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## Theory and Practice in Teaching English Economics Vocabulary

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*Abstract. The present paper proposes to speak about teaching English economics vocabulary. So, at first, we make references to the key points and the issues which are raised by teaching and learning specific vocabulary: learners usually select the words they want to acquire; once learned, words move from active to passive status; one of teachers' activities is to help students remember the acquired vocabulary; teachers should provide the correct exposure to words and opportunities for learners to practice them.*

*Secondly, we will study examples of economics vocabulary teaching and show how discovery techniques can aid vocabulary acquisition.*

*In the end we draw the conclusions, showing the importance and the active role of the discovery techniques in teaching English vocabulary.*

**Keywords:** teacher, student, learning process, teaching activities

**JEL Codes:** A20

### 1. Introduction

There is a great variety of answers to the questions: why do people want to learn a foreign language / English? Probably the most of them do it because it is on the school curriculum; some of the students and their parents also, really want to study it; others feel neutral or even negative about the study of languages; some students consider that they increase their chances for a better job knowing English or another foreign language. English has a premium position since it is considered the international language of communication.

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## 2. Literature review

As it is recognized by all pedagogues and teachers, Doris A. Santoro asserts that the teaching process represents an intellectual and moral practice full of contradictions, impediments and challenges, having two major characteristics: quotidian and extraordinary (1).

Nowadays, linguists have turned their attention to vocabulary, focusing on its importance in language teaching. Thus, Gairns and Redman (2) stressed the work with words, a significant book for language teachers. Carter and McCarthy (3) explore more theoretically some of the issues behind how words work and the way they are learned by pupils. McCarthy (4) speaks about vocabulary, how this is treated in teaching materials and practice.

As concerns the vocabulary effectiveness issues, several aspects have been established. Thus, direct instructions of vocabulary should entail: the usage of a contextual base, multiple and repetitive exposure to new words; the usage of multiple context for direct instruction of new words; actively engaged students in the learning process; the usage of more than one type of instruction (5).

Michael O King makes references to two main topics: principles of rich vocabulary instruction and the theoretical rationale behind recommendations for teaching vocabulary words in groups that make semantic/thematic relationships apparent to students. (6)

## 3. Selecting Vocabulary

In connection to vocabulary, the question *what do students need to know?* raises a lot of commentaries. The first remarkable thing about vocabulary items is that they frequently have more than one meaning. For example, the word *land* (7) has the following meanings:

- more than five as a noun: a politically organized body of people under a single government, the territory occupied by a nation, territory over which rule or control is exercised, the solid part of the earth's surface, material in the top layer of the surface of the earth in which plants can grow (especially with reference to its quality or use) and

- six as a verb: bring into a different state, reach or come to rest, cause to come to the ground, shoot at and force to come down, arrive on shore, deliver (a blow). When we meet a word, we try to decipher its meaning. In order to manage this, we look at the context in which it is used.

Another aspect connected to meaning is that sometimes words have meanings in relation with other words (8, p. 156). Thus, students know that revenue means income. Revenue has a general meaning, while commission, wage, salary, fees, royalty, grant, pension, dividend are more specific.

We understand the meaning of a word like blue collar in the context of a word like white collar; domestic/home trade in the context of foreign/overseas trade. Words have opposites or antonyms, but they also have synonyms. Here we have to mention that words rarely have absolute synonyms; context may make them synonymous on particular cases. Thus, the students have to know about two other concepts: meaning in context and sense relations.

Another concept that governs words meaning is collocation that is which words go with each other. Thus, we have chief accounting officer as a „controller responsible for maintaining the records of the company operations, interprets the results of the operations, plans and recommends future actions” (9, p. 180), but we cannot have „director accounting officer”.

The action of selecting vocabulary is of great importance and faces many questions. Generally speaking, we reached a consensus as concerns the grammatical structures that are to be taught. As



concerns the vocabulary teaching, the problem is to select the words. Most dictionaries for upper intermediate level contain about 55,000 words. This number, on the one hand, is a small fraction of the words in a language, but, on the other hand, is an enormous list that has to be reduced to smaller proportions, in order to be learned by the students.

The main principles in selecting specific vocabulary are frequency and coverage (8, p. 153-154). Thus, the most used words are to be taught first. The principle of coverage, in its turn, states that a word with more meanings is more useful than a word with a specific meaning.

The most remarkable work in order to establish which are the most frequent words was done by Michael West (10), Hindmarsh (11). Many universities have corpuses based on computer. Nowadays the young people use technology in ways we could never imagine. Instead of passively watching television, the “F Generation” is actively participating in the distribution of entertainment and information. For the first time in history, youth are the authorities on something really important (12). To sustain the opinion above, we mention that there are on line applications that can count the number of characters and words, like in the example below (13).



