The Teaching of New Language Items

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In the early days of SL/FL* teaching and when the Grammar-Translation method was queen of the day, vocabulary occupied a prominent position in SL/FL programmes. However, the fortunes of vocabulary soon changed with the oncoming of the Direct Method and the Audio-Lingual Method. One of the important underlying principles of these two methods is that language is not made up of words but of patterns of usage (Lado, 1965). Consequently, a greater emphasis was given to the teaching of structures, and vocabulary had less attention. There is presently a renewed interest in the teaching of vocabulary due to the development of Functional-Notional Syllabuses. (O'Neil and Snow, 1978). It is, therefore, necessary to reconsider the teaching of vocabulary and develop a systematic technique to achieve our objectives. Different objectives are defined for recognition and productive vocabularies. An EFL ** student needs to recognize and enunciate recognition vocabulary, but he does not need to spell or use such vocabulary items. The EFL student, however, will need to recognize, pronounce, spell and use those vocabulary items that are intended for productive use. The sequence in which these four skills (recognizing, pronouncing, spelling and using) are presented and taught is of great significance, both for linguistic and methodological principles.

1. The Place of Vocabulary in the ESL*/EFL Syllabus

New language items (i.e. words, idioms, phrases, phrasal verbs etc.) are usually introduced in listening and reading comprehension lessons. They are more often than not considered enabling objectives and as such receive rather poor attention from teachers. Perhaps this is an after-effect of the audio-lingual method because it has accorded greater emphasis to structures and a lesser attention to words. Lado (1964:52) says that

> The attempts of many students to concentrate on vocabulary at the beginning is misguided. Linguistics shows that words, no matter how many, do not constitute a language. The most strategic part of a language for use is the system of basic patterns and significant sound contrasts.

This may also explain why the teaching of vocabulary is seldom given independent and separate treatment in the ESL/EFL literature and programmes. There is a dearth of materials in the areas of vocabulary teaching.

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The ESL/EFL scene is currently witnessing certain changes in the focus and methods of language teaching, namely the development of functional and notional syllabuses, (Wilkins, 1976) (Van Ek, 1979. 101 - 128) (Widdowson 1978). The terminal objective, for instance, of a unit in a functional or a notional course can be the extension of the learners' vocabulary. It is, therefore high time to reconsider the place and teaching of vocabulary in the light of these new developments.

2. Statement of Objectives

Before we write an operational statement of objectives, it is useful to distinguish between receptive and productive vocabulary. Bright and McGregor (1970:19) have observed that

> Native speakers and foreign learners recognize and understand more words than they actually use. The words they recognize but do not use are the items by which their receptive vocabularies exceed their productive ones.

Usually it is the textbook writer who decides the words that are to be taught for productive use and those words for receptive use.

Given two vocabulary lists, i.e. productive and receptive lists, that are introduced in a context, two operational statements of objectives must be written: a statement for receptive vocabulary and another statement for productive vocabulary. The statement for receptive vocabulary may read like this: Given a list of receptive vocabulary that is used in a context at the end of the lesson/unit all pupils will be able to recognize and pronounce all the words in the list. The statement for productive vocabulary may also read something like this: Given a list of vocabulary for productive use and used in context, at the end of the lesson/ unit all pupils will be able to (a) recognize the words in the list, (b) pronounce the words fairly accurately, (c) spell them with 95% accuracy and (d) use them in sentences. (Hanna and Michaelis, 1977:8)

The learning of vocabulary, therefore involves different learning capabilities, therefore, and hence each of these learning capabilities demands a separate and different treatment. However, before we attempt to explain how each of these skills may be taught, it is better to discuss the sequence in which these skills can be presented.

3. Sequencing

The writer recommends the following sequence for both productive and receptive vocabularies. First, the teacher presents each of the new items in a context that helps to bring out the meaning of the new item. Second, the meaning of the new item is explained either by the pupils or by the teacher. Third, the teacher teaches the pronunciation of the new item through drilling. Fourth, the teacher writes the new item on the chalkboard.

We will now try to delineate why this sequencing is strongly advocated by answering questions related to each step.

