
UNIT 2 ENHANCING VOCABULARY

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Active and Passive Vocabulary
- 2.3 Content Words and Function Words
- 2.4 Some Difficulties in Learning English Vocabulary
- 2.5 Word Building: Affixation and Compounding
- 2.6 Using a Dictionary and a Thesaurus
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 References and Suggested Readings
- 2.9 Answers

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have gone through this unit, you should be able to:

- differentiate between active and passive vocabulary;
- distinguish content and function words;
- discuss with appropriate examples homonyms, homophones, homographs or idiomatic expressions;
- enumerate the use of suffixes and prefixes; and
- understand the necessity of using the dictionary and thesaurus to expand vocabulary.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Like bricks when laid out properly, correctly and with some imagination can build up simple walls or complex designs for buildings and mansions, not to talk of other structures, similarly a language user uses different words to construct sentences – both single word sentences and longer ones. But just as bricks alone are not adequate, and they need to be strengthened by the use of mortar/concrete mixture, similarly words alone may not be adequate. The appropriacy of the word chosen, the word order in which it is placed, the nuance of the meaning – everything plays an important role. In this lesson, we will read how words – oral or written – are gradually learnt and how you as a learner can gradually increase your word base.

2.2 ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOCABULARY

Just think for a moment. Can you use all the words the moment you have heard them or have read them once? Do you use all the unfamiliar words – the meanings of which you have guessed while reading or listening – in your speech or writing? Some words you may, some you might not. But you start understanding those words if you hear or read them again and again. Our listening and reading vocabulary is much more than our speaking or writing vocabulary.

The words that you can use appropriately when you say or write something form what is known as your **active** vocabulary and those that you have an idea of or can guess the meaning of, but cannot use confidently form a part of your **passive** vocabulary. Our *active* vocabulary is more limited (smaller) than our *passive* vocabulary. As students we try our best to increase the repertoire of both active and passive vocabulary and gradually try to convert our passive into our active vocabulary.

Check your progress 1

1 Given below are a few words. Under which category ‘**Active**’ or ‘**Passive**’ would you put them in?

antiseptic anomaly forte herbarium paroxysm

i Consult a dictionary to find out the meaning and pronunciation of the words (given above) if you do not know them.

ii Compare your list with someone in your family or one of your friends. Does the list differ?

2 Look at the following words:

Rapport

Abdicate

Recede

Maverick

Would memorizing the meaning and pronunciation of these words help you in using them immediately in your speech? Give at least one reason for your answer.

2.3 CONTENT WORDS AND FUNCTION WORDS

Read the following sentences:

1 I saw a beautiful bird sitting on a branch of a gulmohar tree.

2 Pari, my five-year-old granddaughter, wants to wear blue jeans all the time. She cries loudly whenever her parents ask her to put on a frock, however beautiful.

Look at the **underlined** words carefully, once again. Even as isolated discrete words they carry some meaning. These words, if you observe carefully, are nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. These words are called **content** words. On the other hand, the words which are not underlined are **function** words. These words are more frequently used and carry some grammatical meaning. These words which are also

known as *structure* words, are modal and auxiliary verbs, determiners, prepositions and conjunctions.

New learners learn content words first. The list of such words is **open**, in the sense that new words are added to this list over the years, e.g. think of the word *helipad* or *smart phone*. Did these words exist a hundred years ago? Why were these words added to the list of words that are so commonly used today? Think and write your answer here.

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.....
.....

On the other hand, **function** words are a much smaller set, although more frequently used and the word list is a **closed** one, i.e. no *new* determiners or prepositions have been added to this list.

Check your progress 2

1 Which of the following words would you consider of recent origin?

phishing	hand blender	milk shake	
cute	clone	pod	
flash mob	blue tooth	smart card	smiley

2 Look for the meanings of the words given in question 1. Use a dictionary to decide the part of speech these words belong to.

3 Find out how long these words have been in circulation.

2.4 SOME DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH VOCABULARY

As Second Language users we may find a few stumbling blocks in mastering this language. In this section we shall look at a few of these difficulties.

One Word Many Meanings (Homonyms)

Homonyms are words which have the same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings in different contexts. In the following sentences, the word **club** has different meanings.

As a child, you might have gone to a local **club** in your locality. You might have seen the picture of *Bhim* with a **club** in his hand in *Mahabharat* serial on television, and if you play cards, you have to deal with **clubs** in the pack. Your teacher might suggest to you to **club** two paragraphs together to make the writing more compact.

