



# Vocabulary and Language Teaching Methods

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**Abstract:** The current article addresses the issues of Contemporary English Vocabulary trends, and is aimed at finding how high-frequency words of English can help students understand authentic reading materials in the target language. It also tries to find what sort of authentic reading materials contain more high frequency words and are appropriate for using in reading and vocabulary classes to boost vocabulary enrichment of the students. According to mathematical-linguistic research on finding how much percent of authentic reading materials are high-frequency words plus two weeks of teaching has been done by the researcher to find what types of authentic reading materials interest them.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary, Methods, Implicit Vocabulary, Explicit (Intentional) Vocabulary, High Frequency Word, Word Families, Lemmas

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## 1. Introduction

The term Vocabulary has some different meanings. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003) defines it as follows:

1. All the words a person knows and uses in their speech (lexicon).
2. All the words in a particular language
3. Word lists with explanation or translations that are often found at the back of a book for learning foreign languages (glossary).

In our case, most of the time researcher mean the second meaning of the word, when researcher talk about vocabulary and its teaching. In addition to that, sometimes researcher mean the first definition of vocabulary when researcher talk about how many words a student knows or how much vocabulary they have.

*Importance of Vocabulary Teaching and Learning*

One thing that most of the students and teachers of English, researchers and linguists who are working in this field generally agree that vocabulary learning in learning English or any other foreign language is of a great importance during their studies. The reason for this is that vocabulary certainly plays a big role in using the language to communicate and express thoughts and feelings. The role of vocabulary in using a language productively and effectively is regarded

high. As a consequence teachers also pay more attention to the teaching of vocabulary now while teaching a foreign language. A lot of students are becoming sure that knowing a good deal of vocabulary in a foreign language highly increases their communicative competence and results in better and more meaningful communication because after learning a good deal vocabulary they can easily master their language skills of speaking and listening, reading and writing. As they master their language skills, researchers are one more time assured that teaching vocabulary is important in Communicative Language Teaching. As Nation (1994) says having a good deal of vocabulary makes the skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking easier to perform. The more words a learner knows in a foreign language the better language learner they will become: they will be able to speak it more fluently, they will be able to express their ideas more clearly and they will be able to comprehend more reading materials in that language and etc [1].

As Folse (2004) says basic level of vocabulary will allow learners to communicate some ideas to certain degree; better communication can be accomplished when learners have acquired more vocabulary. He says that the more vocabulary a learner acquires the better speaker or communicator he or she will become and can express his or her opinions and thoughts in better and more comprehensible way. Constantly learning a good deal of vocabulary results in a constant rise in student's communicative competence.

Teachers and linguists thought that students could learn sufficient vocabulary to communicate while learning the grammar of the target language or mastering the other languages skills such as reading. Students were expected to build their lexicon as they learn a language. As a result many of them didn't learn sufficient vocabulary as expected. They failed to communicate their ideas as they lacked sufficient vocabulary [2].

As Moras (2011) argues that this traditional vocabulary learning has been proved not enough to ensure a wider range of meaningful communication. He argues that this traditional method failed to enable students to be able to become a good language speaker with good communicative competence. He goes on to say that if students acquire a lot of vocabulary while learning a foreign language grammar, most of the time, students have them as a receptive knowledge of a wide range of vocabulary, but most of them lack productive use of that vocabulary. As classes did not provide enough practice for the words. What he suggests is that new vocabulary should be integrated into everyday use of the students and should be taught intentionally and with an explicit attention to it and the students should be facilitated to come across with that vocabulary on a number of occasions in their English classes. In this way only, we can expect the learners to have a large variety of vocabulary to be a good language user with communicative skills [3].

