Innovative Techniques of Teaching Vocabulary at the Intermediate Level in the Second Language Classroom

Prashant Subhash Mothe, Adarsh Senior College, Omerga Dist.Osmanabad (MS) India

Abstract: Changes are quick and inevitable. The need to teach in general and teach to English language effectively in particular is the challenge before all the teachers in India. Today, it has become mandatory for the academicians to rethink and revamp their teaching strategies with the changing times. Since there has been a constant change in the teaching methods and techniques all over the world in every subject, vocabulary teaching methods and techniques need desirable and radical changes in a view of the demanding job market in the globalized world.

Vocabulary of a language is just like bricks of a high building. Despite quite small pieces, they are vital to the great structure. Wilkins rightly says, “Without grammar very little can be conveyed….but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (p.111, quotes in Lewis, 2000). Therefore the study of vocabulary is at the center while learning a new language. English being a second language or foreign language, one needs to learn vocabulary in the systematic way.

The present paper is an attempt to enrich vocabulary of the students at the intermediate level. It used pre-test and post-test as the basis for the study. In the pre-test, an attempt was made to examine the area of difficulty of the intermediate students. The mistakes made by the students were observed and scrutinized carefully. After knowing the students’ problem, they were given special training by using new techniques. The analysis proved that the students were largely benefited from this innovative model of teaching vocabulary. It also makes an in-depth analysis of the traditional methods, techniques and approaches adopted by the teachers and suggest innovative techniques of teaching vocabulary.

Introduction

Nowadays, India went to make rapid strides in all spheres. Changes are quick and inevitable. The need to teach in general and teach to English Language effectively in particular is the challenge before all the teachers in India. Today, it has become mandatory for the academicians to rethink and revamp their teaching strategies with the changing times. Since there has been a constant change in the teaching methods and techniques all over the world in every subject, vocabulary teaching methods and techniques need desirable and radical changes in a view of the demanding job market in the globalized world. Vocabulary of a language is just like bricks for constructing a building. Like bricks, they are vital for the building of a language. Language is made up of words. If we want to use language effectively, we must have good stock of vocabulary. We cannot use the language, if we don’t know the words of that language. English language has vast vocabulary. It is the richest language of the world. One cannot learn a language without learning vocabulary. Therefore, the study of vocabulary has occupied the central place in teaching-learning activities. Thornbury opines (2002):
“If you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much. You will see most improvement, if you learn more words and expressions. You can say very little with grammar, but you can say almost anything with words.”

This speaks volumes about the significance of vocabulary in learning, developing and enriching English. Even, Wilkins rightly says,

“Without grammar very little can be conveyed….but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (p.111, quotes in Lewis, 2000).

Vocabulary is a very important means to express our thoughts and feeling, either in spoken or written form. Indeed, neither literature nor language exists without vocabulary. John Drink Water rightly says that words are the bricks the bricks with which the poetry and the literature of the world have been built. It is mainly through using words that we compose and express our thoughts to others. We can tackle our own task through words. It shows words are powerful tools. Famous imperialist poet, Rudyard Kipling says that words are the most powerful drug used by mankind. Those who are rich in vocabulary can speak and write English correctly. Therefore, the study of vocabulary is at the center while learning a new language. English being a second language or foreign language, one needs to learn vocabulary in the systematic way. In fact, without vocabulary communication in a second or foreign language is not possible in a meaningful way. McCarthy (1990) argues:

'No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way'.

Vocabulary is needed for expressing meaning and in using the receptive (listening and reading) and the productive (speaking and writing) skills. It should be considered as an internal part of learning a foreign language since it leads the way to communication. Nation and Waring (1997), aptly mentioned, “Such as writing and reading, vocabulary knowledge is one of the components of language skills”. Harmer clearly states, “if language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh”. If one wants to use language effectively, he/she must have good stock of vocabulary. Language is made up of words. According to Throat et.al (2001), ‘Words are the building block of language’. Nagy(2003) appropriately remarks, “Vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension; one cannot understand text without knowing what most of the words mean”. Teaching vocabulary well is a key aspect of developing engaged and successful readers.

