

TURNING PERCEPTIVE VOCABULARY INTO CONTEXT VOCABULARY IN BUSINESS ENGLISH

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Abstract: *Language is made up of five basic components: morphology, phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Morphology in linguistics represents the study of the words, how they are formed and their relationship with other words in the same language; phonology involves the rules regarding the structure of the speech sounds and their sequence; syntax is the study of morphemes and how they form larger units; pragmatics involves the rules for appropriate and effective communication; semantics deals with vocabulary and the way concepts are expressed through words. Thus, vocabulary is one of the constituent elements of the language. Words carry meaning and have their own energy representing the building blocks of communication. According to the context they are used in, their meaning differs, therefore, vocabulary acquisition is crucial when talking about English for Specific Purposes, in our situation, Business English. But how is vocabulary acquisition in second language done? Vocabulary building often occurs through reading, however, it is unlikely for the students in foreign language to acquire the basic specific vocabulary through reading. The present paper deals with the strategies a Business English teacher approaches in order to assist students to learn vocabulary as well as to equip them with methods to turn perceptive vocabulary into context vocabulary. How can vocabulary be taught efficiently? How can teacher provide learners the needed input in order to shift vocabulary from input to output? How can teachers introduce vocabulary in order for optimal retention to be ensured? These are some the questions the present paper addresses.*

Keywords: *teaching Business English; vocabulary; innovation; on-line technologies.*

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1.Introduction

Teachers and students alike have always been concerned with vocabulary acquisition, which is actually the process of learning new words. This is an important part in foreign language learning, vocabulary being considered as central in language teaching, having an enormous importance to a language learner. According to Steven Stahl “vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word does not only imply a definition but also implies how the word fits into the

world“. „Vocabulary is an essential building block of language as such it makes sense to be able to measure learners'knowledge of it“. (Schmitt, Schmitt & Clapham). Thus, vocabulary represents one of the most important elements of language learning and teaching as it affords students to access all forms of oral and written communication of the word, being also a “fundamental facet of literacy skills“. (Pulido & Hambrick). Teachers propose a vast variety of meanings for the term vocabulary. To some, it represents sight-word vocabulary, meaning the immediate recognition of words by students; others describe the term as the words understood by students; and to some others vocabulary represents the understanding of the heard or spoken words. „*The content teachers further describe it as an academic vocabulary that reflects the content-specific words or students' understanding of the oral and print words*“ (Antonacci & O'Callaghan, 2011).

Another definition provided by other teachers regard the term as the knowledge that the learners should have about the meaning of words, oral or written; thus, knowledge comes in at least two types, receptive and productive. The receptive vocabulary is what students understand and recognize, while the productive vocabulary is what students can write or speak. To Hiebert and Kamil (2005), “*the productive vocabulary is a set of words that are well-known and used frequently by the learners in speaking or writing. The receptive vocabulary is a set of words, which are less frequent and for which learners assign meanings while listening and reading*”.

Words, phrases, collocations and idioms are indispensable in taking shape of both receptive and productive language learning skill. Therefore, knowing words is a multidimensional and complex construct and the purpose of the teachers is to use the most effective strategies that improve the learners' vocabulary in order for these to develop skills like speaking and writing. The discussion goes on with the strategies the teacher provides, in order to move vocabulary from input to intake. Once the word is learnt, how do students achieve long-term retention for easy retrieval for future communication? How can we best introduce new words and practice them to ensure the optimal retention?

2. Vocabulary as the Basis of Communication

Nothing can be done without words, vocabulary being the basis of communication. Jamalipour and Farahani (2012) strengthen the importance of vocabulary by saying that it is the main communication tool. Compared to another aspect of the language, the vocabulary seems to be more useful and more urgent than grammar. Successful communication depends on the vast vocabulary acquired in a language. Considering this, Schmitt (2000) emphasizes that lexical knowledge is crucial to communication and Nation (2001) describes the link between vocabulary knowledge and language practice as complementary. They are interrelated: the skill of vocabulary enables language use and vice versa. The use of the language leads to an increased vocabulary knowledge. However, long before the 1980 there have been a prominent interest in vocabulary learning and teaching. Beginning with 1987, due to the vast quantities of lexical research, vocabulary has acquired a prominent and legitimate place within applied linguistics. Thus, vocabulary is one of the constituent elements of the language. Researchers such as Maximo (2000),

Marion (2008), Nation (2001, 2005), Susanto (2017) and many others have come to the conclusion that the acquisition of vocabulary is central for the successful use of a foreign language and it plays a very important role in the formation of written texts and complete spoken texts. In 2000, Maximo stated a lot of reasons for giving special attention to vocabulary acquisition. The mastery of a language depends on the vocabulary's diversity, having no rules that the learners should follow like in the case of syntax and phonology. In 2001 Nation stated that *'learning vocabulary items plays a vital role in all language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.'* Alqahtani continues in 2015 arguing that *'the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is essential for successful foreign language use because without an extensive vocabulary, a language learner will be unable to use the structures and functions we may have learned for comprehensible communication.'* Vocabulary is considered to be a reflection of social reality. There are four reasons for saying that. Richards (2001) theorises these four reasons:

- the primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication;
- the language is a system for the expression of meaning;
- the structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses;
- the primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural but categories of functional and communicative meaning.