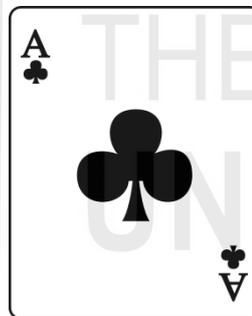
- A **club** is an association of people with common interest (first sentence).



- A **club** is a heavy stick with a thick end, used as a hand weapon (*Bhim* with a club in his hand).



- **Club** is one of the four suits in a conventional pack of playing cards.



- In the third sentence, **club** means **combine**.

Let us take another example.

- 1 She went to her room and lay down on the **bed**.
- 2 My husband is busy preparing a **bed** for the roses.
- 3 Heat the curry thoroughly and serve it on a **bed** of rice.

You will notice that the word *bed* has different meanings in the examples given above. You understand the meaning from the **context** in which the word has been used, e.g. the context of the first sentence is a piece of furniture, in the second sentence the context is the area in a garden so that plants can be grown in it, whereas “a bed of rice” in a recipe would mean a layer of rice.

These contexts give the clues about the meaning of the word *bed* or *club*. Read the examples given above again and look at the words that give you the clues about the situation.

In English, there are many such words where the spelling (written form) and pronunciation (sound) are the same but they have different meanings in different contexts.

Check your progress 3

- 1 There are many **fans** in the room.
Is this sentence ambiguous in meaning? Give a reason for your answer.

- 2 What are the different meanings of the word *light*? Use the word in sentences to bring out the different meanings. Compare your answers with any dictionary.

Same Sound, Different Form and Meanings (Homophones)

Look at the following set of words.

	A	B
1	great	grate
2	flour	flower
3	break	brake
4	there	their
5	stationary	stationery
6	bow	bough

What is common in the different set of words?

Yes. You have got it right. The pronunciation (sound) of both the words are exactly the same but the written form (spelling) are different. The meaning of the words is also different. Which spelling to use is decided by the context in which the word is used. Such pair of words – with identical sounds but different spelling and different meaning – are known as **homophones**.

homo = same
phone = sound

Check your progress 4

- 1 You must have noticed the warning on many cars / taxies in India - *Keep distance. Power Break*. What is wrong? Why?

- 2 Give examples of five sets of homophones.

Same Form Different Sound and Meaning (Homographs)

Now let us look at a different set of examples.

- 1a The Director’s Secretary took down the **minutes**.
1b Even **minute** details are taken care of by a diligent organizer.
- 2a Warriors, in earlier days, fought with **bows** and arrows.
2b We **bow** our head to the martyrs of our freedom movement.

What do you notice in the above examples? Write it in a sentence here.

Did you notice that the spelling in both the sets of sentences are the same? What about the sound (pronunciation) and meaning? Consult a dictionary if you are not sure. Such pair of words are termed homographs.

homo = same
graph = writing

In the above examples, did the context of the word help you in deciding the *meaning*? If yes, then write down the pronunciation and meanings of the words *minute* in sentences 1a and 1b and *bow* in sentences 2a and 2b.

Check your progress 5

- 1 ‘The words *lead* (v) and *lead* (n) are homographs as are the words *live* (v) and *live* (adj). Explain with suitable example.

- 2 Give examples of another set of homographs (other than the ones mentioned here). Use them in your sentences to bring out the difference in meaning. Consult a dictionary to check the pronunciation.

Idiomatic Expressions

Does lend an ear to someone mean the same as to lend someone money? What does from hand to mouth mean? Who in your family is the apple of your eye? Or what is it to have a green thumb?

As an experienced user of the language, you know the meaning of such ‘idiomatic expressions’ and you are well aware that these *frozen* expressions mean something which is totally different from the sum total of the individual words. The meaning cannot be derived

from individual words and must be **learnt** as a complete unit of meaning. And this understanding is acquired slowly, gradually and with constant contact with the language.

Check your progress 6

1 Explain the meaning of the underlined idioms.

A I refuse to play second fiddle to my younger sister any more. I have had enough.

B I am sorry I cannot listen to you now. I am pressed for time.

C I'd better write the information in my notebook. I have a head like a sieve.

2 Substitute the underlined words with the appropriate idiom given in the box. You may have to change the form of the idiom if required.

a skeleton in the cupboard	make short work of
drop a line	get the message

A You needn't look at your watch again. I've understood what you want me to do and I'll go now.

B It is commonly said that every family has a secret or embarrassing fact which no one likes to discuss.