“There is a great divide between what we know about vocabulary instruction and what we (often, still) do” (Greenwood, 2004, p. 28).

Traditional vocabulary instruction for many teachers involves having students look words up in the dictionary, write definitions, and use words in sentences (Basurto, 2004). Word lists, teacher explanation, discussion, memorization, vocabulary books, and quizzes often are used in an effort to help students learn new words. But these methods ignore what research and theory tell us
about word learning and sound vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary is a principle contributor to comprehension, fluency, and achievement.

What need to be taught?

Nowadays methodologists and linguists suggest that teachers can decide and select the words to be taught on the basis of how frequently they are used by speakers of the language. Carter – McCarthy (1991) rightly points out, “Knowing a word involves knowing its spoken and written context of use; its patterns with words of related meaning as well as with its collocation partners; its syntactic, pragmatic and discourse patterns; It means knowing it actively and productively as well as receptively.”: 43).

Richards (1976) list the different things teaching need to know about a word before we can say that they have taught it. These include:

1. The meaning(s) of the word
2. Its spoken and written forms
3. What “word parts” it has (e.g., any prefix, suffix, and “root” form)
4. Its grammatical behavior (e.g., its word class, typical grammatical patterns it occurs in)
5. Its collocations
6. Its register
7. What associations it has (e.g., words that are similar or opposite in meaning)
8. What connotations it has
9. Its frequency

Innovative Ways of Teaching Vocabulary:

Different types of instructional modes, approaches, vocabulary building activities and skills proved to be effective in developing children and college students’ vocabulary in L2 environments. Teaching vocabulary in context, combining vocabulary with reading and writing activities, and providing the students with different lexical information about the words under study enhanced children and adult students’ vocabulary.

The prominent role of vocabulary knowledge in second or foreign language learning has been recently recognized by the theorist and researcher in the field. Accordingly, numerous types of approaches, techniques, exercises and practice to teach vocabulary. Nation properly states that teaching vocabulary should not only consist of teaching specific words but also aims at equipping learners with strategies necessary to expand their vocabulary knowledge.

By showing actual objects and showing models
It is a very useful technique to teach vocabulary to the beginners. The names of many things can be taught by showing actual objects. It gives real experience and sense to the learners. The words like pen, chalk, table, chair, football, flowers, tomato etc. can be taught in the classroom. Real
objects or models of real objects are very effective and meaningful in showing meanings but in handling of real objects, a teacher must be practical and should not be superfluous.

It is neither possible nor necessary to bring all the things in the classroom. Therefore, some words are to be taught by showing models. They are easily available in the market. They are inexpensive too. Hence, teacher should make frequent use of such models to teach vocabulary. For example, the words like tiger, brain, elephant, aeroplane etc. can be shown to the learner.

**Using demonstrations and showing pictures**

Teacher can perform some words. It can be fun and frolic. It makes the class student-centered. Teacher can act and learners try to imitate it. For example, the words like jump, smile, cry, nap, sleep, and dance can be demonstrated. Miming works well with younger students. You can mime out emotions and everyday activities to teach new words. This method can be practiced at ease. It can win the favour of the students as learners like dramatizations and can easily learn through them. Many situations can be dramatized or demonstrated. This works well with young students or students studying a foreign language to help introduce them to new concepts. After explaining new vocabulary, you can then ask the students to perform the actions.

Charts, pictures and maps can be used to develop students’ understanding of a particular concept or word. There are some good picture dictionaries available in the market. Teacher should make use of such dictionaries. For instance, using a picture of a ‘fish’, words related to the fish, such as gills, eyes, backbone, cold-blooded, water, big, small etc. can be taught. Zebrowska (1975:452) rightly says, ‘Learners remember better the material that has been presented by means of visual aids’. Some words work well with pictures, particularly nouns. This can also be a good way to introduce blocks of related words, which is often utilized in foreign language classes, such as nouns and verbs related to the classroom or the house. Pictures can also be used in printable worksheets and flashcards, where pictures are matched to the word they represent.