Fig. 1: Application for counting words in a text

Nowadays it is accepted to build vocabulary syllabuses with the help of computers and computerized information. The decision about what is the suitable vocabulary is influenced by information about its frequency and use. We also have to take into consideration other clues: topic, function, structure, needs and wants (8, p. 156).

#### 4. Teaching Vocabulary through Different Techniques

The specialists consider the language structures as being the skeleton of any language. As a consequence, vocabulary is the flesh. To deal well with grammatical structures represents a significant ability, but it cannot express meaning without using words, proper words. In classes, the structural accuracy is the central issue, the most important interesting point.



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It is obvious the need to teach language structures, if we want to utter sentences, meanings, to express something. Vocabulary is not only incidental to the aim of language teaching; students learn structures and these are to be used, developed, applied to a rich and specific vocabulary, depending on the life situation one faces with.

Nowadays, teachers recognize the interdependency between vocabulary and grammar acquisition.

The activity of teaching vocabulary is more than just presenting students the new words. This action, of presenting new words is only one constituent part of the activity, but there are other issues.

The specialists speak about active and passive vocabulary in a foreign language. The former means that part of the vocabulary the students are able to use, once they have been taught to, while the latter includes the words the students recognize when they meet them, but probably they are not able to produce those words.

Sometimes students know some words better than other words, but no one can demonstrate that these are the words taught by teachers: some words are learned through other routes, not through the learning process, other words may be looked for by the students, because they wanted to use them or simply came across them.

After the primary level, at the intermediate level and above it, other techniques for presenting words can be used for the students; one of them is the discovery technique. That is the teacher does not give everything, the students work out rules and meanings for themselves. Thus, they find out what a word means and why it is used.

At the intermediate level students handle a significant store of vocabulary. They are shown examples of words in action.

In order to achieve high yield, teachers have to engage their students in learning activities. (8, p. 160)

## 5. Examples of vocabulary teaching

There is a wide variety of activities which help teachers teach and practice words and their uses. Interaction and discovery are useful techniques, but they cannot be always applied. There are situations when teacher presentation or explanation is more useful or effective. We present a few examples:

1. Realia. That means to bring the things they represent into the classroom.
2. Pictures. These can be board drawings, wall pictures, charts, cards, magazine pictures and other visual representations.
3. Mime, action and gesture. Actions are usually better explained by mime.
4. Contrast. The words relation can be used to teach meaning: foreign trade – home trade, white collar – blue collar, net – gross profit.
5. Enumeration. Teachers can use general and specific words in presenting meaning. Thus, we say "means of revenue" and explain it by enumerating different items: commission, salary, wage, royalty, grant, pension, dividend.
6. Explanation. The action of explaining the words meaning can be difficult at first level, but it can be successfully used at intermediate and upper levels.
7. Translation. It is one of the quickest and easiest ways to present the words meaning. This way has also its drawbacks: it is not always easy to translate words.



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Another teacher activity is to assure that students know how the words they have just learned are said. With intermediate and upper levels, one way of doing this is through phonetic symbols. It is obvious that knowledge of the symbols will help the students to access pronunciation from dictionaries.

The following activity expands the concept of general and specific words. The activity uses the mind map technique to help students put a list of words into different groups.

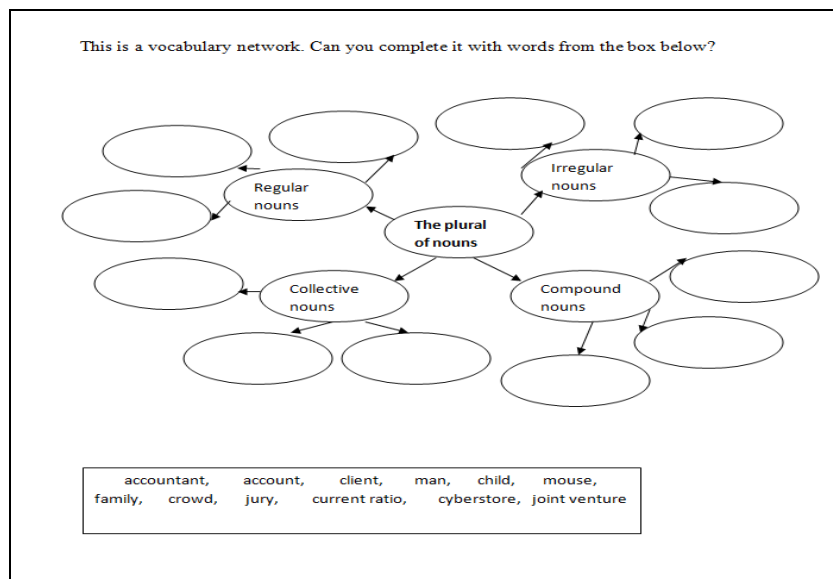


Fig. 2: Map technique

The following activity requires students to match the economics concepts with their meaning. They have to put a cross in the right box, as it is given in the model. Previously the students have read different passages to see the words in context.

