



**THE SUBCARPATHIAN STUDIES
IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE, LITERATURE
AND CULTURE**

**VOLUME 1
LINGUISTICS AND METHODOLOGY**

EDITED BY:
Grzegorz A. Kleparski, Ewa Konieczna
and Beata Kopecka

RZESZÓW 2014

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WYDAWNICTWO
UNIwersytetu Rzeszowskiego
RZESZÓW 2014

Recenzował
Prof. dr. hab. PIOTR P. CHRUSZCZEWSKI

Projekt okładki
MARCIN KUDŁA

Edited by
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Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego
Rzeszów 2014

ISBN 978-83-7996-062-0

1056

WYDAWNICTWO UNIwersYTETU RZESZOWSKIEGO
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wydanie I; format B5; ark. wyd. 23,5; ark. druk. 25,125, zlec. red. 99/2013

Druk i oprawa: Drukarnia Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego

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THIRD ANGLISTENTAG IN RZESZÓW

THE SUBCARPATHIAN STUDIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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TEACHING L2 VOCABULARY TO ADVANCED STUDENTS

Having learnt all the basic structures of the language, advanced learners can generally communicate well. However, they need to broaden their vocabulary to express themselves more clearly and appropriately in a wide range of situations. At this stage the main concern is the ability to use words appropriately and in accordance with the situation, degree of formality, style, etc (Moras 2001).

Occasionally vocabulary teaching to advanced learners can be incidental and indirect (while listening or reading some texts). On the other hand it's acknowledged that vocabulary teaching should be a part of the syllabus, and taught on a well-planned and regular basis. Besides, much attention must be paid to encouraging students to expand the vocabulary on their own initiative. Effective independent vocabulary learning is possible when undertaken by students themselves, stimulated by teachers and language surrounding. Besides, students need to be acquainted with learning strategies.

As Gairns and Redman (1998:13) claim languages rarely divide the world in the same way. Even students whose mother tongue categorizes groups of objects in the same way as English have to learn to identify the boundaries that separate words of related that separate words of related meaning.

Let's have a closer look at recognizing the boundaries. It is necessary to mention that our attention to them is caused by two factors. The first one is to emphasize what teachers should pay attention to in classrooms and the second is what students should be aware of working independently.

The first item is *polysemy* (for example, *a leg of a person / chair*). The problem is that the word may mean one set of things in, for example, Ukrainian, but a different set of things in English.

Another difficulty is caused by *homonymy*. Homonyms are the words that share the same spelling and the same pronunciation but have different meanings (for example, *bark – the sound of a dog, and the skin of a tree*). Misunderstanding may arise, first of all, on the level of reception.

Learners may feel some difficulties dealing with **synonyms** – words with the same or similar meanings. They can be interchangeable in some contexts and at the same time have conceptual differences (Gairns and Redman 1998:13). For example, in the sentence *The company has decided to extend / expand / increase its range of products* all the synonyms are interchangeable and mean “to make bigger”. But there are situations where only one version is possible: *We are going to extend the kitchen by ten feet this year. We want to increase the sales by ten per cent next year. The metal will expand if we heat it.*

A synonym may have an identical or similar denotation (a literal meaning of the word) but a different connotation (an association – emotional or otherwise – which the word evokes). For example, **negative connotation** – *There are over 2,000 vagrants in the city*; **neutral connotation**: *There are over 2,000 people with no fixed address in the city*; **positive connotation**: *There are over 2,000 homeless in the city.*

Another area of concern is **sociocultural associations** which are common for the society, but difficult for foreign learners to understand. For example, everybody in Great Britain knows the meaning of HP (HP Sauce is the best-known brand of brown sauce in the United Kingdom. It was called the sauce HP because its developer heard that a restaurant in the Houses of Parliament had begun serving it).

Style and register should also be taken into consideration while teaching and learning vocabulary. Style reflects the level of formality (colloquial, formal etc., for example, *children* (neutral), *off-springs* (formal)). Registers are the varieties of languages defined by their topic and context of use; the language of medicine, education come into this category (e.g., *cardiac arrest* is the medical term of *heart attack*).

Being aware of style and register, students are able to distinguish between different levels of formality and use appropriate lexis. It is necessary that the teacher should highlight any special features to the learner.

Reading and listening activities are effective ways of dealing with the above-mentioned problems as they demonstrate the context in which the words are used and help understand the boundaries.