**Teaching words in the context**

Most people agree that vocabulary ought to be taught in context (Nilsen 1976; Chastain 1976; Rivers 1968). Words taught in isolation are generally not retained. In addition, in order to grasp the full meaning of a word or phrase, students must be aware of the linguistic environment in which the word or phrase appears. Setting a good context which is interesting, plausible, vivid and has relevance to the lives of the learners, is an essential prerequisite for vocabulary teaching as it helps in both engaging the attention of the learners and naturally generating the target vocabulary. Maintaining the context and making sure the language surrounding the context is easy to comprehend, the teacher should start eliciting the target vocabulary.

Therefore, in selection of vocabulary, the teacher must be sure that the words or phrases chosen can be immediately incorporated into the students’ linguistic range. Stahl (2005) stated, “*Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world.*”
Etymology

Every word has its origin and its story of how it gets its current meanings. Because of its physical and meaningful origin, the etymology of a word is often found much easier to be comprehended than the bare linguistic symbol and its present semantic meanings. So, whenever we teach an English word that is completely strange, we can ask students to look it up in a dictionary or other reference books, and or surf on the internet to find its origin. The interesting stories behind a word’s birth can be a very good reminder for students to remember the particular word. Thus, learning the etymology of a word will certainly promote students’ comprehension of new words.

By drawing pictures

It is an easy and quick technique of introducing vocabulary to the learners. For students, drawing can be a fun medium to explain vocabulary. It is not necessary that teacher must be an expert in drawing pictures accurately. He can draw rough sketches to make an idea clear. Basic sketches will often work well. You can even have students do their own drawings, which further reinforces their understanding of the vocabulary. Comparative words and prepositions can be made clear by simple sketches. Pictures of many types and colours can be used successfully to show the meaning of words and sentence. Drawings can be used to explain the meaning of things, actions, qualities, and relations.

Associated vocabulary

If one topic consists of number of words, it is easy to teach these entire words altogether. For example, it is easier to teach words like orange, banana, grapes, lemon, pineapple, mango, and watermelon together in the context of ‘fruits’ than to teach anyone of these words in isolation. Examples of lexical fields: Parts of the Face as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>parts of the face</th>
<th>forehead</th>
<th>brow</th>
<th>temples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nose</td>
<td>nostrils</td>
<td>bridge/tip of the nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>septum</td>
<td>mouth</td>
<td>lips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eyes</td>
<td>eyebrows</td>
<td>eyelids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chin</td>
<td>cheeks</td>
<td>jaw</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using morphological analysis of words

Morphology is the study of words in different terms, showing how words are broken down into smaller units, and how such units are recognized. That is to say, by using the analysis of morphemes of words, we can find out the meaning of words, even some of unfamiliar English words. It is estimated that there are over 600,000 English words concerned with the roots and affixes. But the roots and affixes are limited in numbers and simple in meaning. And the most
commonly used roots and affixes are only 600-800 in number. By using the analysis of roots, affixes and word structure, we can teach thousands of English words. For example: “hand/handle/handful/handicap/handsome/beforehand...”

**Dictionary**

It is an important tool in the teaching and learning of vocabulary. Teacher should encourage students to search words in dictionaries. Therefore, the habit of its use should be inculcated right from the beginning. Gonzalez (1999) found that dictionary work was laborious but necessary, and that ESL college students need to be taught practical use of the dictionary. Exploring dictionary entries can be one important and effective component of understanding a word deeply.