3.1 First, why do we have to teach pronunciation before writing the words? First, English is "a partially phonetic language." (Sweet, 1899:10) (Gleason, 1955:425) (Greene and Petty, 1971:393). It is therefore most likely that pupils in attempting to decipher unfamiliar words from the way the words are written, make mistakes that can later prove difficult to unlearn. For example, the combination of letters in ough is pronounced differently in each of the following words: cough,plough, through, thorough, dough. Also there are eight different ways for spelling the English sound /i:/ as in be, machine, these, beast, see, thief, ceiling and people. (Rivers, 1978:2154). Second, it is rather difficult for beginning pupils to learn stress symbols when and if they were written by teachers. The only way of learning correct stress patterns is by experience. (Broughton, et al. 1980:53). Failure to use correct stress may hamper the act of communication.

Because of at least these two reasons it is highly advisable to teach pronunciation before writing a new item on the chalkboard.

3.2 Why must pupils recognize a new word before they are asked to pronounce the new word? The fact that aural recognition proceeds oral production is a fairly old and well established teaching principle. (Lado, 1965), (Broughton, et al. 1980:65) (Rivers, 1978:165). It is now generally accepted that a FL learner must hear a sound before s/he is excepted to produce it.

3.3 Why do we have to explain the meaning of a new word before we drill it? The answer to this question is quite simple. If children are asked to chorus words without knowing their meaning it is like repeating nonsense syllables. The act of explaining the new item will facilitate learning. (Gagne 1965, 1970:266).

4. The Teaching of Recognition

By recognition is meant the ability to associate both the spoken and the written forms of a word with its meaning. This means that a learner must be able to know the word both when he hears it spoken and when he sees it in writing. This is by no means an easy task for a beginning learner. Hence greater care and more time must be spent during the early stages of learning English. An item must be thoroughly learned and mastered before another related item is introduced (Gagne and Briggs, 1974:201).

In English, as in many other languages, the meaning of a word is largely determined by the context in which it appears. (Lado, 1965:21) (Malinowski, 1923:306). Consequently it is of paramount importance that each lexical item must be introduced in a context, preferably short sentences.

At the initial stages of teaching English and depending on the method being used these contexts may not be more than simple, short structures such as:

This is	a pen
	a pencil
It is	a rubber
I have	a book

However, as the pupils progress the sentences may be more complex.

When introducing a word a teacher must make certain that his pupils discriminate between usually confused sounds, because production depends to a large extent on recognition. A young Arab learner of English who initially does not hear a difference between, for example each of the pairs below, should not be expected to produce this difference. He can gradually do this when s/he has developed the ability to discriminate between such usually confusing pairs.

sat	:	set
sad	:	said
cat	:	cart
back	:	pack
think	:	sink

Teachers are well advised to draw the attention of their pupils, very early in the course, to certain important features, namely, word stress, pause, especially with compound words, weak and strong forms of certain function words, elision etc.
4.1 How can a teacher explain the meaning of a word? There are a number of ways by which a teacher can explain the meaning of a vocabulary item. A teacher can, for instance, use objects, pictures, drawings, action, dramatisation, miming, English definitions, other synonyms, antonyms, contextual clues and of course translation. Translation is the easiest and most popular method amongst most teachers and pupils. In certain cases and when it is not possible to use any other means, giving the vernacular equivalent (or approximation) to an English word, saves a lot of time and trouble. But the excessive use of translation should not be countenanced. "It is a crutch that, though immediately useful, becomes harder and harder to throw away the longer it is used." (Haskell, 1978:21). In addition to this, translation creates certain semantic and semantico-grammatical problems. The semantic fields of an English word and its Arabic equivalent are not exactly the same. (El Fadil, 1965:3). They coincide over a certain area, but then they differ from one another in other spheres as can be seen from Fig. 1.

The shaded area shows those instances where cut and its Arabic equivalent/ JaGTaE/ are used in more or less the same context. But they differ in many other contexts. Because of this we find many literal translations such as the following:

* I cut the road.
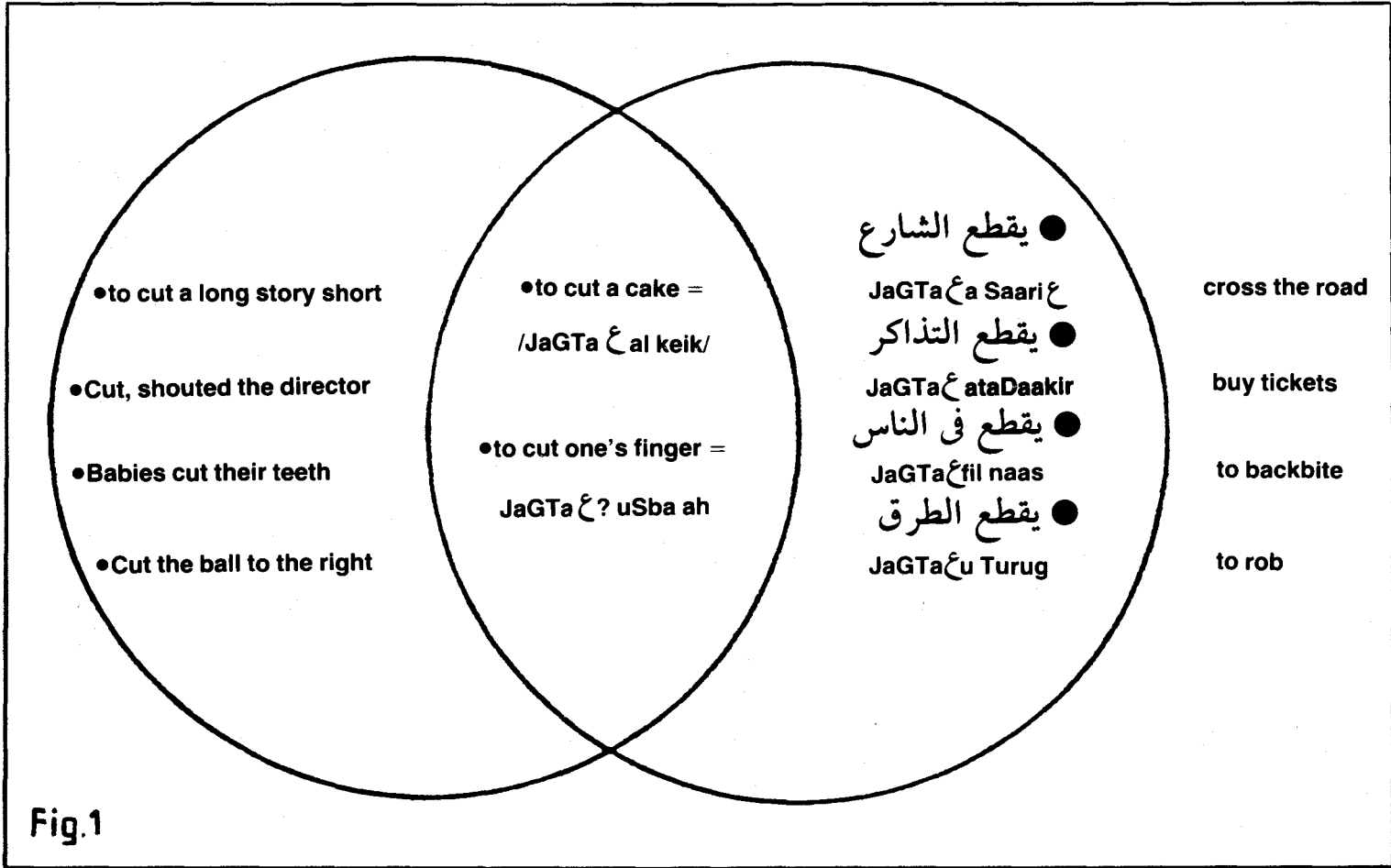* I cut the tickets.
* I cut a very long distance.

Fig.1

to cut a long story short

Cut, shouted the director

Babies cut their teeth

Cut the ball to the right

to cut a cake =
/JaGTa ع al keik/

to cut one's finger =
JaGTa ع? uSba ah

● يقطع الشارع
JaGTa عa Saari ع   cross the road

● يقطع التذاكر
JaGTa عataDaakir   buy tickets

● يقطع فى الناس
JaGTa عfil naas   to backbite

● يقطع الطرق
JaGTa عu Turug   to rob

A second difficulty arising mainly from the use of translation is semantico-grammatical. Arabic is an agglutinative language and because of this words, especially verbe do not have one grammatical form, i.e. an Arabic simple present tense verbs, may have as many as fourteen forms depending on whether the subject is 1st person, 2nd person, 3rd person; singular, dual or plural, masculine or feminine, etc. (El Fadil, 1965:6). Hence when a teacher gives the Arabic equivalent for an English word, he must give the correct grammatical form of the Arabic word.