Taking into consideration this, EFL teachers have implemented and are implementing vocabulary now as a separate class or paying a greater attention to it in other skill based classes. Vocabulary teaching is being regarded important in English classes in many places. It is not being neglected as it was in the past. Nation (2001) pointed out that it is important to learn vocabulary, as it makes up a large part of any language. He says that vocabulary is a very important part of the language and makes up a large part of it. So researchers can't neglect it and go over without learning it properly. Also, Green and Meara (1995) say that learners need vocabulary and see acquisition of vocabulary as their greatest challenge and they continue to say that, vocabulary learning should be their first goal when learning any foreign language, not only in English, in all other languages of the world, without the knowledge of vocabulary one can't express themselves properly. Carter (1987) pointed out that the gradual development of foreign language lexicon is a fundamental part of the process of learning a foreign language. He says that learners should work hard to build and develop their foreign language lexicon across all their studies. They should know plenty of words on a wide range of topics to be able to communicate freely and cohesively [4].

For good vocabulary learning, Communicative language teaching provides good basis, the more vocabulary the student has, the better communication can be achieved says Folse (2004). However, foreign languages haven't always been taught this way. There has been another method of teaching. For a long time, languages were taught through a method what linguists call grammar translation method. Although my research topic isn't language teaching methods,

I believe that it is vital to shed some light on them and give some information on them as well.

## 2. Materials and Methods

While talking about grammar translation method Folse (2004) says grammar translation method is based mainly on learning grammar rules and being able to translate sentences from the source language to the target language. Usually in grammar translation method, students are taught grammar rules systematically, and they practice translation of sentences and texts. Vocabulary is often neglected and students are expected to learn vocabulary themselves while being exposed to the target language, for example, while reading texts and translating them. This method has been used for a long time in the history of language teaching. Of course, although it is rejected now by many linguists and teachers of English, this method has been used to teach English for centuries and it has shown its effectiveness. For example, in the former USSR, language teaching was wholly based on grammar translation and there was great progress in learning and teaching English [5].

After some research and advances in language teaching, the backwards and issues the grammar translation method has come to the light. As this method of teaching usually didn't improve students' communicative competence and even after the finishing the course many of the students lacked vocabulary to interact on various topics, the grammar translation method was rejected by many linguists and teachers at the end [6].

As students learn a foreign language, they learn and acquire vocabulary of that foreign language. Schmitt (2000) says that foreign language vocabulary learning is a mental process of students where students learn the knowledge of foreign words. He argues that foreign language vocabulary learning requires much effort and time in comparison to the first or native language vocabulary acquisition. Though foreign language vocabulary learning can be frustrating, tiring and can last one's lifetime, he advises students to develop a love for vocabulary learning and acquisition in their foreign language learning. The reason he gives for this opinion is that learning vocabulary while mastering a foreign language is an important part of any foreign language acquisition [7].

There are some factors which affect the learning of vocabulary in students' foreign language learning. Schmitt (2000) list those factors as follows:

1. Mother tongue a student has
2. The age of a student
3. Exposure to the target language
4. Cultural background
5. Levels of motivation
6. Background knowledge

Schmitt suggests that those factors should be taken into account when teachers teach vocabulary to their students. Schmitt argues that, taking into consideration these factors will ensure a successful vocabulary teaching and learning and

result in the success of the students [8].

Vocabulary learning or vocabulary acquisition falls into two general types. The first is the implicit vocabulary learning. It happens as its name suggests incidentally or unintentionally while being exposed to the language. However, Schmitt (2000) says, during the exposure, the focus of the learner is not on learning vocabulary but if it is reading, the focus of the student is on understanding the reading material. Schmitt (2000) defines implicit vocabulary learning as an acquisition happening through exposure when one's attention is focused on the use of language rather than the learning itself. " In other words, implicit vocabulary learning within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching means a student learn and acquire vocabulary through the use of the language or exposure to it while focusing on the more important aspect of communicative language ability says Schmitt (2000).