There is one more very important conclusion that we can make. Grouping items together by synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy and other types of relations can promote to students’ understanding the boundaries. The term hyponymy needs to be explained. **Hyponymy** is a relation between two words in which the meaning of one of the words includes the meaning of the other word. The lexical relation corresponding to the inclusion of one class in another is hyponymy (Gairns and Redman 1998:24). For example, *apple- fruit; car- vehicles; tool- furniture; cow - animal.*

Another difficulty that may arise is learning **phrasal verbs** which usually have multiple meaning, for example, *get off* can mean *leave, finish work, send something*

etc. Phrasal verbs should be treated as a specific lexical area that needs much attention in advanced classes and independent studying, as used appropriately they contribute greatly to fluency. In grouping them much depends on the type of a phrasal verb. Unlike Gairns and Redman (1998:35) who claim that they see little reason to start from the root verb as the items will be largely unrelated in meaning, we consider it an effective way of learning phrasal verbs (for example, *to bring back, about, up, round, in* etc.). The matter is that only the most frequently used verbs or meanings should be chosen. Besides, the sufficient amount of exercises and communicative activities must be offered in classrooms or recommended to students in individual settings (for example, translating, grouping, matching, replacing, using them in own sentences etc.).

Another area of concern is learning idioms. An *idiom* is a combination of words that has a figurative meaning, due to its common usage. There is no grouping them on the basis of individual words as they do not usually indicate the sense of the unit. As Gairns and Redman suggest they should be treated as individual items taught as they arise and emphasized according to their usefulness (Gairns and Redman 1998:36). On the other hand, many modern textbooks suggest lists of idioms carefully picked up according to the frequency of their usage. It can also be an effective way of learning idioms on condition that teachers demonstrate the contexts of their usage and provide exercises to practise the new idioms. Learners also must be encouraged to use idioms in communicative activities.

As there are no rules of *collocations*, this aspect may also be problematic. Both teachers and students must pay attention to words collocations. It can be useful for students to put down in their vocabulary notebooks not separate words, but word combinations which demonstrate how collocations can be used.

There is another aspect that needs attention. It is *translation* which seems to be valuable in advanced classes. Students should be aware of the equivalent in their native language, which helps them to understand the meaning of the foreign language vocabulary better, be aware of certain differences and similarities between the native and the foreign language. In this aspect we cannot support the idea of using exclusively monolingual dictionaries by advanced students.

Learning vocabulary is largely about remembering. According to Jean Aitchison (Aitchison 1990:7), the number of words known by an educated adult, is unlikely to be less than 50000 and may be as high as 250000. These high figures suggest that the *mental lexicon* is arranged on a systematic basis.

The second reason which made scientists arrive at the conclusion that words are likely to be well organized in the mind is that they can be located very fast. Experiments showed that native speakers can recognize a word of their language in 200 ms (milliseconds) or less from its onset, that is, approximately one-fifth of a second from its beginning (Marslen-Wilson and Tyler 1980, 1981). In many cases this is well before all the word has been heard. Indeed, the average duration

of words used by Marslen-Wilson and Tyler in their experiments was around 375 ms – almost twice as long as the recognition time.

So semantically related items are stored together. Researches in this area suggest that words are organized in semantic fields, and within these fields there are strong relations between coordinates. This arrangement is useful as far as producing speech is concerned as speaker can pick a lexical unit easily from a particular topic area. It also groups similar sounding words together which is useful for comprehension. The mental lexicon has found a compromise between the requirements of production and those of comprehension (Aitchison 1990:193). There are various ways of grouping words: related by topic (appearance, character etc.); similar in meaning and easily confused (pretty, lovely, attractive), pairs easily confused (lend / borrow), derivatives (suspicion / suspicious / suspect / to suspect). Besides, vocabulary can be stored not only as individual words, but also as parts of larger chunks. So it is essential to encourage students to identify and record chunks (not in a linear way, but in mind maps, cluster models, word trees) which will develop 'collocation competence' and organize new words in semantic fields.

Repetition is essential to effective vocabulary learning (Ebbinghaus 1885/1964, Greene 2008, Nakata 2008). Research studies show that regular repetition which takes place some time after learning is more effective than intensive repetition just after learning (the so-called spacing effect). It was proved experimentally by Ebbinghaus who noted that [...] *with any considerable number of repetitions a suitable distribution of them over a space of time is decidedly more advantageous than the massing of them at a single time* (Ebbinghaus 1885/1964:89).

Several distinctions among commonly used terms may be useful. The advantage in memory for a repeated item over a once-presented item is a repetition effect. The advantage in memory for spaced items (repeated items that had their occurrences separated by intervening stimuli) over massed items (repeated items presented consecutively) is a spacing effect (Greene 2008:71).

In the experiment made by Bloom and Shuell, high school students learned vocabulary words under conditions of either massed or distributed practice as part of their regular class activities. Distributed practice consisted of three 10-minute units on each of three successive days; massed practice consisted of all three units being completed during a 30-minute period on a single day. Though performance of the two groups was virtually identical on a test given immediately after completion of study, the students who had learned the words by distributed practice did substantially better (35%) than the massed-practice students on a second test given 4 days later (Bloom and Shuell 1981).

There are several explanations of spacing effect. The most meaningful, in our opinion, is that the distribution of repetitions affects the likelihood that at least one of the occurrences will be successfully retrieved. Typically, it would be assumed that greater spacings would increase the probability that each presentation of a

repeated stimulus would be encoded in a very different way, thereby making it more likely that a participant would be able to retrieve at least one of the occurrences. Greene (2008: 75) explains that this is like the ability to find a particularly important piece of paper. If you want to be sure that you will always be able to find the paper when you need it, you may try to have multiple copies of it. However, it would make no sense to place all of those copies in the same place. Rather, you should scatter the copies around at many different places. Although this would make it more difficult to locate all of the copies, it is assumed that you only need to locate one.