Believing that the language is made up of symbols representing human thoughts and feelings, then, the reality of human thoughts seems to be grasped only through the language. Thus, the word choice in our communication is definitely determined by our experience. The word choice produces and perceives emotions which are contextually linked to the situation where, when, and how they are communicated and received.

Language is made up of five basic components: morphology, phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Morphology in linguistics represents the study of the words, how they are formed and their relationship with other words in the same language; phonology involves the rules regarding the structure of the speech sounds and their sequence; syntax is the study of morphemes and how they form larger units; pragmatics involves the rules for appropriate and effective communication; semantics deals with vocabulary and the way concepts are expressed through words. Words carry meaning and have their own energy representing the building blocks of communication. According to the context they are used in, their meaning differs, therefore, vocabulary acquisition is crucial when talking about English for Specific Purposes, in our situation, Business English. But before thinking about designing programs based on specific vocabulary teaching, teachers need to understand the vocabulary challenge faced by the learners of English, as a second language. Among the other languages spoken around the world, English probably contains the greatest number of words, which makes learning its vocabulary an incredibly harsh task to do. There are many other languages which routinely create new words by adding a prefix or a suffix (Spanish) or which just combine two or more simple words together into a longer compound word (German). In these languages, by understanding the system underlying lexical constructions, learners can create and use a large number of new words. Up to a certain level, English utilizes the same system of word creation. But on a larger scale, learners have to acquire a considerable number of words that do not have an underlying forming pattern. However, the difficulty students

face when learning English vocabulary should be put into context. The Webster's New International Dictionary (1961) mentions 54,000 or so word families appearing in English and even educated native speakers will know a fraction of this number (around 20,000). The good news is that researchers have found out that it is possible to function in English with vocabularies smaller than this. Adolphs & Schmitt acknowledge the fact that in order to participate in basic everyday oral communication, knowledge of the most frequent 2,000-3,000-word families provides the necessary lexical resources. Second language learners with a knowledge of the most frequently used 10,000 words are considered to have achieved enough vocabulary to cope with the challenges of university studies in a second language. Albeit vocabulary is not the only element that conveys meaning, there are some other vital features like grammar, intonation, stress, rhythm, pauses, silences and tone of voice. Wilkins states that "while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (Wilkins, 2020). So, the key of successful communication lies in the knowledge of a large number of words. According to Nation (2001), we can talk about three dimensions of lexical knowledge that a word has: form, meaning, and use. Form refers to pronunciation and spelling; meaning refers to structure of words, ideas, and preferences; and use refers to knowledge of syntax, collocation, and constraints in use. Schmitt has put it into a simpler way: vocabulary knowledge is depicted as the ability to recognize the components of words and as the receptive and productive expertise and fluency. (Schmitt, 2014)

When we talk about English for Specific Purposes, learners need to focus on a specific field of study and obviously the criterion to choose the target word selection is the frequency of occurrence. Words that occur frequently in English are typically the most useful one and they are the first to be acquired by the students. It is absolutely clear that the most frequently used words represent the essential foundation on which language use is based and it is needed to be learnt regardless of the effort. The question that arises is the following: how does receptive vocabulary turn into productive vocabulary when talking about Business English? There has been a lot of research on the issue of the students' levels of perceptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary but the research on methods regarding turning receptive vocabulary into productive vocabulary has been limited.

3. Perceptive Vocabulary

Perceptive or receptive vocabulary of a person also known as 'receive' represents the number of words that are generally understood when they are heard, read or seen. Students are in receptive control of the words that they understand when they hear them or read them. When vocabulary is taught, learning is likely to be receptive as teachers tell the students the meaning of the word, provide definitions and use the new word in a sentence. Thus, perceptive vocabulary knowledge represents the capacity of the students to comprehend a spoken or written word. Receptive activities, such as matching words to their definitions, looking up new words in a dictionary and learning from word pairs are most commonly used by teachers in order to enlarge the students' vocabulary, being more common than cloze exercises or writing tasks.

