

TEACHING VOCABULARY TO PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS IN INDIA: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC APPROACH

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Abstract: Vocabulary occupies an unrivalled place in the teaching curriculum. What's more, since a good stock of vocabulary, combined with the ability to arrange the words to create supra-segmental structures, goes a long way to create meaningful chunks of spoken and written discourses and results in successful communication most of the times, to acquire, develop and use a formidable stock of vocabulary is a coveted academic as well as non-academic goal of Engineering and Management students. Consequent upon this need analysis and requirement, vocabulary is found to be the syllabus and beyond syllabus (as a part of pre-placement training) topic.

Keywords: Vocabulary, psycholinguistic approach, business English, CHOICE method

Vocabulary building is viewed as an indispensable building block for career building by professional students, especially Engineering and Management students and particularly the undergraduates. Since a good stock of vocabulary, combined with the ability to arrange the words to create supra-segmental structures, goes a long way to create meaningful chunks of spoken and written discourses and results in successful communication most of the times, to acquire, develop and use a formidable stock of vocabulary is a coveted academic as well as non-academic goal of Engineering and Management students. Learning vocabulary should be interesting. Learning Vocabulary Pays! Consequent upon this need analysis and requirement, vocabulary is found to be the syllabus and beyond syllabus (as a part of pre-placement training) topic. As students find that word power holds the key not only to effective listening and speaking but also to reading and writing, and therefore they are supposed to eagerly participate in the vocabulary classes. However, the teacher/trainer finds it rather challenging to capitalize on the interest shown by the trainees because the reality turns out to be something else. What mars this highly demanding linguistic programme (i.e., vocabulary teaching) are anxiety and even fear whenever the trainer goes on with his or her attempt to assess the threshold level of the overall class. Public speaking is apparently the most-feared event in such an exercise. Motivation and Vocabulary Development: Thus, student-trainees need motivation for the study of vocabulary in order to invite participation and encourage greater involvement from them. Against this background, this paper proposes to discuss some means and methods that can be very useful in teaching vocabulary effectively to technical students, especially in the language laboratories and in the ELT and Communicative English/ Professional English/Business English classrooms. Motivation and anxiety play a vital part in English learning outcomes

(Liu and Huang, 2011) and particularly in vocabulary acquisition, development and usage. The researcher has gained the insight from his own experience of teaching vocabulary to students at KIIT University, Bhubaneswar, in which Vocabulary learning is a part of the Professional Communication syllabus for B. Tech. students of First Year. The pedagogy involved in teaching Vocabulary is left to the teachers concerned and the methodology is as varied as possible. However, it is found that though students exhibit interest in the initial stages to learn vocabulary per se, the real-time engagement is not proportionately rewarding. The students also feel that the vocabulary classes should be and could be more interesting but turning the dream into reality is easily said than done. The interplay of motivation (degrees vary) and anxiety creates havoc with the Vocabulary classes and adequate preparation needs to be done before handling the class. The following paragraphs will demonstrate this point. Psychology Holds the Key! This researcher finds that teaching vocabulary is a psycholinguistic enterprise and it involves the AIDA principle (i.e., awareness, interest, desire and action). The trainer has to create in the trainees an awareness of the need for a good vocabulary stock with suitable real-life (and reel-life) examples. Use of videos to demonstrate how a good stock of vocabulary helps or lack of it hinders creates a lasting impact on the trainees. Vocabulary games and exercises involving synonyms, antonyms, idioms and phrases, and word attack skills can help create interest in the students for learning vocabulary. To create desire among the students to do exercises and learn a variety of words a lot many strategies can be adopted. For example, the speech of a very popular statesman/ diplomat/ corporate leader can be provided with some words missing and students/trainees can be supplied with alternative words/phrases to guess and answer from the list supplied. In the same fashion, one write-up from a well-known technical/motivational author like Shiv Khera's You Can Win or Dale Carnegie's How to

Win Friends and Influence People with some words or lines missing may be given for test. Technical texts with words missing or headings missing can also be provided. One word substitutes will be a good strategy too. In the last leg of the session, the action principle can be applied by giving select but inter(related) words (with or without their meanings as per the threshold level of the trainees) to speak or write on the topic or write first and then speak. However, the AIDA is one of the strategies with psychological orientation. CHOICE Method for Teaching Vocabulary: Another principle which this trainer finds suitable involving psycholinguistic approach is the CHOICE method. In CHOICE method of vocabulary teaching, the trainer will first ask the trainees what their field of choice (C) is from a general to particular form (e.g., sports to cricket). After writing the words in a rough sheet, the trainer will choose the most common topic. Then the trainer will write the words of a topic randomly (i.e., without alphabetical order) in the form of the structure of a house (H) (say in pyramidal form). In this way the trainer will create two word houses and ask the trainees to choose either the one or the other (O) assignment as per their interest (I). If everybody chooses one then they will be asked to write a small article or story using those words. Thus one or two write ups will be used. As one group goes on presenting on the topic, the other group will be asked to write down the words they consider poor and what their best alternatives can be. Same thing with the other group will be practiced. When there will be only one group (i.e., when all students choose one option only), then the class can be divided into more or less equal number of students and the system as in case of two groups can be practiced. The alternative words taken from both the groups can be put together and synonyms or antonyms of these words may be added up. Any individual trainee or a few from both the groups may be asked to compose (C) a short story or write up or a corporate small talk kind together. At the end the trainer will do the evaluation (E) of group and/or individual performance. Thus a psycholinguistic approach to vocabulary teaching can be of immense benefit in the teaching-learning scenario involving the four language skills which will greatly benefit the Engineering students to acquire, develop, build and expand their own vocabulary.

While administering the CHOICE methodology to teach vocabulary, many practices can be integrated into the system. For example, while discussing vocabulary related to Personality, astrological vocabulary can be used. Students may be asked their respective Sun Signs and the characteristics of each sun sign can be discussed. Then the students may be asked to develop a write-up on their own personality. They may also be asked to use thesaurus to develop a story. Besides, developing register or vocabulary in a particular domain being practically indispensable, students may be given dictionaries of a particular subject and may be asked to prepare a write-up on a particular assignment. For example, the teacher can give a Dictionary of Chemistry and ask them to write an article on a very common thing like 'salt' using words of chemistry. However, everything depends on the threshold level of students and assignments should be given accordingly. Games are an integral part of any ELT exercise. They fulfill the adage 'fun while you learn'. While the vocabulary teacher is supposed to innovate games tailor-made to suit specific requirements of the students concerned, games on synonyms and antonyms may afford readymade ground for raising the interests of the trainees. For example divide the students into two groups. Give one group synonyms and give the other group antonyms. Let the students of each group find their match. It is a very interesting game and the teacher can proceed with similar games. Similarly, one group may be assigned words generally used in UK and their US counterparts; foreign phrases and their meanings; animals and their sounds, etc. Conclusion: A teacher should be very careful while teaching vocabulary to professional students. Planned activities will make one more successful than an on the spot activity. Since the vocabulary requirements of students vary from institution to institution and batch to batch, the teacher/trainer concerned should first make a study of the demographic profile of the students of the target group and proceed with a strategy with a step by step plan of the process. The teacher/trainer should collect feedback at the end of the class and should make appropriate modifications in the activities designed or yet to be designed. To sum up, a professional approach to teaching vocabulary to professional students will be highly beneficial.

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