C Don't forget to write to us as soon as you arrive in Delhi.

3 Think of four idiomatic expressions in your **mother tongue** that uses different body parts e.g. *to have a finger in every pie*. Find out if there are English equivalent to those expressions in your mother tongue. Two examples in Hindi are given below:

Oongli pe nachaana

Sar aankon pe bithaana

Formal-Informal Expressions / Approved – Disapproved

Levels of formality and the connotations of some words also pose practical problems for students of a second language. In learning a new language there is a tendency to use the more formal language in normal conversational situations or vice versa i.e. use a slang or colloquial expression inappropriately. Similarly, the positive or negative connotations of some words

might create difficulty for you. We all know how we applaud the **firmness, determination** or **resoluteness** (words indicating approval) of people we like whereas we deplore the **stubbornness, obstinacy** and **pigheadedness** (terms indicating disapproval) of those whom we don't like in exactly the same situations. Similarly, the same person can be **fat** or **plump** to different persons. It takes a long time for most of us to catch such nuances of the language.

Check your progress 7

1 Write *formal (f)*, *informal (inf)*, *approved* or *disapproved* against the words given below. Consult a dictionary, if necessary.

Laudatory	.....	Smart Alec	.....
Sissy	.....	Felicitous	.....
Dirt cheap	.....	Dude	.....
Soporific	.....	Clobber	.....

Hyponyms (word categories)

Orange is a fruit and so is an apple, banana or a mango. The word *fruit* is a *superordinate* while the name of other fruits given above are the hyponyms. Similarly, learners are familiar with different items in the world around them. Given below are some examples of this category of sense relationship.

Superordinate	Hyponyms
Clothes	Shirt, trousers, frock, kurta...
Trees	Neem, banyan, gulmohar, acacia...
Different methods of cooking	Boil, simmer, bake, roast, deep fry, stir fry, sauté...
Colours	Blue, Red, White, Crimson, aquamarine, sea green, ochre...

Collocation (word partnerships)

Collocations are essentially word partnerships. A collocation is two or more words that often go together. Native speakers intuitively know which words frequently combine and are acceptable and which do not. Knowing the frequent collocations is essential for accurate natural English.

We can use the word colour in the following combination:

Adjective	Bright colour, favourite colour
Noun	Colour blind, eye/hair colour, Colour film/ photograph, Colour television
Preposition	In colour

(Source: Collins Co-build Advanced Illustrated Dictionary)

Some other collocations could be: ideal character, central figure, gained status, met her fate, make your bed, do your homework, and so on.

Check your progress 8

- 1 Read the words given below in the rectangle. Put them in proper categories. One is done for you as an example. In some you have to write the categories in the boxes.

Human dwellings 1 wigwam	Apartment Canada Mansion Iceland Mammoth Sofa Norway Villa Wigwam Dinosaurs Chaise Denmark Chair Duckbilled platypus Lounge Igloo Tent Bungalow	
		Countries

- 2 We often use certain words in combination with others. An example is given for you. Use a dictionary, if necessary.

Money	make,
Friend	close,
Hair (colour)	.....
Hair (style)	.....

Antonyms (Opposites)

The term *antonym* is used to refer to words which have an opposite meaning. But there are pairs of words which contrast in terms of a scale, e.g. hot/cold; tall/short; easy/difficult. These opposites are **gradable**. For example, if we put hot/cold (water) at two ends of a continuum, we get something like this.

Scalding hot → boiling hot → warm → lukewarm → tepid → quite cold → freezing cold

But think of opposites, male/female. Such meanings are **non-gradable** or **mutually exclusive**. A **boy** cannot be a girl or a dead person cannot be alive/living.

Synonyms (Similar Meaning)

Every language has groups of lexical items which are very similar in meaning (Synonym) but are never identical. For example: **angry, annoyed, upset** and **irritated** may be synonyms but each word differs slightly from the others. You have to pay attention to synonyms if you wish to choose appropriate words in different types of writing.

Check your progress 9

- 1 Make a word continuum for the pair big/small.
- Huge → very big → → very small → tiny

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2 Can words like **limp, hobble, stroll, saunter, march, stride, trudge** and **trek** be used as synonyms of walk? Consult a dictionary and give reasons for your answer.

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3 How many synonyms are there for the word *glamour*? Write them here.