However, most scientists and linguists doubt the effectiveness of implicit vocabulary learning. If we give a closer look at how implicit or accidental vocabulary learning occurs, we can see some encounters by the learners with new vocabulary that are supposed to be learned through implicit acquisition. Those encounters can be reading a text in a foreign language and coming across the new words that are supposed to be learned, or listening to radio or watching media in that foreign language. In short, all those encounters by the learners with new words happen while learners are exposed to the target language in some way. Below we further list the research results and discuss the effectiveness of vocabulary learning from reading and listening [9].

*The effectiveness of implicit vocabulary learning from reading and listening*

There have been a lot of researches on implicit or incidental vocabulary learning. However, Schmitt (2008) says the early research on incidental vocabulary learning during spontaneous exposure to the language while reading had a number of methodological weaknesses: including very small amounts of reading, unreliable measurement instruments, inadequate control of text difficulty. For this reason, we refrain from referring to them. Later researchers have found some good reliable results. Pigada and Schmitt (2006) studied how students learned the spelling, meaning and grammatical characteristics of words during a one-month extensive reading case study. They found that 65 percent of the target words were enhanced on at least one of the knowledge types. This means that after being exposed to the target words during the one-month extensive reading period, students learned either the meaning or the spelling or grammatical characteristics of 65 percent of the words. However, the knowledge of spelling of words was enhanced greatly in comparisons to other types of knowledge, because the meaning and grammatical characteristics of words were learned at a lesser degree. In another research by Waring and Takaki (2003) they found out that their students recognized the meaning of words encountered during implicit reading on 10 out of 25 scales in an immediate multiple choice test. This means that students could remember the meaning of 10

words out of every 25 words which they came across in their exposure to the text. However, we shouldn't forget that the multiple choice test was immediately after students had finished the test. When later tested however, they could remember the meaning of only 4 or 5 words out of every 25 words. After three months, students could only remember the meaning of one word out of 25 words. However, Waring and Takaki found that most of the word forms were recognized by the students. This means that students could remember seeing them or encountering them somewhere. However, recognizing the form or the spelling of the word doesn't mean knowing the meaning of it [10].

After his research Schmitt (2006) concluded that incidental vocabulary learning from reading provides partial learning of a word, students either learn meaning of a word or spelling if it. They tend to learn the spelling of words more which means they tend to forget the meanings of words more likely than their spellings.

However, some linguists argue that implicit vocabulary learning does occur in a better way if the number of encounters with the target words and the exposure to the target language increase. Rott (1999) found that just 6 times of exposures or encounters of a word led to better learning of words than 4 times of exposures to it. He said that more than 10 times of exposures or encounters of a word provide very increased learning rate. He also pointed that some of the words couldn't be learned even after more than 20 times of exposures. Waring and Takaki (2003) found out that just 8 times of exposures were enough to have 50 percent chance if recognizing a word form [11].

Zahar and Spada (2001) also researched on this topic and published the results. They found out that the number of encounters needed to learn a word might depend on the proficiency level of students. They concluded that advanced learners need fewer encounters to learn a word from incidental reading than intermediate level students.

The reason is that advanced learners know more words, so they need fewer encounters to learn a word in comparison to learners of other levels. This research result proves that background knowledge of learners does play role in vocabulary learning.

If we take all the research results together, they indicate that some vocabulary learning does occur from incidental reading however word meaning recognition of a word is low. If the exposure and the number of encounters with words increase, the learning also increases. However, if we think reasonably, it is difficult to facilitate 10 or 20 times of encounters by the students with the target words. Especiall, adult learners who have less time to learn a language [12].

To conclude, I provide what Schmitt (2008) says: incidental vocabulary learning from reading provides partial knowledge of words. For this reason, it can't be trusted as a primary source of vocabulary learning. However, he says, incidental vocabulary learning from reading is good at enhancing what students already know. He says incidental reading provides good practice for already known words of the students.

