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Mind Your Vocabulary!

N. Pratheeba, Ph.D.

Introduction

In recent years, English is turning out to be the preferred medium of instruction for mathematics and sciences. Most States in India have made English compulsory for all classes. Immediately after Independence, regional languages replaced English as the medium of instruction in many states. However, current economic realities have necessitated the turn around. English is now seen to be a pre-requisite for success in most careers. IT revolution brought thousands of jobs and such jobs were available mostly to those who had adequate skills in English. With the bio-technological boom also in the offing, the demand for English skills will rather increase, not decrease.

This paper presents some methods with which an ESL learner can increase his English vocabulary. Some play-way methods are listed here to help students (and teachers) to increase their active as well as passive vocabulary. When learners uses the methods listed below, they certainly can increase the number of vocabulary they have and use such vocabulary efficiently.

Kinds of Vocabulary

Here, vocabulary refers to all the words that a person knows or uses. It is divided into two groups: Active Vocabulary and Passive Vocabulary. Active Vocabulary refers to the

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words that one uses in his or her day-to-day life. On the other hand, passive Vocabulary refers to the words that one understands and recognizes but does not use. The passive vocabulary of any learner is usually larger than his active Vocabulary. It is very tough to distinguish between the two.

Importance of Language Games in the Acquisition and Use of Words

Games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning (Kim, 1995). The benefits range from cognitive aspects of language learning to more co-operative group dynamics (Lengeling and Malarcher, 1997). Many experienced textbook and methodology manual writers have argued that games are not just time-filling activities but have a great educational value (Uberman, 1998). Games are highly motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging (Aydan, 2000). Games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for the useful practice and review of language lessons, thus leading toward the goal of improving learners' communicative competence (Nuyen and Nga, 2003).

Vocabulary Games Suggested in This Paper

Six games are chosen by the researcher. It is expected that these will improve not only the word power of the ESL learners but also their cognitive ability. As games provide intense and meaningful practice of language, an ESL learner can hone his or her communicative competence by getting involved in the same.

1. Cognate Word-Building Game

Words are the important tools of communication. If one knows the proper form of the apt word then we can speak fluently and write effectively. Well-placed words convey the optimum force of thought. Words in English can be divided into eight categories namely noun, adjective, verb, adverb, pronoun, preposition, conjunction and interjection. The first four categories are open-ended because new words and their derivatives can be added to them. The last four categories are close ended.

Though all words do not have all the four forms, namely, noun, adjective, verb and adverb, most of the words in English have all the four forms. Choose a particular word (e.g.) *ability*. Try to categorize it. It is a noun. Find the other equivalent forms of this particular word. If you cannot do it, consult a dictionary.

In this method, every word that we employ will benefit us with four more forms of words including the gerund. It will help an ESL learner to choose the specific word for the correct use in the right place.

<u>Noun</u>	<u>Adjective</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Adverb</u>	<u>Gerund</u>
Ability	Able	Enable	Ably	Enabling
Education	Educative	Educate	Educationally	Educating
Fullness	Full	Fulfill	Fully	Fulfilling
Thought	Thoughtful	Think	Thoughtfully	Thinking

2. Associating Synonyms and Antonyms

In a book entitled, *The Family Word Finder* published by the renowned magazine *Reader's Digest*, it is noted that a very simple way to improve one's vocabulary playfully is to learn at one stroke both the antonyms and synonyms of words. Choose a particular word. One must try to add as many words as we can both to the list of antonyms and synonyms.

<u>Synonym</u>	<u>Word</u>	<u>Antonym</u>
Ally, confederate, helper, supporter, sympathizer	FRIEND	Opponent, antagonist, adversary, enemy, foe
Like, identical, resemble, oneness, exactitude	SAME	Opposite, contrary, antithetical, reverse, antonymous
Sure, definite, assure, conviction, certitude	CERTAIN	Doubt, dubious, problematic, questionable, skepticism

3. Word-Listing Method

ESL learners have to select from a list all the words that they know that are connected with a particular topic. The list must be as complete as possible.

Centres of Learning: nursery, school, college, polytechnic, university, tutorial, Institute, library, seminary, etc.

Musical Instruments: mouthorgan, saxophone, xylophone, triangle, bagpipe, bassoon, guitar, cymbal, panpipe, tambourine, etc.

Media of Communication: books, newspaper, magazine, telephone, internet, e-mail, cinema, television, fax, radio, letter, drama, Wireless, satellite, mike, compact disc, radar, pager, etc.

4. Rhyming with the Same Ending

The ESL learner has to select a final syllable like –ate, -est, -ile, -ipe, -ime, etc., To this selected syllable, he or she has to prefix single letter, double letters or multiple letters to form new words. It will result in a number of words. For example, from the final syllable

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–est-, one can frame the following words: **best, fest, lest, nest, pest, test, vest, west, zest, chest, crest, digest, request, suggest.**

5. Doublets

Choose two words of the same length. Transform the first word into the last word. This will be done through a series of words in which each word differs from the next by only one letter. Make the series as short as possible. For example, **work** is changed to *rest* in the following way.

work
pork
port
post
pest
rest

Work and *rest* are termed as the doublets. The interposed words *pork, port, post* and *pest* form the links. And the complete series by which the Doublets are transformed is termed as chain. A regular reader of ‘The Hindu’ newspaper would have found this word game in Derek O Brien’s *Derek Q’s MINDGAME*.

6. Mismasch

It is another word game that can enhance the vocabulary of any ESL learner. A group of letters is given to the students. And they must find a word that contains the group of letters in the given order. It may be possible to form a number of words. For example take the group of letters –cti.

Answer: faction, fraction, action, satisfaction, suction, fiction, rectify.

Conclusion

Words are the most essential tools of communication. A person’s vocabulary in a language is an indispensable element if he or she wants to communicate effectively in a particular language. Once an ESL learner has tremendous word power and a wide vocabulary, then definitely he or she can convey their ideas in a more specific and precise manner. Probably, English is the richest language in the world today with at least five hundred thousand words.

It is said that Winston Churchill had a tremendous vocabulary in English and that he used sixty thousand words in his writings. It is not necessary or possible for all of us to have such large number of words as part of our active and passive vocabulary. And yet we all

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need to have essential words that express ideas that go beyond the compass of basic vocabulary. As we go through several learning stages from school to college to university to work, there is an increasing demand to learn and use more words so that our ideas are promptly, correctly and adequately expressed.

The games I've listed above, along with many other strategies available to us, should help us to acquire more vocabulary and use them effectively. Vocabulary building is not a wild goose chase; it can be made into a deliberate game that is played well, even as we enjoy playing it. This way, definitely we all can increase our mastery of English words.

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N. Pratheeba, Ph.D.
Kamaraj College of Engineering and Technology
Virudhunagar-626001
TamilNadu, India
pratheeba.bose@yahoo.com