There is one more point to be taken into consideration – that's the ineffectiveness of repetition in the absence of attention. Simply repeating an item over and over has little benefit for memory in the absence of attention or more elaborative processing of the material.

It is necessary to keep in mind, though, that advanced students have some experience in learning a foreign language and they have already developed some language intuition and new words are quickly accepted into the existing semantic fields so students do not have to spend much time on memorizing. There is no need for multiple repetition for advanced students as links between known and new words promote students' memorizing.

Working at vocabulary expansion students should define whether they are going to focus on receptive or productive vocabulary. It is widely known that much of incidental vocabulary learning comes from reading. Ellis claims that people who read more, know more vocabulary (Ellis 1995:3). Reading gives us whole language, not just isolated words. That's why there is much criticism nowadays of teachers and textbooks being too much obsessed with items and their definitions and overall preoccupation with lexical units at clause and sentence level (McCarthy 1984). But it has been proved that to learn 108 words it's necessary to read a text of 200000 words (Ellis 1995). That is why though reading is an effective way of expanding vocabulary, it is not a sufficient one.

If a student wants to expand his or her receptive vocabulary, the attention should be focused on the quantitative increase of vocabulary, if productive – on qualitative.

Students must be aware of effective ways of increasing their vocabulary (Gairns and Redman 1998) such as :

1. Adding new meanings to familiar words (e.g., *Keep still while I tie your shoe. These apples are very nice, but the others are better still. Clare didn't do much, but she still passed the exam*).
2. Understanding the figurative meaning of vocabulary items (e.g., *The contents of the report have already been leaked to the press*).
3. Expanding students' knowledge of collocation (e.g., *It's highly likely he'll leave*).
4. Using a wider range of idiomatic expressions (e.g., *to get off the handle, to take somebody for a ride – The travel agent's took us for a ride when he sold us those tickets at such an outrageous price*).
5. Using derivatives (e.g. *to humiliate / humiliated / humiliation*).
6. Using compound words (e.g., *driving licence, panic-stricken, tongue-tied*).

Students can check their knowledge of a receptive or reproductive lexical unit by answering some questions which differ depending on whether the word refers to receptive or productive vocabulary. The questions are presented in Table 1 (where R stands for receptive vocabulary, P – productive).

Table 1. *Receptive / productive lexical units knowledge*

I. Form		
Writing	R	How does the word look?
	P	What is the spelling of the word?
Pronunciation	R	How does it sound?
	P	How is it pronounced?
II. Usage		
Grammar structures	R	What models can it be used in?
	P	What models must the word be used in?
Collocations	R	What other words are expected to be used with the word given?
	P	What other words must be used with it?
III. Function		
Frequency	R	How often is it used?
	P	How often can we use it?
Register, situations	R	Where can we expect it?
	P	Where can we use it?
IV. Meaning		
Meaning	R/P	What does the word mean?
Synonyms	P	What other words can be used instead of the one given? In what situations?

The explicit vocabulary learning hypothesis holds that learner's acquisition of new vocabulary can be strongly facilitated by the use of a range of strategies (Takač 2008).

When students come across a new word reading a text, it is not necessary to look it up in a dictionary. Guessing from the context, the analysis of its grammar function, structure (prefixes, suffixes) can facilitate students' understanding.

As for productive vocabulary, the following strategies can be of use:

Metacognitive: repetition; keeping vocabulary notebooks (where we would recommend to write down not only the transcription and translation, but also collocations, synonyms, antonyms, examples of usage and even schematic classification of the new units); using mind maps, word trees etc.; creating images, associations, thematic vocabulary; self-control and self-evaluation.

Cognitive: imitating; using word lists, word cards; making sentences with new words; using key words; using music and rhyme; grouping; making associations.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned ideas we would like to present the examples of meaningful tasks to be used both in classroom and studying independently.

To acquire **receptive vocabulary**: classifying prefixes, suffixes according to the part of speech; matching; grouping; guessing meaning by analysing morphological structure of a word; translating word into the mother tongue; finding an odd word; finding in a text words that mean ...; filling gaps after listening to the text; guessing the meaning of words underlined in the text; guessing the meaning of words while listening.

As for **productive vocabulary** the exercises can be the following: creating derivative word forms; doing crossword puzzles; translating words / sentences into English; giving definitions; filling gaps with appropriate words; listening to the text and putting down words on the topic ...; situational and functional dialogues; writing essays / articles etc.

To conclude, it is impossible to master a language without knowing its vocabulary. So teachers should pay much attention to it in advanced classes and facilitate students' independent learning by acquainting them with effective strategies, providing them with meaningful tasks and useful ideas.

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