

## The Significance of Vocabulary Taxonomy and Learning Strands in Fostering Vocabulary's Learning among Non-Native Learners

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### Abstract:

*The study investigates the significance of vocabulary taxonomy and learning strands in fostering vocabulary's learning among non-native learners. It focuses on the vocabulary taxonomy from linguistic perspective entailing phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic perspective, use and usage aspect including high and low frequency words, three vocabulary tiers and stylistic aspect which includes common words, literary words, colloquial words, slang words and technical words. The study accentuates the three tiers of vocabulary -tier one consists of the most basic words which do not have multiple meanings whereas tier two consists of high frequency words that occur across a variety of domains which occur often in mature language situations such as adult conversations and literature. Tier three consists of low-frequency words that occur in specific domains as subjects in school, hobbies, occupations, geographic regions, technology, weather and others. The focal point of the study is the four learning strands meaning- meaning-focused input involves learning through listening and reading using language receptively. Meaning-focused output involves learning through speaking and writing using language productively. Language-focused learning*

*involves the deliberate learning of language features such as pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. The fluency development strand involves all the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.*

**Key words:** Vocabulary tiers, high frequency words, low frequency words, learning strands

## **I.0 INTRODUCTION**

Learning English as foreign language involves developing learners' proficiency with lexis, or words. Traditionally, vocabulary learning is understood as a learning stock of individual words with fixed meanings and lexis. In addition, it is an ongoing process which requires systematic repetition to help students retain the vocabulary they find useful and relevant to their subject matter by learning vocabulary through context, cooperative learning, and using technology. Learning English vocabulary is one of the most crucial part of a well-balanced language learning process because it is involved in comprehension and production. Moreover, learning vocabulary is a cumulative process which entails amount of words stored in learner's memory as a form of lexicon. Pedagogically, learning English relies on four strands: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development. Nation and Waring( 1997:6) stated that "Vocabulary knowledge enables language use, language use enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of the world enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge and language use and so on".

In terms of contextualization, learning vocabulary will help students increase their vocabulary through authentic interaction

## **2.0 VOCABULARY TAXONOMY**

### **2.1 Taxonomy of Lexical Items**

Lewis (1997:43-49) suggests the following taxonomy of lexical items:

- words (e.g., book, pen)
- polywords (e.g., by the way, upside down)
- collocations, or word partnerships (e.g., community service, absolutely convinced)
- institutionalized utterances (e.g., I'll get it; We'll see; That'll do; If I were you ...; Would you like a cup of coffee?)
- sentence frames and heads (e.g., That is not as ...as you think; The fact/suggestion/problem/danger was ...) and even text frames (e.g., In this paper we explore ...; Firstly ...; Secondly ...; Finally ...)

The researcher believes that vocabulary or words can be classified from various perspectives as the following:

- Phonological aspect concerning sound constrains or phonotactics in terms of consonant clusters and vowels
- Morphological aspect concerning word formation in terms of simple, compound and complex
- Semantic aspect can be classified in terms of lexical relationship such as synonym, antonym, contronym, hyponym, polysemy, homophone, and other relations. Moreover, words can be classified in terms of binomial, trinomial, idiom and phrasal verbs.
- Syntactic aspect concerning content words and functional word from lexical density perspective. In terms of grammar, words can be classified according to parts of speech and as a head of phrase. Furthermore, words can be classified into the functional aspect of words in terms of case.

In teaching vocabulary module, vocabulary is taught in consideration of PFM(pronunciation, form and meaning) technique. Teaching pronunciation is based on repetitive drills

whereas teaching the form is relied on mechanical drill in terms of spelling and writing. Teaching meaning involves communicative drills.( Allen, V. (2005: 67))

## **2.2 Stylistic Classification of English Vocabulary**

A word is a linguistic unit that can be moved around relatively freely in a sentence; can be stressed; has only one primary stress; can be pronounced naturally on its own; can usually be inserted between two other words, but in the middle of a word.

