

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO TEACHING/LEARNING VOCABULARY; AN EFFORT IN THE DIRECTION OF MAKING L-2 (LANGUAGE 2) LEARNER FRIENDLY

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Abstract

English is accepted worldwide as a communicative language, but the reality lies in its nature of being foreign to our Indian grounds. Teaching a foreign language, especially English is an uphill task for the teachers as vernacular languages of the learners dominate their vocabulary skills.

This study aims at dealing with the inhibitions associated with learning English to break off their glitches associated with learning and speaking the language. For experimentation, learners were exposed to different techniques like "learning vocabulary with flash cards", "learning vocabulary with miming", "learning vocabulary with Realia" and "learning vocabulary with context" followed with mass drill pronunciation using various emotions to break the monotony in learning vocabulary. Findings of the study were rewarding as use of different techniques aroused interest and readiness among the learners towards understanding and correct pronunciation of the words leaving a lasting imprint on their memories.

Keywords: language skills, vocabulary skills, flashcards, miming, realia.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching a foreign language, especially English which has been nationally accepted as the second language across all schools of India has become an uphill task for the teachers. No doubt the language finds its inherent exposure through media and an array of indefinable sources, still the inhibitions associated with learning English has off late increased the anxiety of the teachers and parents alike. It may seem likely that the condition in the schools of southern states is better when compared to the northern states.

I teach in a Kendriya Vidyalaya located on the border of Punjab and the Union territory Chandigarh where three languages i.e. Hindi and two vernaculars (Punjabi and Haryanvi) predominantly don the tongues of the speakers. However it may be considerably agreed that English is not a strange language to them as they can very well understand someone talking to them in English. And it is not so that they do not know English as they have been exposed to learning English through a well framed national

Curriculum framed by NCERT right from Grade -I. This project aims not to research upon the reasons of not speaking English, but to make the learners shed off their inhibitions, associated with learning this language.

The experimentation rolled out of this basic need of my learners. It was found after experimentation on a long reading text introduced for Grade-XI - The Canterville Ghost. After the complete discussion on Chapter-1, It was felt that the students were more uncomfortable and alien not to the theme of the text but the allusive and new vocabulary used in it. Routine reference of word meaning too did not help them considerably.

Their inability to feel comfortable with the vocabulary led the researcher to try her hands on some websites and books on promoting vocabulary and researcher thought of applying her learning on the particular class under study. The researcher also owes her allegiance to a few language development workshops attended at the British Library that sowed the seed towards this experimentation.

It was aimed to reach to her vision of making her learners possess considerable,

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adequate vocabulary and pronunciation skills to break off their glitches associated with learning and speaking the language. This project thus off-shoots from this basic need and experimentation – the one aimed at promoting vocabulary skills.

PREPARATORY WORK

As the researcher taught students of Grade -XI & XII, she decided to execute her experimentation on the learners of Grade -XI. At the onset it was made very clear that there is no yardstick measuring as to what is good English with good vocabulary and correct pronunciation. She also eased them conveying that as long as they were able to communicate their ideas and opinions in the language desired they are making an effort to learn the language. Moreover, English is such a globally acceptable, flexible language that it has assimilated the culture specific needs all around the world and evolved a new English of its own kind as per the locale where it is spoken, the Indian English a product of the similar kind.

The researcher prepared the learners with the readiness to understand English harping upon its need and importance with the emerging globalization and advancement. They were quite aware that English is considered as a means to achieve an extra edge over others when it comes to qualifications for a job that leads to an economic advantage. They were also aware that just to improve their job prospects or to go abroad do thousands of people learn English and not necessarily to read Shakespeare and become English.

The idea for this experimentation occurred naturally looking at the need of the learners. A **long reading text** worth 15 marks was introduced to the CBSE syllabus of Grade-XI . Students were to read the unabridged version of **The Canterville Ghost** . The vocabulary of this text was quite rich with allusions and references to medievalism, supernaturalism that posed considerable difficulty to the learners. Searching the meanings of the difficult words in the dictionary did

not help them in this situation. The helplessness of researcher at getting them made her search for other flexible ways in getting home to her students.

EXECUTION OF THE PROJECT (PROCEDURE)

As chapter -1 of the novel was read and discussed, it was natural that students had queries on vocabulary pertaining to the chapter. The researcher was ready with the instructions. Students were told to refer the words from dictionary, also paying attention to its usage. A sample of the list given here was prepared by the learners initially.