4. Productive Vocabulary

On the other hand, the productive vocabulary represents the knowledge to produce a word when the learner can use it in writing or speaking. Students are in productive control of words when they use them to express themselves in speech or in writing. The first step is the perception of words and only after intentional learning they become available for their productive use. It is stated that first, the students know vocabulary words receptively and only after a while they become available for their productive use. The vocabulary items that the students recognize and understand are receptive vocabulary items whereas the lexical items that the students deploy in their communication and writing are productive vocabulary words. There are two basic skills, speaking and writing, that make use of the productive vocabulary. Thus, we can say that the productive vocabulary is regarded as a process of active word because learners can generate words in order to express thoughts and feelings.

5. Relations between receptive vocabulary knowledge and productive vocabulary knowledge.

There are various assumptions about the connection between receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. According to Webb (2013) when students study a word receptively, the impact is on the receptive vocabulary; when students learn a word in productive way, the results accounted for are both for the receptive and the productive knowledge. The receptive knowledge competence regards to both listening and reading skills, while the productive knowledge competence is concerned with speaking and writing skills (Schmitt, Schmitt & Clapham, 2001). Moreover, adequate vocabulary knowledge facilitates learning of target language and at the same time determines the extent to which the learner is capable of using the language (Nation, 2001). According to Melks Teichrow “receptive knowledge gradually becomes productive when the students learn more vocabulary items on the topic “ (M., Teichrow, 2012). Vocabulary knowledge encompasses receptive and productive knowledge. However, students studying Business English, and not only, face the fact that limited vocabulary knowledge hinders effective communications and represents a great challenge when it comes to express themselves in writing, especially when we talk about carrying out academic tasks that are usually written. Most prominent researchers in the field came to the conclusion that vocabulary can be divided into active vocabulary – vocabulary that can be used and call it orally and passive vocabulary – vocabulary formed of words known through recognition but cannot be called and produced through writing. This categorization of vocabulary seems somehow to limit it to its function, meaning and word structure. Henriksen has divided knowledge of vocabulary into three parts: the level of meaning and understanding, the level of relationship between words, and the level of learner’s control and access to knowledge about the word. The discussion goes on and Nation has broadened the construction of vocabulary knowledge by combining form, represented by pronunciation and spelling, with meaning represented by structure and meaning of the words, ideas, preferences and use represented by syntax, collocations and constraint in use. Schmitt claims that vocabulary knowledge can be assessed by means of learner’s ability to gain,

understand, remember and retrieve the items. Due to the fact that vocabulary knowledge is multi-faceted, language teachers must have a more comprehensive approach to vocabulary development, in order for the students to reach a higher quantity of productive vocabulary. Thus, the students' ability to identify spelling in the written form of a word will precede the ability to spell correctly, as well as the ability to identify and recognize the written form may precede the ability to convey meaning. On the other hand, teachers must know that it is also likely to spell words correctly and use the right words with grammar before the meaning of the word is understood. In other words, we have productive vocabulary knowledge in written aspect or productive vocabulary knowledge in grammatical function before receptive vocabulary knowledge in form and meaning. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to distinguish between receptive and productive knowledge in every aspect of vocabulary knowledge if we want to study and understand the productive vocabulary knowledge. After all, our ultimate goal is to bring learning vocabulary in the form of oral or written communication. In 2013 Webb claimed that "*the study of a word receptively only gives impact at the meaning in receptive while learning vocabulary in productive way, the results accounted for receptive and productive knowledge*". Thus, both prove to have a strong relationship in the development of vocabulary, especially in improving the learners' language efficiency. As a consequence, both teachers and learners benefit from teaching/learning vocabulary when they completely understand the aspect of vocabulary knowledge and its process being understood.

Research in the domain of vocabulary acquisition brought to light two problems: acquisition through direct vocabulary instruction and incidental vocabulary acquisition. Intentional vocabulary acquisition refers to activities that have the final target the development of the vocabulary mainly. Incidental vocabulary acquisition refers to learning word as the by-product of something else, such as reading for comprehension. Language professionals have been continuously debating whether students should be taught Business English words individually, directly or in the context, meaning the presentation of a word in a sentence. But even if most vocabulary is learned from the contexts teachers present in class, one should not conclude that this could represent the fastest and most efficient way of learning specific vocabulary. By learning words in the context, the students acquire not only the phonetic, syntactic and semantic rules but also how to use that certain term properly in a context. Also, in the case of definition-based learning or synonym or translation in the native language, the students become familiar with just one meaning of the word which leads to a shallow level of word knowledge, not increasing the comprehension of the text that contains the word in discussion.