There aren't many researches done on implicit or incidental vocabulary learning from listening because most of the researchers concentrated their works on incidental vocabulary learning from reading. However, there are some researches done on this topic. Al-Hamoud and Schmitt found out that Saudi university students learned small amounts of vocabulary from listening to 15-minute academic lectures. However, the result wasn't so encouraging, because for most of the students the target words seemed to move from the state of being unknown to the state of having been heard somewhere. Although they were some sort of word knowledge gained from listening incidentally, however after two weeks of time, students in many cases couldn't remember those words. All they learned were 2 words out of 40 words. This is a very low result indicating they incidental vocabulary learning from listening can't be trusted as a learning source.

### 3. Discussion

Also, Barcoft and Sommers (2005) found that students would achieve more learning if there are a variety of speakers in terms of dialects and voice types. They suggested that listening materials on audio and video tapes should include a variety of speakers and voices. They also concluded that listening can be a useful supplement to reading because reading a text and listening to it produces more learning than only reading a text.

#### 3.1. *Explicit (Intentional) Vocabulary Learning*

Opposed to implicit (incidental) vocabulary learning, explicit vocabulary learning of foreign language implies a focused, intentional learning of vocabulary in a foreign language. Schmitt (2000) says that in Communicative Language Teaching, teachers should teach students how to notice and learn new words intentionally. He continues to say that the main reason for explicit attention to vocabulary learning is that it is effective in language learning, it leads to greater and faster gains when it comes to foreign language learning, and it leads to productive level of mastery in a foreign language. Also Laufer (2005) researched on the topic of effectiveness of intentional vocabulary learning and found out that after the target words-focused exercises, students achieved 33 – 86 percent gains. Even in delayed posttests after two weeks, the students showed high results with 15 – 20 percent of words being forgotten. Still the results were far better than those of incidental learning.

Although explicit vocabulary learning has such effectiveness, still some educational schools and teachers don't pay enough attention in the classes to their students' vocabulary learning intentionally. Even learning new words through vocabulary lists are very effective. For some people learning vocabulary using lists can be tiring and boring, and some people reject this way of learning. However there is no evidence that those lists are ineffective. Usually word lists contain some new words of English for students and their translation. Sometimes they may include some example

sentences. Laufer (1997) studied vocabulary retention of students who learned new words intentionally from word lists and context condition. She found that less information was better. I mean those students who learned the new words from word lists remembered more target words and did better than those students who learned the target words in context condition. So the result clearly shows that if target new words are learned in their word lists with their L1 translation is effective, even better than learning the target words in context condition.

Before talking about the English language vocabulary, I would like to mention that, while reviewing the literature on English vocabulary, I paid attention to articles that are closely related to my research topic such as the size of English vocabulary, the number of words native speakers and learners of English should know high-frequent words of English and etc.

#### 3.2. *The Size of English Vocabulary*

It's very difficult and almost impossible to say how many words there are in the English language. The word stock of the English language is very vast and huge. The Global Language Monitor, which tracks language trends, especially in the media, has counted up to almost a million at 988,968 words (McCarten, 2007). The biggest dictionary that has been published so far in the history of humankind, Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged (1961) which consist of 2726 pages and weighs 6.12 kg together with its 1993 Addenda Section includes around 470,000 dictionary entries [13].

When counting up the words in the English language, there are some issues that arise and these issues need to be considered. For example, teacher, teach, teaching are they all one word or three words. Also, teaching, teaches, taught are they also one word or three different words? How do we deal with such words? To solve the issue, there are several ways given by Schmitt (2001):

**Tokens.** One simple way of counting words is counting them by tokens: we count up every word that is written in a text or spoken by a person in his or her speech. For example, if we say 'it is easy to do it,' this sentence consist of six tokens although the sentence included two times repeated word 'it.' This way of counting words work best if we want to find out how many words are written in a textbook or article. Word counter of Microsoft Word program on our computers that we use every day, counts all the words typed into computer by tokens.