HANDOUT-1

Word Meanings (Chapter-1- The Canterville Ghost)

Punctilious(adj)- strictly attentive to minute details while listening or exhibiting conduct

rector- a priest of any church, principal of any educational /religious institution

prima donna- (an Italian word)- the leading woman in any concert

casino- a public room or building for gambling and other entertainments

lithe- readily bent ,very graceful ,very flexible

swish- to move with a hissing or whistling sound

waggonette- a light four wheeled horse drawn vehicle with two length wise seats facing each other

pheasant- an old world wild bird from North America having long tails and brilliantly coloured plumage

rook- a bird that resembles a crow

cheroot - a cylindrical cigar with both ends clipped, quite inexpensive and popular

providence- care or preparation in advance , foresight

tottered- to sway as if about to fall, to appear about to collapse ,to walk feebly or unsteadily

scouring - to clean ,polish or wash by scrubbing vigorously

belle- a popular attractive girl or a woman, especially the most attractive one of the group

resisted- to refuse to accept something and try to stop it from happening

impresarios- those who arrange plays in the theatre, etc, especially a person who manages a theatre, **opera** or **ballet** company

overtures- (n) a piece of music written as an introduction to an opera or a ballet , (v)a suggestion or an action by which somebody tries to make friends, start a business relationship, have discussions, etc. with somebody else,

knolls- small hills

enterprising- ready to take challenges, resourceful

stains- spots on a surface

courtesy- excellent manner of social conduct ,polite behaviour

alight- to get down from

split- falling of something i.e a liquid on the floor

This list of word meanings searched, however did not help them remember the meanings substantially after some period of time. This posed a challenge to the researcher as she started thinking of some effective technique that would foster the learners' retention associated with vocabulary.

Referring a few books and with the support of some websites the researcher planned to execute teaching vocabulary differently. The class was divided into four different groups. Students were again given freedom to refer the dictionary.

GROUP ACTIVITY

- The first group was given a few **flash cards** containing pictures of certain words. Most of the words chosen for this group were nouns.
- The second group was given equal number of words for which they had to enact **miming** to elicit the meaning. Most of the words were verbs for this group.
- For this group use of **realia** was made. They were provided with their set of words. They were provided with some objects.
- This group was provided words to search out the **meaning from context**. They were provided with some handouts with sentences connected to the text.
- Each group was given five to ten minutes to discuss within themselves. After this they were told to share the words of their group to the whole class in the best possible manner. The researcher moved around the group

solving their difficulties related to the understanding of the tasks provided to the learners.

Group1: Learning vocabulary with flash cards

Materials needed: Flash cards, Word meaning list

Words: wagonette, pheasant, rook, cheroot, knolls and rector.

Instructions:

- Students of this group were provided the flash cards to match their meanings.
- All group members were given sufficient copies of the first handout containing the word meaning list.
- As the teacher went to their group, learners were instructed to ask the word first by showing the flash card.
- If that did not bring in the reply, some CCQ'S (Concept checking questions) could be asked
- Flash card game to be played.
- Flash cards be stuck finally at the display board. One of the words be spoken. Students to point to the picture or a piece of paper were used to cover the picture, gradually the piece of paper was moved down, exposing the flash card bit by bit. Students were told to shout out the word as soon as they recognized the picture.

Group2: Learning vocabulary with Miming

Material needed: Word meaning list

Words given: swish, totter, scour, prima-donna, belle, resisted, courtesy

HANDOUT-2

Your group has to MIME these words:

resisted swish prima -donna belle totter
courtesy

Instructions:

- One student out of the group was made to sit on the **HOT SEAT** facing the group.
- Another student from the group showed the word written on a paper in such a way that the word was not visible to the candidate sitting in the hot seat.
- Other participants in the group made efforts to mime the word. The candidate sitting in the hot seat guessed the word by looking at the actions and gestures of the fellow participants.