Thirdly, the excessive use of translation is likely to arrest the progress of the learner as the learner will always have to think in his native language first and then in the foreign language, both when he is decoding or encoding speech, as can be seen from Fig. 2.

The sender thinks first in his mother language (L1) and then translates from his mother tongue into the foreign language (L2). The receiver receives the notion in L2 and then translates it into his mother tongue. Besides the fact that this will slow down the act of communicating in L2, it has the additional effect of the learner having to think in L1. In this case the learner will find tremendous difficulty in decoding those notions that do not exist in his mother tongue: in certain cases these may be very vital scientific/mathematical or geographical terms.

Before proceeding to the next step the teacher will need to check if his pupils do recognize the new word. S/he can do this in a number of ways.
(i) The teacher says the word and then asks the pupils to point at the appropriate picture or pick out the correct object.
(ii) The teacher can ask a pupil to act the word if it is a verb that can easily be acted in the class.
(iii) The teacher may mime an action and ask the pupils to give the word for it. A pupil can be asked to mime something and then ask another pupil to say what it is.
(iv) The teacher may give short descriptions of objects and ask the pupils to name the object. For example, a teacher may say: It is round, it is yellow, we eat it or drink its juice. What is it?

5. The teaching of pronunciation

Having explained the meaning of the new form the teacher should then teach his pupils to pronounce it.

First, the teacher should ask the whole class to repeat the word after him four or five times depending on the difficulty of the word. Secondly, he should ask one half of the class to chorus the word and then the other half. Thirdly, he should ask a whole row or one group of pupils depending on whether the pupils are seated in rows or groups to chorus the new item. The teacher should prick up his ears to pick out those individuals with faulty pronunciation. It is easier to do this with small groups of pupils than with large groups.
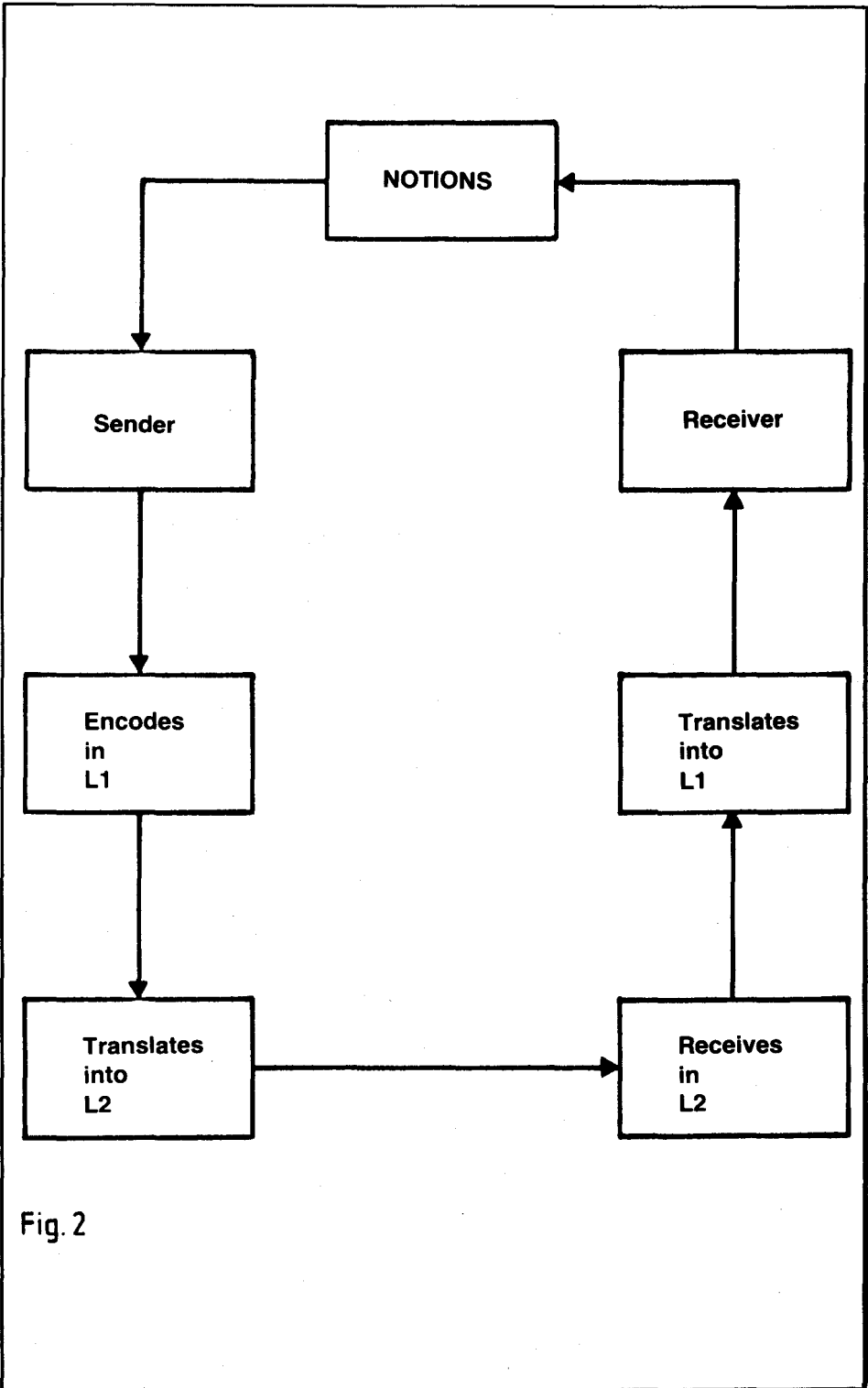
Fig. 2