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2.5 WORD BUILDING: AFFIXATION AND COMPOUNDING

Affixation

We can build new words in English by adding *prefixes* and *suffixes* to the base word. For example, to the word *mortal* we can use the prefix *im* to make a new word *immortal* and we can get the word *immortalise* by adding the suffix *-ise*. Similarly, the word *agree* can take the prefix *dis-* to make a new word *disagree* and another word *disagreement* with the suffix *-ment*.

Use of prefixes like *im-*, *dis-* or *multi-* when added to the root word gives it a different meaning. For example:

un	-	uncommon, unable
in	-	inconvenient, injustice
dis	-	disadvantage, disagree
il	-	illegal, illegible
ir	-	irregular, irrelevant
im	-	impossible, impatient
multi	-	multilingual, multifaceted
fore	-	forenoon, forewarn

Here are some suffixes:

-age	bag-baggage, post-postage
-dom	kind-kingdom, star-stardom
-hood	state-statehood, boy-boyhood
-ism	hero-heroism, Hindu-Hinduism

Compounding

Compounds are made up of two or more parts which can also occur independently as words. These separate words are combined to form other new words which are listed separately in the dictionary and have separate meanings.

Blackboard
Flowerpot
Armchair

Check your progress 10

1. Choose the correct prefix from the prefixes given in brackets to express the kind of meaning indicated for each of the words given below:

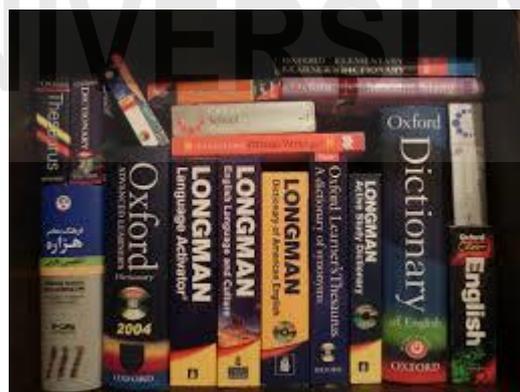
- i Contented (mal-, dis-, un-) negative
- ii Represent (non-, mal-, mis-) ‘wrongly’
- iii Inform (mal-, mis-, dis-) ‘incorrectly’
- iv Active (ultra-, in-, hyper-) ‘extremely’
- v Comfortable (un-, dis-, non-) negative

2. Match the words in Column A with those in Column B to form compounds.

A	B
brain	pour
down	felt
draw	case
heart	back
stair	storm
	pin

2.6 USING A DICTIONARY AND A THESAURUS

Dictionaries are of help in checking and learning of pronunciation with the correct stress pattern, meaning in contexts (with examples) or grammar of a word (e.g. the part of speech it belongs to; whether transitive or intransitive in case of a verb or whether countable or uncountable in case of a noun). Some dictionaries like the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2002 edition) (OALD) gives the origin of the word.



For example, **Gordian Knot** means a very difficult or impossible task or problem. Then the origin of the word it mentioned:

ORIGIN: From the legend in which King Gordius tied a very complicated knot and said that whoever untied it would become the ruler of Asia. Alexander the Great cut through the knot with his sword.

Moreover, dictionaries like the Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995 edition), includes a picture dictionary (e.g. on kitchen, bicycles, etc.) as does Advanced Oxford or Collins Co build.

The last dictionary mentioned here also includes Word Webs or topic related vocabulary through encyclopedia – like readings combined with related art work, word partnerships (collocations) and word links (word origin) e.g. (geo=earth; geography; geology, geopolitical) or even usage like less and fewer. You also have used the dictionary to decide whether a particular word is formal, informal, and shows approval and disapproval to complete your task set in Check your progress 7. While the language of literary criticism of OALD is very informative, the Text Messaging and Emoticons included in Collins Cobuild is very handy in an age of e-mails and SMSs. In other words, a dictionary is not only a useful reference material but also a treasure house of information to build up the vocabulary of your learners.

In higher classes, you will find both the thesaurus and the dictionary extremely beneficial in reading and writing tasks.

Check your progress 11

1 Substitute the word **nice** in the following paragraph. Change sentence construction, if necessary.

It was a **nice** morning. We went out for a **nice** picnic to a **nice** park near our house. The food was **nice** and we played **nice** games. We enjoyed the **nice** outing.

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.....

2.7 LET US SUM UP

Isolated words are difficult to remember. When we learn words and phrases, our memory tries to group words that go together so that one word of phrase reminds us another. We have discussed some of these in different sections of this unit e.g.