Thornbury, S. (1998:85) classifies words according to level of usage: common words , literary words ,colloquial words ,slang words and technical words. Common words are connected with the ordinary things or activities necessary to everyday life. The core of the common words is the basic word stock. They are stylistically neutral, hence they are appropriate in both formal and informal writing and speech. Literary words are chiefly used in writing, especially in books written in a more elevated style, in official documents, or in formal speeches. They are comparatively seldom used in ordinary conversation. In English, most of the literary words are of French, Latin or Greek origin. Many of them have their everyday synonyms. For example, cast (throw), edifice (building), endeavor (try), purchase (buy), etc. More examples: recognition, distinction, inclination, dubious, amelioration. Colloquial words in contrast with literary words, colloquial words or expressions are used mainly in spoken English, as in conversation among friends and colleagues. They can also be used in informal writings, but are inappropriate in formal speeches or writings. They are marked colloq. or informal in dictionaries such as: kid, guy, fellow, gay. From a stylistic point of view, words are often divided into three types: formal, common and colloquial.

Formal words are used in formal writing such as scholarly or theoretical words, political and legal documents,

and formal lectures and addresses. Many formal words contain three or more than three syllables; most of them of Greek or Latin origin. Formal words are seldom used in informal writing. Common words are used by common people every day, and appear in all kinds of writing. Colloquial words are mainly used in informal or familiar conversation. They are short words of one or two syllables and most of them are of Saxon origin and they are seldom used in formal writing, unless for some special purpose or effect. Slang words are often used by uneducated speakers, with dialectal words being highly informal, vivid and interesting. Slang is defined as language, words or phrases of a colorful, facetious (playfully jocular; humorous), or taboo nature, invented for specific occasions, or uses, or derived from the unconventional use of the standard vocabulary. The chief reason for the formation and use of slang expressions is to secure freshness and novelty. A slang usage is not generally used in formal conversation unless the speakers are on intimate terms; slang embraces those daring and new expressions that have not been accepted by the majority of people as Standard English. Technical or special words refer to those words used in various special fields. Every branch of science, every profession or trade, every art and every sort of sports has its own technical terms. Most of the technical terms are Latin or Greek in origin. In fact, they are part of literary words. Since language is constantly changing, the classification of words by level of usage is not absolute. Most of the technical terms are Latin or Greek in origin. In fact, they are part of literary words. Most of the technical words remain essentially foreign to outsiders, even to educated native speakers. However, under the influence of radio, television, newspaper and the Internet, we are witnessing a remarkable breaking down of the barrier between technical and common words. Many technical neologisms created yesterday by specialists are today heard in ordinary

conversation, e.g. moonwalk, space shutter, gene, transgenic and clone.

### **2.3 Three Tiers of Vocabulary**

Montgomery, Judy K. (2008:123) consider three types of vocabulary words—three tiers of vocabulary for teaching and assessing word knowledge, a word's frequency of use and meaning determines into which tier it will fall. The three tiers of vocabulary are: Tier 1—Basic Vocabulary, Tier 2—High Frequency/Multiple Meaning, and Tier 3—Subject Related.

Tier one consists of the most basic words. These words rarely require direct instruction and typically do not have multiple meanings. Sight words, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and early reading words occur at this level. Examples of tier one words are: book, girl, sad, run, dog, and orange. There about 8,000 word families in English included in tier one. Tier two consists of high frequency words that occur across a variety of domains. That is, these words occur often in mature language situations such as adult conversations and literature, and therefore strongly influence speaking and reading. Following is a list of standards for tier two words:

- Important for reading comprehension
- Characteristic of mature language users
- Contain multiple meanings
- Increased descriptive vocabulary (words used across a variety of environments) allow students to describe concepts in generalization and a detailed manner.

Tier two words are the most important words for direct instruction because they are good indicators of a student's progress through school. Examples of tier two words are: masterpiece, fortunate, industrious, measure, and benevolent. There are about 7,000 word families in English (or 700 per year) in tier two.

Tier three consists of low-frequency words that occur in specific domains. Domains include subjects in school, hobbies, occupations, geographic regions, technology, weather and others. Learners usually learn these words when a specific need arises, such as learning amino acid during a chemistry lesson. Examples of tier three words are: economics, isotope, asphalt, Revolutionary War, and, crepe.

## **2.4 Use and Usage Classification of English Vocabulary**

From use and usage perspective, vocabulary can be classified as high frequency vocabulary needs to be met across all four strands of a course - meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development and low frequency vocabulary may not need to become part of the learners output and so it is not important for it to be part of the meaning-focused output strand. Nation (2005:8) defined high frequency words as words that occur quite frequently in the language, such as the, a, man, and woman. High frequency words occur so regularly in daily conversation that if students understand these words, they are able to write and speak in comprehensible English. Low frequency words, as described by Nation, are words that deal more with academic studies, words that appear throughout all academic texts and courses, but not very often in day to day speech, such as formulate, index, and modify.