6. Ideas on how to boost productive vocabulary in Business English classes

During the years we have conducted a study regarding the development of Business English vocabulary learning (receptive as well as productive) among different groups of students, in different learning situations. The methods used have been different, ranging from focus on learning vocabulary in context (listening), teach vocabulary items in realistic contexts (reading), maximize students' speaking time on a given topic, giving presentations on a given topic, role plays, etc. Among these, one of the most relevant group has been the one where

the effectiveness of mobile learning on developing vocabulary knowledge has been tested. The study has brought to light the idea that both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge has been developed among university students. We will not get into details about all the findings of all the studies that have been conducted, but we will reveal the conclusions that can be drawn:

Multimedia, referring to a number of combinations of text, sounds, graphics, and video or animation, increases the speed and enhances the retention of vocabulary when words occur in different current situations that are presented. Moreover, it provides easy access to glosses, helping the students decode the meaning of specific words through images, it provides students with the option for viewing the materials in either visual or verbal modes, according to the students' individual learning styles. As Mayer & Sims said "*learners who possess high spatial abilities benefit more from multimedia than those who have low spatial abilities*". Yet, multimedia is highly debated in terms of bringing or not benefits to students. Studies have been undergone during the years and Lewalter (1997), Weidenmann (2002), Hoffler and Leutner (2007) and Abdulrahman and Faruk (2020) have supported the use of multimedia in Business English classes, in order to turn perceptive vocabulary into productive vocabulary. Although the ability of a corrective feedback is limited in the situation of multimedia, there have been a number of benefits mentioned in the studies above such as the students' ability to self-assess, self-monitor, and increase motivation.

Authentic Visuals and Oral and Written Texts

Authentic materials are generally defined by Galloway as "those written and oral communications produced by members of a language and culture group for members of the same language and culture group". These authentic materials capture the multiple nuances of a word that cannot be otherwise recorded or conveyed, providing an appropriate sociocultural context for the students to read, seem and feel the real language purposefully.

Deeper Level of Processing

When a task requires a higher degree of need and evaluation, thus creating a higher involvement load, a deeper level of processing occurs, having as a result a better word retention. Deeper learning tasks require the students to follow a multiple set of operations to complete the task. This means that, in order to obtain the learning of information, it is not enough to read the content but to process it, think about it and reflect on the content. The Depth/Levels of Processing Hypothesis (stated first in 1972 by Craik & Lockhart) implies the fact that the more attention and manipulations a word receives, the higher the chances of storing the vocabulary in long memory are. Word associations are reinforced when students are asked to manipulate words, relate them to other words and to their own experiences and justify their choices. As a result, critical thinking and problem solving are greatly enhanced. Information-gap activities, jigsaws, word-puzzles are effective in using a higher-level thinking skills like analysis, synthesis, and paraphrasing.

Incidental Learning and Direct Vocabulary Instruction represent two main sources of meaningful vocabulary; the first one refers to learning without having the intention to learn while the second one refers to a systematic demonstration of ways to determine the meaning of unknown words. Studies show that explicit vocabulary instruction was found to be more effective regarding vocabulary

acquisition in comparison with incidental learning as it resulted in greater and faster gains and a better retention. When reading, vocabulary acquisition is higher if it is supported by vocabulary-focused activities. Therefore, in order to optimize vocabulary learning in Business English classes, as well as turning perceptive vocabulary to productive vocabulary, teachers should provide the students vocabulary exercises before, during, and after reading the texts. There are some activities that can be suggested: highlight essential words in the text, provide vocabulary exercises that include the new vocabulary, identify words that are not connected to the topic under discussion etc. The teaching of vocabulary can be also integrated in the context of writing, as the writing process provides a space for learners to think about the words that can best convey the idea they have. This cannot be done in speaking, as the speaking process requires immediate reaction to convey ideas.

7. Conclusions

Lexical knowledge has a decisive role in Business English acquisition. Among all the linguistic competences required to be proficient, the lexical competence is the first to be mentioned in *The Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning, Teaching, Assessment (Council of Europe, 2001)*. Vocabulary plays an important role in the use of the language, being considered the heart of language skills. Moreover, it functions as the basis of communication, reflection of social reality, emotion booster and academic ability predictor. The language skill performances are based on the perceptive and productive vocabulary, having different contributions, along with the principles of teaching vocabulary, the materials used and the selection of the methods used. When teachers choose the vocabulary-learning tasks, we must take into consideration the degree of knowledge of the word since each lexical unit involves different aspects. Not all these aspects are always available. They can be incorporated gradually and progressively. Information regarding productive vocabulary knowledge aspects also provides information and guideline for teachers in developing and adopting appropriate methods and instruments in Business English classes. The support of the teachers can serve as a catalyst to encourage students in the use of the new words. Motivation, desire and environmental control must be given the necessary attention in order to ensure successful use of productive vocabulary knowledge.

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