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CHAPTER

Teaching of Vocabulary

A vocabulary is a list of words. Word has been defined by scholars as :

*Strang*¹ : "The most important criterion of a word is that it is the smallest unit that can in ordinary usage function alone as a sentence."

Bloomfield : "A free form which is not a phrase, is a word."

Getting pupils acquainted with new words is important because, in the words of *H. W. Beecher*, "Words are pegs on which ideas hang." Besides this, one of the aims of teaching English in India is to enable students to use it as library language. For this, they need to learn a large vocabulary which includes : (1) Active or recognitive vocabulary and (2) Passive or receptive vocabulary.²

Some Characteristics of Words

For a good teaching of vocabulary, the teacher must know the characteristics of words which are as follows :

(i) A word can have more than one meaning. Generally, a word has following levels of meaning :

(a) **Lexical**—That meaning which is given in the dictionary.

(b) **Syntactical**—That meaning which is conveyed by the word order.

(c) **Morphological**—The meaning which is conveyed through the forms of words.

(d) **Intonational**—That meaning which is conveyed by the way the word is pronounced.

(e) **Cultural**—That meaning which is related to some culture.

(ii) Words convey their meaning in context.

1 B. M. H. Strang : *Modern English Structure*, p. 65.

2 The meaning of these has been explained in chapter : "*General Principles of Teaching Foreign Language*."

language.

Kind of Words

Words are mainly of four kinds :

1. **Function Words.** These are the words with which we speak. A. W. Frysky has classified the following types of function words :

(a) **Auxilliaris**—e.g., will, shall, is, are, can, must.

(b) **Preposition-Adverbs**—e.g., in, on, by from, at.

(c) **Conjunctions**—e.g., and, as, when, whose.

(d) **Interrogatives**—e.g., which, what, when, where.

2. **Substitute Words.** These are the words which are used to substitute other words, e.g., I, he, she, they, we, anybody, everybody, none.

3. **Content Words.** These are the words for which we talk about. They are of the following kinds :

(a) Words for things, e.g., book, pencil, table.

(b) Words for qualities, e.g., honesty, beauty.

(c) Words for action, e.g., departure.

4. **Distributive Words.** The words having affirmative and negative distributions are called distributive words, e.g., too, any, as :

(i) I bought a basket and Sita purchased too.

(ii) I shall not give you any of these books.

Selection and Gradation of Vocabulary for Teaching

The purpose of teaching vocabulary is not to teach all the words of English. It is not possible anyhow. The conference of professors of English held in New Delhi in 1953 observed, "The course of English should consist of a detailed study of texts of simple modern English prose written within a vocabulary of about 2,500 essential words, non-detailed study of books in prose and verse with a large vocabulary for rapid reading and simple composition." The conference of 1963 on the teaching of English held in New Delhi, recommended that "It is possible to cover approximately 2,500 words to form the active and some 500 more words to form the recognition vocabulary of pupils, in a six or seven years course of English." According to Prof. H. E. Palmer, a list of 3,000 words can be devised which would cover 95% of ordinary English. It seems appropriate to have secondary students get a knowledge of about

3,000 words. These words should be properly selected and graded by the following principles :

- (i) Principle of usefulness,
- (ii) Principle of structural value,
- (iii) Principle of frequency of occurrence,
- (iv) Principle of teachability,
- (v) Principle of universality, and
- (vi) Principle of simplicity.

Teaching Procedure

The teaching of active vocabulary should be done by going through two distinct steps *e.g.* :

- (1) Presentation, and
- (2) Practice.

1. Presentation. The presentation can be done by using the following methods :

- (a) Direct method,
- (b) Translation method,
- (c) Usage method,
- (d) Similar word method,
- (e) Contrasted words method,
- (f) Derivation method, and
- (g) Reference method¹.

2. Practice. The practice should be at the productive level as well as the application level. Productive level means to repeat what the teacher has said and application level means to use the words in different novel situations. Both at productive and application levels, the practice should be for speaking, reading and writing. Pupils should be asked to solve some exercises to have command of the new vocabulary items.

For teaching passive vocabulary, there is only one step and that is the presentation. For developing the passive vocabulary, there is no need of practice. Instead, supplementary reading should be encouraged. The teaching of passive vocabulary starts at the senior level.

Some Suggestions

Following are some suggestions which should be kept in mind while teaching vocabulary :

1 Details of these methods are dealt within Chapter : "*Teaching of Prose and Poetry.*"

- (i) Students should be encouraged to keep a vocabulary notebook and meaning of difficult words should be noted in it.
- (ii) By employing different word games, interest in the students can be created.
- (iii) At the early stage, the emphasis should be on quality rather than on quantity.
- (iv) Presentation should be according to the standard of the class. *Prof. Vermon Maliinson* says, "It must, therefore, grow as naturally as possible, out of the pupils' immediate experience and must satisfy an immediate need."