A high-frequency vocabulary of around 2,000 words, a mid-frequency vocabulary of an additional 7,000 words making a total of 9,000, and the remaining low-frequency vocabulary of at least another 10,000 words but potentially higher. Adult native speakers seem to have the vocabulary size of around 20,000 words, but this would be a very long-term goal for most foreign language learners. More sensible goals are to aim initially at a high frequency vocabulary of 2,000 words, and then to give attention largely to the most useful parts of the

mid-frequency vocabulary for particular purposes. These can include academic vocabulary (currently in the form of the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000), and technical vocabulary relevant to a particular area of study, work, or pastime interest. Vocabulary size data is also very useful in planning extensive reading, particularly now that there are free adapted mid frequency readers for learners at the 4,000, 6,000 and 8,000 word levels (<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/staff/paul-nation.aspx>).

### **3.0 FOUR LEARNING STRANDS**

A well-balanced language learning process should consist of four roughly equal strands: learning through meaning-focused input; that is, learning through listening and reading where the learner's attention is on the ideas and messages conveyed by the language; learning through meaning-focused output; that is, learning through speaking and writing where the learner's attention is on conveying ideas and messages to another person; learning through deliberate attention to language items and language features; that is, learning through direct vocabulary study, through grammar exercises and explanation, through attention to the sounds and spelling of the language, through attention to discourse features, and through the deliberate learning and practice of language learning and language use strategies; developing fluent use of known language items and features. These four strands are called meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development.

It is through these four strands that learners achieve the learning goals of a language course, namely fluent control of the sounds, spelling, vocabulary, grammar and discourse features of the language, so that they can be used to communicate effectively. The opportunities for learning



language are called strands because they can be seen as long continuous sets of learning conditions that run through the whole language course. Every activity in a language course fits into one of these strands.( Nation, 2001)

Meaning-focused Input refers to learning through listening and reading and itstrand involves learning through listening and reading using language receptively. It is called “meaning-focused” because in all the work done in this strand, the learners’ main focus and interest should be on understanding, and gaining knowledge or enjoyment or both from what they listen to and read. Typical activities in this strand include extensive reading, shared reading, listening to stories, watching TV or films, and being a listener in a conversation ( Hinkel, 2006).

Meaning-focused Output refers to learning through speaking and writing and it involves learning through speaking and writing using language productively. Typical activities in this strand include talking in conversations, giving a speech or lecture, writing a letter, writing a note to someone, keeping a diary, telling a story, and telling someone how to do something.

Language-focused learning has many names-focus on form, form- focused instruction, deliberate study and deliberate teaching, learning as opposed to acquisition, intentional learning, and so on. It involves the deliberate learning of language features such as pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. The ultimate aim of language-focused learning is to deal with messages, but its short-term aim is to learn language items. Typical activities in this strand are pronunciation practice, using substitution tables and drills, learning vocabulary from word cards, intensive reading, translation, memorizing dialogues, and getting feedback about writing.

The fluency development strand should involve all the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In this strand, the learners are helped to make the best use of what they already know. Like meaning-focused input and output, the fluency development strand is also meaning-focused. That is, the learners' aim is to receive and convey messages. Typical activities include speed reading, skimming and scanning, repeated reading, repeated retelling, ten-minute writing, and listening to easy stories.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Learning English vocabulary is one of the most crucial part of a well-balanced language learning process and it is a cumulative process which entails amount of words stored in learner's memory as a form of lexicon. Technically vocabulary can be classified into phonological , morphological ,semantic and syntactic aspect. From use and usage perspective, vocabulary can be classified as high frequency and low frequency vocabulary . Lewis (1997) classified lexical items into words , polywords , collocations, institutionalized utterances and sentence frames and heads . Montgomery, Judy K. (2008) proposes three tiers of vocabulary- Tier 1-Basic Vocabulary, Tier 2-High Frequency/Multiple Meaning, and Tier 3—Subject Related. Pedagogically, learning English relies on four strands: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development.

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