**Types.** If we look again at the sentence 'It is easy to do it,' we can see that the word 'it' is used twice. If we count these two as one, there are five words in the sentence. This is counting words by types. Counting words by types help us how many words are used in a textbook or in an article. Also, if we want to know how large was Shakespeare's vocabulary and how many words he knew and was able to use in his works, we use counting words by types.

## 4. Result

Lemmas. Another way of counting words in a language is by lemmas. A lemma is a group of words, which consists of a headword and some of its inflected and reduced (n't) forms (Schmitt, 2001). The English inflections consist of plural, third person singular present tense, past tense, past participle, -ing form of the verb, comparative, superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs and possessive case. Some dictionaries count the words by lemmas.

Word families. Word families are group of words that are bigger than lemmas. Word families include a headword, its inflected forms (its lemma) and its closely derived forms. The derived forms of the words are made up with derivational affixes, such as un-, -ly, -ness, -er. For example, a lemma of the word 'paint' can be paints, painting, painted. However, word family of the word 'paint' include other words such as painter, paintings, and inflected forms of the word (its lemma).

So the word family of the word 'select' can be select, selects, selecting, selective, selection, selected, and unselect.

How many words do native speakers know? How many words do learners need to know?

Although the word stock of the English language is vast, even the native speakers of English don't know all of them. One simply can't know all the words in any language.

Unfortunately, an average learner of English can't possibly learn as many words as native speakers can. Fortunately, says McCarten (2007) learners of English can get along without learning as many words as the native speakers do. In his book "Teaching Vocabulary" McCarten (2007) says that if learners know the most frequent 2,000 words, they should be able to understand almost 80 percent of the words in an average text, and the knowledge of the most frequent 5,000 words will enable learners to understand 88.7 percent of words in an average text. McCarten (2007) says that knowing the most frequent 2,000 - 5,000 words for learners of English will be sufficient to provide a meaningful communication on any topic. He continues to say that there are two lessons to be learned from this research result, first is that it is important to identify the most frequent 2,000 - 5,000 vocabulary items and teach them in vocabulary classes. Since it is not always possible to cover all these words in classes, the second lesson ought to be teaching students what to learn when they work on their English independently. He means that students should be taught the importance of the most frequent words.

### *High-Frequency words*

While talking about high-frequency words, Nation (2001) defines them as a small group of very important words that cover a large proportion of the running words in spoken and written texts and occur in all kinds of uses of the language. High-frequency words are a group of words that we use very frequently in our everyday life. They are also called commonly used words. As said earlier, the most frequent 2000 words will enable us to understand almost 80 percent of words in an average text. Also, the knowledge of 5000 most common words enables us to understand 88.7 percent of all

words in an average text. They should make sure that they learn those most common words in their studies. Also Nation suggests that average students of English should learn the most frequent 2000 words. He says that time spent on the most frequent words is well justified by their frequency, coverage and range.

How frequency lists are made?

How do we collect the list of most frequent words? It is easy to do it with help of a corpus of words and a computer software. What is a corpus? Corpus is, says Mc Carten (2007), basically a collection of texts which is stored in a computer. The texts can be written or spoken language. Written texts like newspapers, magazine articles, and book and so on can be entered into the database. Conversations, phone calls, speeches can be transcribed into it too. So, corpus is a database collection of texts of different forms and transcribed spoken language. With the help of computer software, the database in the corpus can be analysed and the word types which were used the most frequently can be found.

## 5. Conclusion

A corpus can be quite small says McCarthy (2004) containing only 50,000 words of text, or very large containing millions of words. The Cambridge International Corpus collected by Cambridge University Press has 2 billion words of text, and it is expanding and growing all the time. The database of Cambridge English Corpus include words contemporary spoken and written English. It includes British English, American English and other varieties of English. It also includes the Cambridge Learner Corpus, developed in collaboration with the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. Cambridge University Press has built up the CEC to provide evidence about language use that helps to produce better language teaching materials. (McCarthy, 2004).

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