**Collocation**

It’s a widely accepted idea that collocations are very important part of knowledge and they are essential to non-native speakers of English in order to speak or write fluently. Nattinger (1980) in Carter and Mac McCarthy (1988),

“It teaches students expectations about which sorts of words go with which ones. Students will not go about reconstructing the language each time they want to say something”

The term collocation generally refers to the way in which two or more words are typically used together. For example, we talk about heavy rain but not heavy sun, or we say that we make or come to a decision, but we don’t do a decision. So, heavy rain and make a decision are often referred to as collocations and we say that heavy collocates with rain. Collocations include:

1. Verb + Noun (e.g. break a code, lift a blockade)
2. Verb + Adverb (e.g. affect deeply, appreciate sincerely)
3. Noun + Verb (e.g. water freezes, clock ticks)
4. Adjective + Noun (e.g. strong tea, best wishes)
5. Adverb + Adjective (e.g. deeply absorbed, closely related)

**Synonyms**

A synonym may be used to help the student to understand the different shades of meaning, if the synonym is better known than the word being taught. Synonyms help to enrich a student's vocabulary bank and provide alternative words instantly. These can be effective since they build on words and phrases that students already recognize. Adjectives often have several symptoms, and phrasal verbs will usually have a non-phrasal verb equivalent. Use caution that you do imply
that all the words have exactly the same meaning, since different words often are used for
different connotations or to imply different meanings. The same procedure can be used to elicit
synonyms. The teacher needs to highlight the fact that “true” synonyms are relatively rare and
the answers will often be “near” synonyms. The students could make crosswords, word snakes
or other puzzles for each other using these synonyms.

Students were asked to bring daily five new words which were not familiar to them from the
text-book. At the end of each session they were asked to tell the word, its spelling and its
meaning in English. They were banned to see the notebook where these words were written. If
they were not able to give the correct word its spelling and meaning, they were asked to bring
new ten words next day. Such an exercise was fruitful for the learner.

**Antonyms**

The students were asked to make lists of opposite words. Two groups were made; one group
gave one word while the other group asked to give an opposite word to it. For example,
sharp/blunt, rude/polite, flexible/rigid, generous/mean etc. One group gave word ‘sharp’ and the
other group gave opposite word for it as ‘blunt’. Marks were written on the board. They found it
very interesting and memorized more words in order to win the contest. Thus, by play way
method they can learn new words.

**Words often confused:**

The long list of often-confused words was made in the class and students were asked to use them
in sentences from the brackets. Teacher should provide the meaning of such words, if necessary.
For examples: adopt: adapt, beside: besides, principal: principle etc.
Homonyms

Homophones are words of the same language that are pronounced alike even if they differ in spelling, meaning, or origin, such as "pair" and "pear". Homophones may also be spelled alike, as in "bear" (the animal) and "bear" (to carry). But this list consists only of homophones that are not spelled alike.

- ant/aunt
- ate/eight
- bear/bare
- son/sun
- steal/steel
- throne/thrown
- blew/blue
- beach/beech
- cent/scent/sent
- cereal/serial
- eye/I
- fare/fair
- sea/see
- stationary/stationery
- threw/through
- be/bee
- by/buy
- cell/sell
- census/senses
- die/dye

Word Map

Students work in small groups to learn connections among words by brainstorming and organizing words according to a map that they design or a blank one that is provided by the teacher. An example might be a key-concept word in the center of the page with rays connecting related words. For example, when asked to give words they thought of when they heard the word
“faithfulness”, low-intermediate ESL students generated sixteen words or phrases: cat, friend, family, reliance, trust, dishonest, unfaithfulness, believe in friendships, bonds, obey, dog, friendly, sexual unfaithful, gossiping, marriage, love. After clustering words which they felt went together, they mapped the relationships between these words.

In my own words: 

Use in the Sentence: 

Etymology: 

Thesaurus: 

Other Features: 

Idioms

Teaching idioms by topic can make easier for students to remember. An idiom is a phrase or expression in which the entire meaning is different from the usual meanings of the individual words within it. Idioms are fun to work with because they are part of everyday vocabulary. Students enjoy working with figurative meanings. They also enjoy finding out about the origins of idiomatic expressions, some of which are very old.