Group3: Learning Vocabulary with Realia

Material needed: Using real objects/class room environment

Words given: stain, lithe, alight, scour and split

HANDOUT-3

Your group has to make use of real objects and class situations to explain the meaning of these words

stains scour lithe alight split

Instructions:

- Students were told to make use of some objects that were there on the teacher table depending upon the words provided to them.
- While one of the participants showed the object, another one in the group illustrated the word asking one or two concept checking question, say for ex. **Lithe** means very flexible. Use of a tender branch could be made to show its flexibility. The page containing meanings was already available with every group, where it was stated that - 'this word is generally associated with the flexible bodies, most commonly of ballet dancers or gymnasts.' And the concept checking questions (CCQ's) could be- What is she holding? Is the branch hard or soft?
- The same process be repeated with other words provided to the group
- Items i.e. realia be passed around in the other groups to touch and feel.
- Use of human resources and class room paraphernalia be utilized done to bring home the meaning.
- **Group4: Learning vocabulary with context**
Material needed: Word list, handouts containing words used in context

Words given: punctilious, providence, impresarios, overtures and enterprising

HANDOUT -4

Your group has to search meaning from the context:

- Suniti is very **punctilious** in nature. She cannot miss even a single instruction given by the teacher.
- One of my friends is passing through difficult times. I comforted him with God's **providence** and told him to do his best.
- Your **overtures** were so pleasing that I was compelled to talk to you.
- The charity show was well coordinated by efficient **impresarios** from the Red Cross Society
- Col. Sharma's **enterprising** efforts plunged us out from the clutches of the enemy.

- Handout containing the words used in context provided to the group
- Students to read the sentences and try to puzzle out the meaning from the sentences provided.

A copy of the handout given to the group is shown here:

- One representative was told to ask a few CCQ's reaching near the meaning. For ex. If a person is very attentive, what do we call him/her? Answer- punctilious. Similarly other participants too asked certain CCQ'S that brought them near to puzzle out the word.

Winding up the activity: Mass class drill on vocabulary acquired

After the group task on vocabulary was over, drilling of the words was done. This helped students feel confident with the pronunciation of the words. Apart from this, repetition and reinforcement also

added to the learners' familiarization with the words. This way the retention of the word in the learner's memory got strengthened.

For this use of various emotions were made to break monotony in learning vocabulary. A representative from every group was made to drill the words consecutively in one emotion i.e. in wonder, in anger, with boredom and with joy. This brought in a sort of momentum as learners got to learn speaking words with correct pronunciation.

Before the activity ended, student's doubts related to certain words were enquired. It was realized that CCQ's were the best way to clear away apprehensions. Students were also advised to maintain a **VOCABULARY RECORD** notebook where they could record the vocabulary learnt on a particular day adding to it the meaning of the word, its stress, part of the speech along with an example of usage.

RESULTS

The findings on this experimentation were very rewarding. These have been summed up as follows:

- According to the principles of vocabulary learning, one has to meet a new word at least five times in order to feel confident in using and understanding it. Students' acquaintance with a word in this experimentation was done for more than four times, each time with a different method.
- In the stipulated time period of 45 min., vocabulary of around 20-25 words was acquired. This was done by dividing a class with strength of around 45 students into four groups.

- Use of four different techniques to learn vocabulary added interest and sufficient challenge to the learners that kept them on their toes.
- The methodology of 'learning by doing' was successfully accomplished. Such learning leaves a lasting imprint on the memory of the learners.
- Vocabulary is always learnt better if taught in context. All four tasks aimed at learning with some context.
- This experimentation does not require the support of Information technology devices like computer. It can be accomplished without it. However using it can also accentuate the effect /degree of learning.
- This can be done to teach vocabulary of every chapter as reading the text is once over.
- The basic aim of a language teacher to facilitate maximum learning to be done on the part of students and herself becoming progressively unnecessary was fulfilled.
- Vocabulary learning was acquired in a non-threatening, conducive atmosphere where the learners had real fun and things were made easy to understand. This is a very important aspect to be developed by the teacher to cultivate learning.
- The light atmosphere and their radiant attitude helped them learn better. Even an average or below average performer contributed to the tasks in one or

the other Over and above this was a very good method of acquiring vocabulary. Normally every chapter has around 20-30 new words. They can be learnt best this way.

CONCLUSION

The researcher felt that the target accomplished by evincing readiness amongst learners for the subject. She could feel their awakening interest. The objective of promoting learning was realized by arousing an interest for learning the language. It was felt that if that if the vocabulary of the students could be promoted in the language desired, half of the efforts would be rewarded as other associated language skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing would follow naturally.

The experimentation can be implied by teachers, teacher -educators ,students and society in general as learning acquired here aims at reaching out ,socializing while groups were sharing their knowledge with each other. The best part of this activity was that with no cost except a few pages, its implications are far -reaching. The students anxiously looked forward to the next vocabulary learning class, which gave the researcher immense gratification.

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