In financial accounting, an asset is an economic resource. Anything tangible or intangible that can be owned or controlled to produce value and that is held by a company to produce positive economic value is an asset. Simply stated, assets represent value of ownership that can be converted into cash (although cash itself is also considered an asset). (14)

Gifts of money or other items of value which are otherwise available to everyone on an equivalent basis, and not for dishonest purposes, are not bribery. Offering a discount or a refund to all purchasers is a legal rebate and is not bribery. (15)

Cash is coming in from customers or clients who are buying your products or services. If customers don't pay at time of purchase, some of your cash flow is coming from collections of accounts receivable. (16)

In 1931, Friedrich A. Hayek, the Austrian economist at the London School of Economics, created a diagram known as Hayek's triangles as a theoretical measure of the stages of production. Hayek's triangles formed the basis of gross output, before GNP or GDP were invented. However, Hayek's work was strictly theoretical, and no attempt was developed to statistically measure gross output. (17)



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According to the United Nations Statistics Division, wholesale is the resale (sale without transformation) of new and used goods to retailers, to industrial, commercial, institutional or professional users, or to other wholesalers, or involves acting as an agent or broker in buying merchandise

”For the other variables they were introduced into a general xxxxxx, since the method from general to specific was adopted, then we preferred not to keep them for a better xxxxxx of the model. In the absence of the common economic theory of banking crises, the initial choice of variables was based on empirical and theoretical studies on financial xxxxxx. On the contrary, the final choice of the model was made after several xxxxxx and the introduction of several variabilities, to choose the best specification which highlights the variables, likely to lead to or point out the happening of a banking crisis.”

for, or selling merchandise to, such persons or companies. Wholesalers frequently physically assemble sort and grade goods in large lots, break bulk, repack and redistribute in smaller lots. (18)

|  | assets | bribe | cash flow | output | wholesale |
|--|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-----------|
| the things of value owned by a company                             |        |       |           |        |           |
| money that is paid secretly and dishonestly to obtain someone help |        | x     |           |        |           |
| the movement of cash in and out of a business                      |        |       |           |        |           |
| quantity of goods produced   |        |       |           |        |           |
| buying and selling in large quantities                             |        |       |           |        |           |

The next example can be used with advanced students, although its principle – usage of a modified fill-in passage – can be adapted to be used to almost all levels. Students have to read a text on economics theme; they are told that some words have been blocked out in the text by the symbol xxxxxx. Each of them have to think of as many words as possible; then they have to compare their options in pairs and groups, till they have reached the consensus. The text may be the following (19):

The purpose of this type of activity is to reinforce the point about meaning in context. The best choices are: model, quality, crises and estimates.

## 6. Conclusions

In this paper we specified the problems of selection vocabulary and showed that counting the frequency alone is not enough to determine what words should be taught.



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We saw that to know a word is more than to know its meaning; this implies to know about its use, its formation, its grammar behaviour.

We stressed the idea that students have to interact with words, not only to learn them, but to manipulate them; one successful method of doing this is the direct method we have presented. This method was considered a reaction to the restrictions of grammar-translations method used before. The direct method abandons translations and brings together teachers and students in speaking and relating the grammatical forms they are studying. The method suffered transformations; it uses the stimulus-response-reinforcement model and thus, through a permanent process of reinforcement, it succeeds in offering good habits in language learners.

We presented different types of activities designated to present and practice vocabulary. All the above presented examples aim to encourage students to work out meanings for them. This involvement of the students with words is, as a matter of fact, a provocation which helps students remember the new words at least for a while. Teachers have to encourage students to practice using the words so that they become more familiar.

The direct and communicative activities have the following characteristics:

- a desire to communicate;
- communicative purpose;
- content not form; variety of language;
- no teacher intervention; no materials control (8).

The traditional methods and techniques have their advantages, also. If we put into balance the modern techniques and the traditional ones, we can say that both have strong and weak points. A good teacher must have the inspiration and pedagogical feeling of choosing the most appropriate method for the specific of his/her class, at a certain moment. He/she has to answer the following questions: how, why and where is he/she teaching? By analysing these features he/she can choose from the multitude of procedures and techniques.

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