An idiom is an expression that cannot be fully understood by the meanings of the individual words that are contained within it. The meaning of the whole idiom has little, often nothing, to do with the meanings of the words taken one by one. Point out to students that idioms are often used in writing or speech to make expression more colorful and that some of the most colorful English idioms make use of animals or animal comparisons.

Phrasal verbs

Teachers should include phrasal verbs in their classroom language as much as possible – and draw attention to these from time to time. There are many phrasal verbs in the English language and they are used in normal, everybody speech and writing. Phrasal verbs mean words consisting
of a verb and a particle (preposition or adverb). The meaning of a phrasal verb is different from the meaning of each word if it was considered separately. Common classroom expressions incorporating phrasal verbs are: sit down, put your hand up, turn your papers over, write this down, cover the page up, look it up, hurry up and calm down!

ex.
The scientists carried out an experiment. vs.
I carried out some chairs in the garden.

**Phrasal verbs with the verb “look”**

**Look**
look about/around Examine
look after Be responsible for
look ahead Think about events in the future
look back Return in one’s thoughts
look for Try to find
look on To be a spectator
look out Take care, beware
look up Try to find, especially in a work of reference
look up to Regard with respect

**Crossword puzzle**

Crossword puzzles offer an entertaining way of reviewing vocabulary. Students can do the puzzles in class in pairs, as a race with other students, or at home as homework. The teacher can also design a “Word Puzzle,” which is also called a “Word Cross,” asking the students to cooperate in groups to find and circle the words that the puzzle contains. The teacher might also place several versions of the word in the puzzle, with only one of them being the correct spelling. The students must circle only the word with the correct spelling.

**Word formation**

Teacher should encourage students to enrich and expand their vocabulary. There are different ways to expand the vocabulary of the students. By studying the morphology, we know that it not only concerns with the morphemes of words, but also the word-formation. In English classes, teachers should help students to get to know the processes of word-formation. Morphological rules reveal the relations between words and provide the means in formation of new words. That is to say, these rules determine how morphemes are combined to form words. Nowadays, teachers in colleges have paid much more attention to the teaching of the morphological rules of English word formation in their classes. But still we have a lot of work to do. The expansion of vocabulary in modern English depends chiefly on word-formation. According to Pyles and Algeo (1982), words produced through affixation constitute 30% to 40% of the total number of new words; compounding yields 28% to 30% of all the new words; words that come from shortening including clipping and acronym, amounting to 8% to 10%, together with 1% to 5% of words born out of blending and other means. So by analyzing the processes of English word-formation, we can infer word-meanings and learn more new English words.

**Reading the word**

Reading words aloud is also very beneficial. It makes a learner familiar with the word and also improves pronunciations of the learners. Sound can be an easy way to illustrate words that
describe sounds, such as whistle, scratching, and tinkling. You can make the sounds yourself, or bring in tapes or CDs for students to listen to and write down the words that they hear.

The situation can be made easy and interesting, if the teacher of English selects the vocabulary, grades the vocabulary and uses different techniques in the classroom. Teachers should focus on vocabulary, as it is the most essential aspect in any language and means of communication. We cannot express our feelings without words. Wallace (1982) states, ‘Not being able to find the word you need to express yourself is the most frustrating experience in speaking another language’ (p.9).

Series, scales, systems

The meaning of words such as the months of the year, the days of the week, the parts of the day, seasons of the year, ordinal numbers, cardinal numbers, etc. that form part of well-known series can be made clear by placing them in their natural order in the series. If you have several gradable words to introduce at the same, you can introduce them together on a scale. For instance, you can use frequency, such as always-often-occasionally or emotions in this way, with cheerful-happy-joyous-ecstatic.

Role play

Role-play is to create the presence of a real life situation in the classroom. It is important in the classroom communication because it gives students an opportunity to practice communicatively in different social contexts and in different social roles. The language applied in this activity is varied according to the student’s status, attitudes, mood, and different situations. (Blachowicz, et al., 2006.) speaks, “Teachers can introduce some of the words which provide both definitional and contextual information about the words to be learned by making up a dialogue for students so that students can understand a further meaning and usage of the words.”