- Related to the same topic (*Associated words* e.g. the picture of a kitchen)
- Examples of a more general word (*superordinate* – Hyponyms, e.g. Furniture – table, chair etc.)
- Similar in meaning (*synonyms* e.g. lazy – indolent)
- Opposite in meaning (*antonyms* lazy – active)
- Arranged along a scale, *word continuum* e.g. letter – word – phrase – sentence – paragraph – page – chapter – book
- Built from the same basic word (*Affixation, Compound words* e.g. Type – retype (prefix) , child – children (suffix), type + write (compound words)

A word is rarely learnt at one go. Hence, the need to **review**, **revise** and **recycle** words at frequent intervals so that the learning is spiral and a new aspect is added gradually over the years.

Moreover, vocabulary learning **does not end** in school. It continues well into our adult life. It is a life-long process. Also, our **passive** vocabulary is much larger than our **active** vocabulary.

2.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Morgan, J. and Rinvoluceri, M. 1986. *Vocabulary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

UKOU. (1980). *Words and Their Meanings*. Milton Keynes: UKOU

2.9 ANSWERS

Check your progress 1

1. Open ended and therefore answers will vary.
2. We do not learn those words which we don’t use. Also, to use a word one must know the meaning, the pronunciation, the context in which the word can be used, the other words that need to be used with that particular word and also the grammar of the word.

Check your progress 2

1. Phishing, iPod, Blue tooth, Smart Card, Smiley
2. a) Phishing (noun) – The practice of trying to trick people into giving secret financial information. (computing)
b) Hand blender, Milkshake, Clone (n/v),
c) iPod, Flash mob, Bluetooth, smart card, smiley (noun)
d) cute (adjective)
3. Answer in your own words.

Check your progress 3

1. The context is not clear. Which fan are we talking about? – The ceiling, table or pedestal fans in a room **or** the ardent admirers (as in the fans of Aamir Khan)
2. There was no *light* in the room.
I prefer *light* colour paint on walls.
I am very *light* sleeper.
Let have some *light* refreshment.

Check your progress 4

- 1 The correct word should have been **brake**. The person who has got it written does not know the difference of meaning between *break* and *brake*.
- 2 blue – blew; see – sea; sale – sail; son – sun; piece – peace.

Check your progress 5

- 1 a) Good leaders **lead** (v) from the front.
Use a lead (n) pencil to draw and sketch.
- b) We **live** (v) in the capital city of India.
Be careful of **live** (adjective) wires. / A **live** (adjective) telecast of the final tennis match.
- 2 Write in your own words.

Check your progress 6

- 1 a) If you **play second fiddle** to someone, your position is less important although you work together; if you **have had enough**, you are unhappy with a situation and want it to stop.
- b) have no time.
- c) If you **have a head like a sieve** you do tend to forget important things.
- 2 a) got the message.
- b) a skeleton in the cupboard.
- c) drop a line.
- 3 Write in your own words.

Check your progress 7

- Laudatory – formal
Smart alec – informal, disapproval
Dirt cheap – informal
Dude - informal
Sissy - informal, disapproval
Felicitous- formal
Soporific- formal
Clobber- informal

Check your progress 8

1

	Super ordinate	Hyponyms
1	Dwellings (human)	Villa, wigwam, apartment, mansion, bungalow, igloo, tent
2	Countries	Canada, Iceland, Norway, Scotland, Denmark
3	Furniture	Sofa, coffee table, chaise longue, chair
4	Animals (Extinct)	Mammoth, dinosaurs, duckbilled platypus

- 2 Make: mess; comment; money; suggestion
Close: contest/election; contact; friend; family; connection; attention

Hair (colour): golden; red; black; white; grey; auburn; salt and pepper; blonde
Hair (style): long; short; frizzy; permed; straight; shoulder/waist/knee length; curly

Check your progress 9

- 1 Huge – very big – big – quite big – medium sized – quite small – small – tiny
- 2 Do it yourself.
- 3 Do it yourself.

Check your progress 10

- 1
 - i. Contented (mal-, dis-, un-) negative **discontented**
 - ii. Represent (non-, mal-, mis-) ‘wrongly’ **misrepresent**
 - iii. Inform (mal-, mis-, dis-) ‘incorrectly’ **misinform**
 - iv. Active (ultra-, in-, hyper-) ‘extremely’ **hyperactive**
 - v. Comfortable (un-, dis-, non-) negative **uncomfortable**
- 2 Brainstorm
Downpour
Drawback
Heartfelt
Staircase

Check your progress 11

Write the answer in your own words.

ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY