UNIT 2 TEACHING-LEARNING VOCABULARY

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you to

- Locate vocabulary learning in the second language learning/ teaching context
- Make you aware of the factors involved in learning a word
- Enhance your awareness of learner difficulties in learning new vocabulary
- Help you assess the size of the vocabulary your learners need
- Design a variety of tasks for vocabulary development, integrating them with other language skills

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As background information it may be a good idea to briefly go over different approaches to language teaching and see how they have dealt with the question of vocabulary in their framework. (You have already become familiar with the basic ideas and assumptions underlying these approaches.) You will recall that whereas the structural approach emphasized the formal nature of language, focusing on grammar and structure of the language, functional and communicative approaches shifted emphasis to function of language and communicative needs of the learner. However, vocabulary did not get the attention it required in either of the approaches. Hence, in these approaches, vocabulary remained a rather neglected area of interest for the theoretical researchers as well as classroom teachers. It was felt that vocabulary would develop on its own, incidentally as it were, as the learner went through structural drills or communicative exercises. Then in the 1980s and 90s, there was a resurgence of interest in vocabulary learning and teaching on part of researchers and applied linguists, when lexical approaches

to language teaching informed the practices and methodologies of language teaching. We should however keep in mind the fact that whatever the emphasis put on vocabulary by the adherents of different schools of thought, for teachers and learners, vocabulary always was and remains, a crucial element in language learning. This perception of teachers and learners is now being shared by researchers and applied linguists; the growing research in the area of vocabulary has put the second language learners and teachers in a very comfortable position, bringing to the area of vocabulary learning and teaching a wealth of information and ideas. It is generally agreed now that vocabulary learning plays a crucial part in language learning.

As we understand better how vocabulary is learnt, how new words are stored in, and retrieved from the memory, how different approaches can be beneficial in learning new vocabulary, we are now in a privileged position to make use of this knowledge in a systematic manner. The amount of research done in the area of vocabulary can help us better in setting the targets of vocabulary size for our learners, it can also help us in investing our efforts in learning high-frequency words rather than low-frequency words. (We will explain what we mean by 'size' of vocabulary and high and low-frequency words.) We can also increase our awareness about how different strategies can work better for different purpose, and different set of learners.

Before we go on to talk about different approaches to vocabulary learning in the next section, let's pause to ask ourselves a few questions. (There are no absolute answers to these questions, but answering these questions will help you articulate the assumptions you may have made about how vocabulary is learnt.)

Cheek Your Progress 1

1) Is it useful to give learners lists of words to learn, unconnected with any language task? What could be the possible advantages or disadvantages of this approach?

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2) Do you think it is better to focus on new vocabulary in context, helping the learner to negotiate the meaning using contextual clues?

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3) How far is it advisable, if at all, to relate the target word to learners' L1?

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2.2 APPROACHES TO VOCABULARY LEARNING

We can think of vocabulary learning in two ways: direct and indirect learning of vocabulary. By direct learning we mean concentrating on words as isolated items, focusing on their form, meaning, may be use— in other words, paying attention to words per se, through word exercises, vocabulary games, or word puzzles. In indirect learning we imbibe the knowledge of words rather unconsciously, when we are interested in understanding the message. Because we are keen to get to the message, we make an effort to tackle the unknown words with the help of the language clues, the world knowledge we have and the immediate context. According to Krashen (1981) vocabulary learning takes place naturally when the focus is on negotiating the meaning rather than on the formal features. In a language-learning programme, it is advisable to provide for both direct and indirect learning of vocabulary. And in fact syllabus planners, teaching materials, and classroom teachers do take into account both ways of learning vocabulary.

Teaching material handle vocabulary in the following ways. Let us categoriese the ways in which it is done (from the most indirect to the most direct):

1) Materials have been designed, keeping in mind the vocabulary needs and the level of the learners. There may not be explicit attention paid to vocabulary in the texts but at the preparation stage a lot of care is taken to include graded vocabulary, simplified texts – in other words, the materials have been based on the word lists prepared on the basis of frequency counts, usefulness and learnability.

2) Vocabulary may not be presented in a systematic way but teachers may handle the vocabulary in a principled manner. Even while tackling a new word in the context of a passage, they may focus on the basic meaning, the pronunciation, spelling and other related grammatical information of the word. In this way, the teachers make vocabulary a less indirect activity.

3) The materials may have exercises which may he taught in relation to and in conjunction with the other language skills. For example, new or difficult vocabulary may he taught before a reading exercise, or vocabulary may be taught for a specific writing task or exercises may be devoted to working out the meaning of new words encountered in the reading passage. In any one of these ways vocabulary is being dealt with in a more conscious manner.

4) The Most direct way of dealing with new vocabulary is taking lists of words at a time. Though there is the disadvantage of treating the words in isolation as though words exist in a vacuum, yet in the second / foreign language learning context there are a number of advantages of this method. For example, one can hasten the speed of learning words and one can maximize the size of vocabulary to be learnt.

Cheek Your Progress 2

1) Do you like to give your students lists of words to learn? How do you choose the lists?

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2) What aspects of words do you ask them to focus on – pronunciation, spelling, meaning, or grammatical information, or all of them?

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3) Do your students use a bilingual dictionary or a monolingual dictionary? Which one do you recommend and why?

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2.3 FACTORS INVOLVED IN LEARNING WORDS

Before we consider what is meant when we say we have learnt a word, we should try to understand what we mean by a word. For example, should we consider *look, looks, looking,* and *looked* as instances of one word *look* or as different words? Should we consider different meanings of the word *look* to belong to different words or the same word, as in *Mary looked beautiful in her simplicity* and in *Mary looked at the picture of her old friend with great interest*. The assumptions we make regarding these issues will also influence our ways of teaching new vocabulary.

While learning words we have to look into the purposes of learning vocabulary as well. We have to make a distinction between receptive learning (e.g., listening and reading) and productive learning (e.g. speaking and writing). Whereas in receptive learning we are concerned with recognition of a word (its form and sound) and its meaning, in productive learning we need to be able to use a word when required, in other words, to know how to say it, how to spell it, which context to use it in and which grammatical framework to put it in. We are using

the table in Nation (1990) to answer the question, what are the factors involved in knowing a word? For receptive knowledge we have a different set of answers from those for productive knowledge.

The table is given below:

Table 1: Knowing A Word

Form		
Spoken form	R	What does the word sound like?
	P	How is the word pronounced?
Written form	R	What does the word look like?
	P	How is the word written and spelled?
Position		
Grammatical patterns	R	In what patterns does the word occur?
Patterns	P	In what patterns must we use the word?
Collocations	R	What words or types of words can be expected before or after the word?
	P	What words or types of words must we use with this word?
Function		
Frequency	R	How common is this word?
	P	How often should the word be used?
Appropriateness	R	Where should we expect to meet this word?
	P	Where can this word be used?
Meaning		
Concept	R	What does the word mean?
	P	What words should be used to express this meaning?
Associations	R	What other words does this word make us think of?
	P	What other words could we use instead of this one?

(R = Receptive; P = Productive)

Receptive Learning

Receptive learning is concerned with comprehension, which involves understanding, storage in memory and recognition. In many cases, this knowledge of words may remain (partially) passive. We know the word when we meet it; we may not recall it when we need to use it. For purposes of listening and reading, it may be sufficient if we can distinguish a word from other words on the basis of sound and spelling. As we process words, we develop language awareness and know vaguely that a particular word 'looks' right or 'sounds' right, for instance, we know that the word *meen* does not look right, but that *mean* does. We also have some expectation about the grammar of the word *mean*; we know for example

that *mean* is a verb, that it can have different verb forms such as *means, meant*, *meaning*, that it takes an object (to mean something), and the grammatical constraint on its use in continuous tenses (the sentence – rajat in Hindi is meaning 'silver' is ungrammatical: we can only say. 'rajat in Hindi means 'silver'.)

We also have a vague sense of the collocations that will go with *mean* (by collocations we mean the words that generally occur with a word). For example, we have the collocation to *mean well*, we do not normally say to *mean nicely*. We also say, '*he is a well-meaning person*' to convey the sense that he is a well-intentioned person.

Also we know the concept that the word *mean* conveys. Apart from the basic concept we have a vague sense of its extended meanings, as in *Well*, *he didn't mean to hurt you,* using it in the sense of *intend*. We also have some expectation about the frequency of its use, i.e., whether *mean* is a word that has high or low-frequency of use. As language users we also expect it to occur in informal contexts rather than formal ones. We also know that the word *mean* in its basic meaning is equivalent to *convey the concept, sense, etc*.

Words are also stored in our mind in semantic networks; for example a word such as *night* may evoke words such as *dark, stars, sleep*; it may also bring to our mind *day* as the opposite of *night*. Words such as *thin* may also be associated with *slim, skinny*, etc. In other words, words are related to each other through sameness or oppositeness of meaning or through function(s) associated with them.

Productive learning

Productive learning subsumes receptive learning and extends it to active language use, for purposes such as speaking and writing. We are not only able to recognize and understand words when we meet them, we are also able to recall and use them when we want to articulate our thoughts. In other words, we are able to pronounce them correctly with correct sound and stress; we are able to use them in the right context with appropriate grammatical features and proper register. This knowledge of words is **active** rather than **passive**.

In real life context we do not and may not make such neat distinctions between receptive and productive learning. They overlap in most cases. When we speak, we are also listeners. When we read, we also write. We may also not emphasize all the factors involved in learning and knowing a word. Yet this analytical framework enables us, the teachers, to comprehend the nuances of knowledge that are implicit in learning vocabulary. It is for us to see which vocabulary we should select for receptive learning and which vocabulary for productive learning. We will also have to make judgments about which aspects of word knowledge to focus on while planning exercises for vocabulary learning, of course depending on the level, the need, prior experience and, if possible, L1 of the learner.

Check your progress 3

Given below is the glossary for the story 'The Open Window', taken from the Supplementary Reader for Class XI (English Core Course). Try to answer briefly the questions that follow the glossary.

Glossary

endeavoured : tried

discounting	:	belittling; reducing the importance of
moping	:	looking sad and listless
rectory	:	church
moor	:	a piece of open, uncultivated land preserved for shooting
treacherous	:	deceptive; misleading
marshes	:	an area of low-lying land which is flooded in the wet season or at high tide
rattled on	:	talked on without giving any attention to the listener's responses
infirmities	:	weaknesses
mackintosh	:	full-length waterproof coat
pariah dog	:	stray dog

1) Which of the above words would you select for receptive learning and why? Which aspects of word knowledge would you focus on?

2) Do you think the gloss for 'rattled on' is exactly synonymous, and easily exchangeable in a text? If not, try to think why.

3) The word *endeavored* is glossed as *tried*. The assumption on the part of the material producer is that *tried* is comprehensible and not new. Do you think *tried* may be a word worth teaching/ learning? If so, then can you think of the reasons? Would you like to tell your learners the different contexts in which either the one or the other will be more appropriate?

2.4 POINTS TO CONSIDER IN TEACHING VOCABULARY

As teachers, we have to consider the following points in teaching vocabulary:

i) Deciding what vocabulary to select for focused attention

ii) Maximizing learner resources

iii) Extending vocabulary learning to phrases, fixed formulas, collocations, etc.

i) Deciding what vocabulary to select for focused attention

Teachers have to decide on how much of class time to devote to high-frequency words, how much to low-frequency words and how much to specialized vocabulary. Depending on this choice, teachers may choose different strategies for teaching vocabulary. Another factor responsible for the choice of the strategy will be the level of the learners. Different word lists, such as General Service List (West 1953), A University Word List (Nation 1990) provide information about the frequency counts of words. Frequency of words in a list is calculated by counting the number of words occurring in a text and noting how many times a word occurs in a text and where. Also a word may be used more frequently in a certain meaning compared to other meanings. Apart from the word lists, many of the dictionaries also give information about the frequency of occurrence of words and their meanings. And an experienced teacher instinctively develops a sense of words that are more frequent in use, occurring in regular patterns.

Many times it is seen that words of high-frequency are not selected for attention by the teachers. The reasons may be any one or all of the following:

i) The course book does not accord priority to high-frequency words

ii) The students already know the meaning of the word.

iii) The teacher wants to focus on the unknown (generally low-frequency) words.

iv) The teacher does not think it worthwhile to spend class time on a word which is not difficult to understand.

Implicit in all the above reasons is a belief that vocabulary learning is limited to word meaning. What we as teachers have to remember is that it is these high-frequency words that facilitate our language use and make our English sound like English. We need to reiterate to ourselves that it is not enough to (vaguely) know the meaning of a word, we have also to know what grammar is associated with it, what words collocate with it, what is the range of the word, and (if possible) how it compares with its translation equivalent in L1.

For low-frequency words and items of specialized vocabulary it may be sufficient (depending on the needs of the learner) to impart to the learners the meaning of the word, for these words will be mostly needed for receptive rather than productive use. This can be done either through translation in their L1 (if both teachers and learners have a common L1) or through a definition in either English or L1. It may not be necessary or even desirable to deal with this vocabulary at length. (We shall talk about the teaching techniques in a short while.)

For example, let's look at the glossary that follows the poem 'Written in Early Spring' (Class XII core English course book), p.21:

Glossary

Recline	:	lean back in a position of rest
Primrose	:	a wild plant with yellow flowers
Bower	:	a shady place under a tree
Lament	:	express sorrow

Out of the four words glossed above, teachers can almost ignore the word 'primrose' – a word the meaning of which learners can easily guess at, and which they may not need for productive vocabulary. 'Bower' is also a low-frequency word, which may not be selected for detailed explanation; however, it may be, useful to let the students know that the use of 'bower' is restricted to the register of poetry and it should not be used in ordinary language. 'Lament' and 'recline' do not come under very low-frequency words, and they may need a little more detailed treatment. Both are more formal in style than their paraphrases are. The teacher may, if she so wishes, give examples to show how they are used:

Lament the loss of a dear one; a **reclining** pose, a **reclining** chair, etc.

The example will show that the verb 'lament' is followed immediately by a noun whereas we express sorrow <u>at</u> something. Apart from the glossed words, the teacher may choose a word such as 'enjoy' (a high-frequency word) used in the poem for explanation of its grammar, emphasizing the frame in which it comes, viz. *enjoy something, enjoy doing something, enjoy oneself at something*. The following sentences exemplify the grammatical frames in which 'enjoy' occurs:

Neena enjoyed the book of poems very much.

Manini enjoys listening to music in the evenings.

All of us enjoyed ourselves at Ramu's birthday party.

The teacher may also draw attention to words formed with suffixes -able and -ment, i.e. 'enjoyable' and 'enjoyment'. This may help them to apply their knowledge of word formation to words they come across in the course of reading, rather than having to do an exercise on forming derivatives from a list of words in a vacuum, The learners may be asked to paraphrase the above sentences using 'enjoyable' and 'enjoyment', (e.g. The book of poems Neena was reading was very enjoyable. Listening to music gives Manini a lot of enjoyment).

ii) Maximizing learner resources

The teacher has to help learners maximize their resources so that students can learn vocabulary independently. For this purpose, teachers have to take the following things into account:

a) Learners' prior experience and level, and

b) Making use of Ll

Let's explain what we mean by the above factors.

a) Learners' prior experience and level

The teacher may and should try to build on the previous knowledge of the learner. There should be an effort on part of the teacher to assess what words pose more difficulty for the learner. The course books for different levels have an underlying sense of this design but there is no explicit way in which reference to previous learning is made or linkages established between two different but related tasks on vocabulary. Let's take an example from the textbook for Class IX, **Steps to English**. The cited exercises are from the unit, **Kathmandu**, p.19.

Vocabulary

Use the suffixes -ion or -tion to form nouns from the following verbs. Make the necessary changes in the spelling of the words.

Example:

proclaim — proclamation

Cremate ————

Act ————

Exhaust ————

It can be said with some certainty that learners are already aware of words such as action, which are formed with the suffix -ion. Hence words ending in -ion may present less difficult for them. This awareness has to be instilled in them and they can start increasing their vocabulary using word-formation processes. It is for the teacher to point out such exercises in the book so that learners are made conscious of the regularities and patterns that exist in vocabulary. Making students see the relationship between word parts makes the learning of new items easy.

Again, another exercise given on the same page is a matching exercise in which a number of phrasal verbs in which the lexical verb is *break* are given with

corresponding meanings. The exercise as given treats these phrasal verbs as an isolated phenomenon; it is the teacher again who can make the learner see a link between these phrasal verbs and others such as *shout out* and *blare out* that occur in the text. This may be a good occasion for the teacher to tell the learner that whereas *break* (a high-frequency word) is more productive (for it enters into relationship with so many adverb particles), a verb such as *blare* (a low-frequency word) is not. The learner can be encouraged to make an inventory of high-frequency words and the phrasal verbs that they form as they encounter them. They may also be taught how the use of phrasal verbs lends a natural flavour to their language. They may be thus given an insight into the formality / informality cline in English.

Relating words to learners' L1

It may be helpful to use a translation equivalent if it saves class time, though too much use of translation is to be avoided. Translation has two advantages: (i) it can speed up learning; and (ii) it may help the learner to see how a certain concept is expressed in two languages, thereby reducing the sense of English being an alien language. Translation can also have drawbacks for there are often no exact equivalents of English words in the mother tongue. However it is a stimulating exercise for the advanced learners to see how two languages express ideas differently, how they convey notions of politeness differently. For an Indian speaker, the use of *please* with an imperative sentence is polite as the corresponding sentence in Hindi is with kripaya, However, Hindi makes use of the device of using a plural marker with the imperative verb which adds politeness to the request. Students can be asked to compare the ways a request is made in English and Hindi respectively as in *Can/Will/Could* you do this for me? and *kripya mere liye yeh kar den*. Hence just knowing the translation equivalent is also not sufficient. At times the L1 word may enter into similar collocations as the English one, at times the possibilities of collocations are different, for example, in English *strong* and *weak* collocate with *tea* I like my tea *weak*. However, because of L1 influence, Hindi speakers use the expression *light tea* instead of *weak tea* for in Hindi the corresponding expression for *weak tea* is '*halki chai*' (light tea). In either way it helps the learner to see equivalences and differences in the two languages.

When it comes to word parts, the learner can be made aware of similar processes at work in their Ll. They can see that there are regular patterns in every language in which new words are formed with the addition of prefixes and suffixes.

For establishing vocabulary in the mind, association, repetition, and attention are very important. The new word to be learnt should be made salient in some way; associating it with the L1 word may be one of the ways.

Extending vocabulary to phrases, fixed expressions

Recent research on language acquisition also suggests that words are not stored in the mind as single items alone but as parts of phrases (look into, by the way), noun compounds (lift operator, hockey player), larger chunks of speech (as far as I am concerned, to tell you the truth), fixed formulas (how are you? fine, thank you). These expressions are easily retrievable and make for fluency in language. Besides, the inclusion of larger chunks of language in the teaching of vocabulary reduces the focus on words as single units and directs attention to the way they shape up discourse.

Nattinger (1980) in his research in natural language processing compares language use to a compositional process which stitches together preassembled lexical phrases into discourse. Some of the phrases according to him are:

1) Polywords: short, fixed phrases, whose meaning is often not analyzable from the phrase. These are often treated as a single unit, e.g. idioms (kick the bucket), euphemisms (wash room), phrasal verbs (put up with).

2) Short, relatively fixed phrases: allowing some variation e.g. greetings (how're you?), partings (see you later), exclamations (you can't be serious!).

3) Deictic locutions: phrases, clauses or entire sentences. They are used in social interaction

   a) to regulate conversation by indicating attitudes, expectations, defences, etc, (as far as I know, if I were you, for that matter, I didn't mean that);

   b) to exercise social control (hey, wait a minute, now look, be quite).

It is for the teacher to bring this awareness about lexical phrases to the centre of vocabulary teaching and learning. As learners become aware of these larger chunks of language they will be more fluent in their language use with less likelihood of producing deviant language.

Check Your Progress 4

1) Do you think it is useful to make a distinction between high and low-frequency words? How can it influence our approach to teaching vocabulary?

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2) Choose a unit from a text you are teaching and decide on the low-frequency words given in the glossary.

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3) Can you find examples of lexical phrases from any unit of the teaching texts? Do you think it may be worthwhile to teach them along with words?

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2.5 TECHNIQUES FOR LEARNING VOCABULARY

The teacher can teach the learner a number of techniques to increase vocabulary and establish already known vocabulary. Here are some important ways:

- Using a dictionary
- Using contextual clues
- Using crosswords, puzzles, word games

Using a dictionary

As we all know, use of a dictionary is crucial for the second language learner. We find that learners mostly use a dictionary to check the meaning of a word. Besides, mostly learners use a bilingual dictionary for this purpose. The disadvantage may be that learners miss out on the opportunity of going through a paraphrase — a skill that first language learners usually have. Language users know how to use paraphrase and circumlocution in their L1, i.e. convey their meaning even if it is in a roundabout way. Moreover a monolingual dictionary such as Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (which uses a basic 2000 word defining vocabulary) is intended to help the learner with not just pronunciation, spelling, meaning(s), but also with grammar, collocations, and other relevant information about its appropriacy in certain contexts, its frequency, the speaker attitudes associated with it. Whereas bilingual dictionaries are more often employed in the initial stages of learning, monolingual dictionaries written for non-native users concentrate on providing information, which helps actual production of language. These monolingual dictionaries provide more detailed guidance on pronunciation, spelling and spelling changes with inflectional forms, grammar and grammatical constraints. It is often seen that the dictionary as a vital resource of word knowledge remains underutilized – if not completely unused. Dictionary use can be actively built into the English teaching materials and language activities in the textbooks. The dictionary can be used for (i) increasing vocabulary, (ii) checking one's intuition about words, and (iii) reading and writing tasks, among other things.

Using contextual clues

It is greatly recommended that as teachers we inculcate in our learners the skill of guessing at the meaning of unknown words from the context of the passage in which the word occurs and from the larger context of the discourse. All good language learners use this strategy and to confirm their guesses they can later go to a dictionary. Guessing from context is a very useful way of discovering the meaning of new words and for this we can teach our students to use a number of clues. Every text develops an idea, or a situation and beginning from the topic itself there are a number of clues to help the reader along, some of which are redundancy, parallelism, anaphora, examples, etc.

Nation (1988) proposes a strategy for guessing from context. This strategy consists of five steps:

1) Guessing the meaning of the unknown word.

2) Looking at the immediate context of the unknown word and simplifying this context if necessary.

3) Looking at the wider context of the unknown word. This means looking at the relationship between the clause containing the unknown word and surrounding clauses and sentences.

4) Finding the part of speech of the unknown word.

5) Checking that the guess is correct

Let's take a look at the following lines from the unit on 'My Childhood' from Steps to English, a Class IX core English textbook.

My austere father used to avoid all inessential comforts and luxuries. However, all necessities were provided for, in terms of food, medicine or clothes...

The difficult words may be austere, inessential, and luxuries. The teacher may help the learner through the following steps:

1) The student makes a guess at the part of speech of the word, for example, *austere* seems to be an adjective because of its occurrence in the frame of a noun phrase, placed after an article and followed by a noun.

2) The student also infers from the meaning of 'avoiding comforts' used for the father that *austere* may not mean pleasure loving; the student may not come upon the exact meaning but she may make a guess, to confirm which, she will have to consult either the teacher or a dictionary.

3) The word *inessential* can be deduced from using the knowledge of prefixes. The learner already knows that attaching 'in' to a word changes it's meaning to its opposite.

4) The word *luxuries* should be a noun as it occurs in conjunction with another noun – by now students will have developed a sense that *and* conjoins words/ phrases of the same class and similar meaning. The next line with the word *necessities* seems to help the learner further establishing a relation of antonym with *luxuries*.

Students can be encouraged to guess at the meanings of new or difficult words by using their knowledge of other aspects of the language.

Crosswords, puzzles, word games

Teachers can get the learners interested in solving crossword puzzles. These introduce a sense of challenge and fun into vocabulary learning. Since the focus is not directly on learning words, the activity becomes more enjoyable. The added benefit is that learners actually practise productive knowledge of words. The meanings are given to them and they have to recall the word that matches the meaning. In the process they sometimes think of a synonym first and that sets them on a journey of exploration, looking up a near synonym, which may then lead them to the right word that fits in the puzzle. Almost incidentally, as it were, learners imbibe a lot of information.

Other word games can be: giving jumbled letters of words for learners to reassemble, or change words by adding a different letter at the beginning or at the end. Though these activities do not get integrated into other language tasks, however they are useful as class exercises, bringing some variety into the monotony of list learning.

Check Your Progress 5

1) Given below are three words having the core meaning of *strong*: firm, obstinate, stubborn. What can be a good resource to know the subtle difference between them?

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2) Do you think guessing from the context is a good strategy? What do we mean by context?

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3) In what ways is doing a crossword puzzle different from a matching exercise for word meanings? What kind of understanding do they assess?

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2.6 INTEGRATING VOCABULARY WITH LANGUAGE SKILLS OF LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING AND WRITING

In the Indian context, our learners mostly learn vocabulary either through reading or through list learning. Their exposure to the spoken word is not very considerable—limited to the teacher talk in the classroom. As a consequence, even when learners have a large passive vocabulary when it comes to reading, they find it difficult to listen with comprehension. Hence, an effort should be made to design activities, which help learners turn their reading vocabulary into a listening one. It is surmised that for both listening and speaking, learners do not use as large a vocabulary as they do for listening. Since listening goes with speaking, attention has to be directed to the speech sounds, word stress, weak forms of vowels, and contracted forms. The students have to see the written-spoken connection in words (which is also a good strategy to learn words used by learners who like to have a visual and auditory image of words they want to store in memory).

Given below are a few activities for this:

1) The teacher can select a story with a vocabulary level lower than the reading one and read it aloud, writing the difficult words on the blackboard. If the word occurs again, the teacher points to it without interrupting the flow of the story (Nation 1990). The teacher can also write down contracted forms and words which are spoken in their weak forms, e.g. I've, she's, I'd, a slice of an apple, etc. Since the teacher provides the greatest input to the students, she can also write a number of sentences on the blackboard such as following:

   Could you say that again please?

   Sorry, we didn't catch the word.

   What was the word before ……. ?

   What does ……. mean?

   This helps the students to know how to ask for clarification, repetition, etc while engaged in the listening activity.

2) The students can be given an exercise in dictation. Earlier dictation was merely a test of spelling. However, later research has shown (Oller, 1971), that dictation is a very good indicator of overall language proficiency. Performing well on a dictation test requires the integrative knowledge of the phonological, syntactic and semantic systems of a language.

   Administrating a dictation is a very important factor. The emphasis should be on the naturalness of the rate of speaking. In a research done by Sahgal (1986) most of the errors had nothing to do with spelling, but mostly with syntax and vocabulary – despite the passage being read out three times in natural speed. For example

Errors of Syntax

	Sentence from the text	**Student sentence**
i)	Gas mains burst	Gas mains bursts
		Gas main burst
ii)	If the quake strikes at sea…….	If the quake strike at sea ……..
		If quakes strikes at sea …….

Errors of Vocabulary

iii) Gaping crevices appear in busy streets. previces, premises, privileges, preserves

iv) ……huge tidal waves sweep inland. island, init, England for inland.

Swept, swipped, seek for sweep

3) For speaking, learners must be provided with a number of fixed phrases and utterances, which direct the flow of conversation. The textbook for class XI (core English) has units on Conversation techniques at the end of every chapter. These can be made use of in class, making the students use phrases such as *excuse me, I'd be glad to be of help, I was wondering if you could... yeah, sure, I'd like to but... yes, of course*.

4) For reading and writing, activities on vocabulary can be designed round the use of a dictionary. Textbooks abound in matching exercises following a reading text, which consolidate word form with word meaning. Glossary at the end of a text also promotes vocabulary but normally, glossary concentrates on low-frequency and specialized vocabulary. Pre-reading vocabulary can be worked out in the form of semantic networks such as health, environment, politics, etc depending on the topic of the text. The teacher may help activate the students' passive vocabulary, adding some words they are going to encounter in the text.

   For writing, learners have to know which collocations words enter into. Here is an interesting task on the verbs *say, talk* and *speak* (very similar in meaning but different in the collocations. The task is taken from Hill (2000):

Which of the verbs *speak, say, tell* best fit into the gaps in these authentic examples?

1) I can't ……..for the rest of the staff, though.
2) As I ……..they've already appointed someone.
3) You'd better do exactly what the doctor ……..
4) Don't worry. Everything you ……..me is confidential.
5) These figures don't …….. us what will happen next month.
6) It's too soon to ……..whether an agreement can be reached.
7) UN sources …….. agreement goes much further than any previous one.
8) To …….. you the truth, I was half expecting it.
9) It may be that actions ……..louder than words.
10) Can I …….. to Mr. Harrison, please?
11) Shall we ……..two o'clock?
12) ……..me about it!

As we can see it is hardly of any use, just knowing the meaning of these words. Unless learners encounter these words in several contexts they may not be able to use them in their writing. Again we can see it is the high-frequency words that are needed for production and it is these words that create problems.

Another exercise given below is taken from Conzett (2000) who uses an example from Walk, Amble, Stroll (Levels 1 and 2, Holliskey et al.):

Many people are interested in *old things* and events which happened *a long time ago*. Some of them like to buy *expensive antique furniture* and others enjoy reading books about Julius Caesar and other leaders from *ancient history*. Other people are more interested in *new things* and *new ideas*. They like to have *modern furniture* or read about *current events*. Some of them only go to the most *recent movies*. Do you prefer old or new movies? Are you interested in ancient or modem history?

Italics show the collocations. Learners can easily see that we can say ancient history but not old history or antique history. The teacher can simply point out the collocations or create additional exercises to reinforce the collocations.

One such activity is a collocation grid. Using the old-new domain the grid is given below (Conzett 2000):

	Events	Furniture	History	Ideas	Movies
Old		+		+	+
Antique		+			
Ancient	?		+	?	
New		+		+	+
Recent	+		+	+	+
Current	+			+	
Modern	?	+	+	+	+

This activity can be done by learners in class; the blank grid with headings can be made by the teacher.

Check Your Progress 6

1) Do you think learners can understand spoken English if they have a large size of vocabulary?

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2) Do you think collocations are an important area in vocabulary learning? Give at least one reason in support of your answer.

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3) Write at least five collocations you can have with *time*.

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

We have tried to place vocabulary in the context of teaching and learning English as a second language. We have seen how the most important task facing language learners is to acquire a large size of vocabulary so that they can perform communicative tasks in speech and writing. Vocabulary can be learnt in both direct and indirect ways. The teacher has to help learners with strategies for increasing and establishing their vocabulary. What we have tried to say is that the knowledge of vocabulary can be receptive (active), and productive (passive), and this distinction is important to decide what technique should be used for learning vocabulary. Word knowledge as we have defined it, consists in knowing its grammar and the patterns and collocations that are associated with the word. Moreover, vocabulary learning is extended to larger chunks of language stored in our mind— a quite revolutionary concept for teaching vocabulary. We have also distinguished between high and low-frequency words since they need different kind of treatment. We do not still discard the idea of learning words as single units; however we are getting increasingly aware of the fact that vocabulary is to be integrated into the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In fact, vocabulary learning has to be treated as a skill by itself.

2.8 KEY WORDS

Collocations : Collocations are words that co-occur naturally in a significant way, for example, sunny occurs with day and disposition. They can be grammatical and lexical collocations.

Context : Context can be viewed as morphological, syntactic and discourse information in a given text. The larger context can be the background information pertaining to the subject matter of the text.

High-frequency Words : High-frequency words are mainly short words which cannot be broken into meaningful parts, such as: put, come, go, look, bring, break, etc.

Low-frequency Words : Low-frequency words consist of thousands of words; they are analyzable into smaller parts, e.g. words such as repress, compress, suppress, depress, etc.

Preassembled lexical phrases : Preassembled lexical phrases are large chunks of language which are stored in our mind as single units.

2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Carter, Ronald and McCarthy, Michael (eds.) 1988. *Vocabulary and Language Teaching.* Longman, London.

Conzett, Jane. 2000. *Integrating collocation into a reading and writing course. In Teaching Collocation*, p.78

Hill, Jimmie. 2000. Revising priorities: from grammatical failure to collocational success. *In Teaching Collocation*,p.61

Lewis, Michael. (ed.) 2000. *Teaching Collocation*

McCathy, Michael and O'Dell, Felicity (eds.) 1994. *English Vocabulary in Use*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Nation, I.P.S. 1990. *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*. U.S.A. Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

2.10 ANSWERS

Check your progress 1

1&2&3 These exercises are meant for brainstorming to activate your thinking about vocabulary learning.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Learning words in lists has the advantage that our receptive knowledge increases very rapidly. The disadvantage is that learners do not meet words in actual use.

2) All the aspects form part of understanding a word. However, you may focus on some more depending on the goals you set for your learners.

3) At the early stages students may not handle a monolingual dictionary. As their proficiency advances they should move on to a learners' monolingual dictionary.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Words such as *rectory, moor, marshes, mackintosh, pariah dog*. These words may not be very useful for production. It would be sufficient to know their meaning.

2) The gloss does not say that the phrase *rattled on* is used in informal style.

3) The word *try* is a very productive word. Time should be spent on giving the learners different collocations, e.g. *try to do something, try a dish, give something a try*, etc.

Check Your Progress 4

1) It is a good distinction for it changes our attitude to selection of words for an in-depth study, otherwise sometimes we spend more time on less useful vocabulary.

2&3 Open ended

Check Your Progress 5

1) A good dictionary can tell us that though all the three words have the core meaning of being strong, *firm* is appreciative whereas *obstinate* and *stubborn* show speaker's disapproval.

2) Context means the immediate environment of the word as well as the larger context of the topic.

3) Apart from the fun part, a crossword promotes productive knowledge, whereas the matching exercise assesses receptive knowledge.

Check Your Progress 6

1) Students need listening experience for comprehension of spoken English.

2) Collocations are a shadowy area between meaning and grammar. Words do not occur in isolation; they occur in context with other words. The knowledge of collocations helps learners produce natural English.

3) spend time, waste time, manage one's time, a good time, difficult times.