Fourth, the teacher asks each individual student having difficulty with the item to repeat the item after him, until they are able to produce a fairly acceptable pronunciation (see 5.3). Fifth, the teacher may need to help those students who are having difficulty in the production of an item by explaining to them how the word is pronounced by pointing out the significant features in the articulation of the word.

Sixth, having achieved the objective of being able to pronounce the word fairly accurately the teacher may now write down the word on the chalkboard or show it on the screen, if s/he happens to be using an overhead projector.

5.2 The writing down of the new word has been deliberately delayed up to this point for a number of reasons not least important of which is the fact that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the letters of the alphabet and the sounds of English. (Wallwork, 1969:22). By stamping the vocal form of an item first, we hope to prevent the pupils from forming wrong pronunciations which may ensue from merely reading an unfamiliar word aloud. It is true that many teachers are in the habit of writing down on the chalkboard all the new words they intend to teach for a particular lesson before they pronounce them to their students. This practice, as we have explained earlier, is full of pitfalls as it can elicit phonetically logical pronunciations that are nevertheless unacceptable to native speakers of English. Moreover, it may prove very difficult later on to unlearn such unacceptable pronunciations.

5.3 There remains one point to clarify that is related to the level of performance we aim at. We have alluded to this earlier in the statement of objectives by the phrase 'fairly accurately'. It must be pointed out here that our target should be intelligibility not native speaker accuracy.

> The aim of pronunciation teaching must be that the students can produce English which is intelligible in the areas where they will use it. The teacher will have to concentrate on the important phonemic contrasts and select allophonic variations only to ensure intelligibility not to achieve a total set of native-speaker-like variations. (Broughton, et. al, 1978 and 1980:58).

6. The teaching of spelling productive vocabulary

We teach students to spell only those words that are intended for active use. Many of my students and colleagues, however, argue that learning to spell is an activity that can best be carried out in the pupils' own time and outside the English classroom. This has been a longstanding practice. The writer still remembers the days when he started to learn English in the early fifties. In those days there were weekly spelling tests that were taken seriously by students and teachers alike, because failure to spell was punished by the cane. We had to learn quite long lists so as to avoid corporal punishment, although it must be owned we were not always very successful at that. Flogging students for failure to spell creates very doubtful and unconfident spellers. The writer had to work very hard in order to

regain his confidence in his spelling abilities. Hence, the writer strongly objects to the practice of punishing young learners, in whatever way, for failure to spell. On the other hand, teachers must be encouraged to help their pupils not only to learn to spell, but also to develop positive attitudes to spelling. It must be pointed out, however, that SL/FL teachers get rather sparse help and guidance as far as the teaching of spelling is concerned, mainly because TEFL/TESL experts give but very little attention to spelling compared to that given to pronunciation. Much of the research on spelling is related to the teaching of English as a native language. This is not surprising since English is not an easy language to spell. This research can still be useful to teachers of English as a SL/FL. Green and Petty (1971:401) observe that

> Modern spelling programs incorporate the findings of research in presenting the steps in learning to spell a word. The steps involve visual, auditory, and kinesthetic imagery as well as an emphasis on recall.

