the meaning of a word or phrase, it is often impossible to get the answer. They may understand what a word or phrase means without being able to explain it. For that reason, the teacher needs to use a technique which provides the students with the meaning and then wants them to understand the word.

Vocabulary is taught in context, but it isn't - stored and memorized in context. Students find various ways to store new items learned in context. They note down these new items when they meet them. Nevertheless, this is just a mixed list of isolated words and phrases which are collected from different places. Of course, they should note down the words to get them when they need later. But it is often impossible to get them when they are needed as they are buried among hundreds of other various words and phrases. Moreover, the learner has to write the equivalent meaning of the target word or phrase in mother tongue and to memorize it he repeats it over and over again. This is a boring and inefficient method of learning vocabulary. It will be better to use vocabulary cards which have the target word/phrase on a side and the translation or explanation on the other one; the cards help memorization.

Culture, grammar and vocabulary of a language are closely related to one another. The culture of the target language — each language — affects its vocabulary and the context in which it is used. There are such contexts that it can be possible to understand the word in them when you go into the matter of its culture in detail.