Use video to produce of target vocabulary.

Select a video segment that contains a series of actions or visual detail. Provide the learners with a list of target vocabulary words and ask them to construct a paragraph that incorporates as many of the words as possible. This activity is best done after the learners have seen the video. As they learn how to use more vocabulary properly, you will see an improvement in their writing and speaking. Teacher can also show a short film without sound and asking pupils to discuss what dialogue they would expect to hear. Showing a scene from a film without sound and asking pupils to use the facial expression to determine emotion.

Analysis of the data:

As far as methodology is concern, the pilot test will be conducted in the beginning. It includes pre-test and post-test. The researcher is going to give pre-test to find out how conscious they are regarding word meaning. The mistakes made by the students will be analyzed in order to gain a better insight of their problems in understanding vocabulary. The pre-test consists of twelve questions. After knowing the students’ problems with vocabulary various teaching methods is followed by the researcher to make the teaching interesting. After giving them training for a
month a post-test is conducted to check the students’ improvement. The result of the pre-test and the post-test will be compared in order to find out whether the students are benefited from the special training.

In the pre-test, an attempt was made to examine the area of difficulty of undergraduate level students. The mistakes made by the students were observed and scrutinized carefully. After analyzing the errors, the feedback was given to the students regarding their performance of the pre-test in the class. It helped them realize the problematic areas where they needed more practice and thus can avoid errors in future. Error analysis was beneficial for the researcher too. It enabled him to develop his methodology of teaching. Different techniques and methods of teaching new vocabulary were followed to make the teaching effective and interesting, after knowing the students’ problem. They were given special training for one month to enrich their knowledge of vocabulary.

The foregoing analysis reveals that students are largely benefited from the experiment. The present study, therefore, has significant pedagogic implications. The insights gained through this analysis can be recommended suggestions for the teachers. It is hoped that the valuable insights and statistical information will substantially help the teachers, course designers and researchers.

**Data for the present study**

The ‘pre-test’ and ‘post-test’ consisted of ten questions. This questionnaire served as the data for the present study. The students were familiar with different types of questions. The time given to the students was one hour. The questions were as follows:

Q.1 There are four words in each group as given below. One word is misspelt. Find and correct the miss-spelt word.
Q.2 Give one word substitute for the following words from the words given at the top brackets.
Q.3 Write the homonyms for the words given below.
Q.4 Match the words given in column ‘A’ with their counterparts given in column ‘B’.
Q.5 Give the collocations for the following words from the words given at the top brackets.
Q.6 Give opposites of the following words from the words given at the top brackets.
Q.7 Give the synonyms for the following words selecting from the words given in the top brackets.
Q.8 Fill in the blanks with suitable words selecting from those given at the end of each sentences.
Q.9 Use the following phrasal verbs in the sentences of your own so as to bring out the meaning.
Q.10 Find out the words related to “________” from the box given below.
Q.11 Create as many words as you can with the help of following affixes.
Q.12 Write down words and phrases, which are closely related in meaning with the given words.
Conclusion
The present paper explored various techniques and methods of teaching new vocabulary. Teacher must make use of such techniques while teaching of vocabulary. It also focused on expansion of vocabulary. Corder (1973:223) rightly observes, ‘The more words one knows, the easier it is to ‘learn’ new words, because one has more associative link available’.

There is no sure fire remedy or method to enhance vocabulary in a day or two. A student's vocabulary bank can be enriched on a gradual basis and one should always show keen interest and enthusiasm in finding, learning and understanding new words. Teaching vocabulary through incidental, intentional, and independent approaches requires teachers to plan a wide variety of activities and exercises. Richards said

“When vocabulary words are being taught to pupils, teachers need to consider how to teach these words to pupils based on the levels of ages, educational background and field of interest. The teacher also ought to recognize such sociolinguistic variables in which the words will be used” (p. 73).

Nathaniel Hawthorne observes the power of words as, “Words – so innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil, in the hands of one who knows how to combine them”

References