The procedure explained below is a modified form of that suggested by Green and Petty (1971:401-402).

First: Having written all the new words on the chalkboard, the teacher marks those words that are taught for active use or alternatively leaves the list of active vocabulary and rubs off the recognition vocabulary.

Second: The teacher asks each pupil to look at the first word and then pronounce it to himself.

Third: The teacher either tells his students to close their eyes or the teacher conceals the word and asks his students to pronounce the word and think how it looks. The student must try to visualize the graphic form of the word and repeat each letter in sequence to himself.

Fourth: The teacher then reveals the word again to all the students to make sure that they have spelt it correctly. Those who have failed must start the process again.

Fifth: The teacher should cover the word again and ask his students to write it down in their copybooks.

Sixth: The teacher uncovers the word and asks his students to check their spelling. Those who have made a mistake should start again.

Seventh: When all the list have been learnt in this way, the teacher should then ask his students to write down the word without looking at the chalkboard or at their previous attempts.

Eight: The teacher asks the poor spellers to repeat the same procedure at home with the promise that the whole class will have a spelling test in a week's time.

The weekly test does not only motivate many students to learn to spell the words, but when corrected by the pupils themselves it can be an effective learning activity. Green and Petty (1971:403) quote E. Horn (1967:17) as saying "when corrected by the pupils and the results properly utilized the test is the most fruitful single learning activity per unit of time that has yet been devised."

6. The Teaching of Word Usage

This is another commonly neglected area. Usually, and perhaps as a precipitate of structuralist methodology, teachers are more concerned with the teaching of patterns and only incidentally with words. This is something that is to happen by itself. Bright and McGregor (1970:19) speak of an incubation period which could extend to six months before a child uses a word he has learnt. It goes without saying we need not wait for such a long time before our students can learn to use the words they have been taught for active use, but rather help them make use of the words they have learnt as effectively and as quickly as possible. It is also necessary to remember that learners of EFL encounter considerable difficulty with English lexicon. They either lack an adequate vocabulary or make wrong use of the vocabulary in their repertoire. We have already cited some examples of the latter when discussing the teaching of meaning.

6.1 How to teach word usage

First:The teacher repeats the sentence that s/he has introduced the new word with.

Second: The teacher asks questions to further make certain that the pupils recognize the new item.

Third: The teacher writes on the chalkboard a number of sentences with one word missed out. The pupils must fill in the blanks with a suitable word from the list of words they have just been taught.

Fourth: The teacher selects one word from the list of new words and gives the pupils one or two words that can be used in a sentence with the new item he has selected. For example, if the new item the teacher has selected is chair, the teacher can then ask the pupils to use it with sit and on. The teacher can, of course, write beside each of the new words one or two such suitable words for the pupils to use in sentences.

Fifth: Finally the teacher asks the pupils to write sentences using the new words. This can be given as homework. The pupils must be encouraged, whenever that is possible, to write the new words in a connected paragraph.

Conclusion

I have tried to put a case for the teaching of vocabulary in the ESL/EFL programme. It is not only important to distinguish between receptive and productive vocabulary, but it is also important to define different instructional objectives for each set of vocabulary. Our students must be taught to recognize and pronounce all the words intended for receptive use. The students, however, should be taught to recognize, pronounce, spell and use the words intended for productive use. Moreover, the sequencing of these four skills of (recognizing, pronouncing, spelling and using) is extremely important. The teachers are well advised to follow this sequencing: teach oral recognition first, then teach pronunciation, third teach graphic recognition, fourth, teach spelling and finally teach usage. Words must not only be introduced in a context, but students must be trained in using contextual clues to arrive at the meaning of the new words as well. The routine, or we may call it the mechanics of pronunciation, are as follows: begin with whole group chorusing, then smaller groups chorusing and finally individuals having difficulty must be corrected. Spelling, too has its routine which must be rehearsed quite well by both teachers and students. The training in learning to spell a word must emphasize visual auditory and kinesthetic imagery as well as recall.

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