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VOCABULARY TESTING: TECHNIQUES AND IMPLICATIONS

As is known, “In the beginning was the Word ...”. To know a language means to master its structure and words. Thus, vocabulary is one of the key aspects of the target language learning.

Learning the vocabulary of a foreign language is not an easy thing since each vocabulary item has its form, meaning and usage. Moreover, one should take into account the fact that every year, new words are being coined and new definitions are being added to already existing words (according to The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) their number can reach more than one thousand annually [1]).

Some more statistics and facts can be instrumental for understanding the burning character of the problem of vocabulary building by English learners.

Thus, scholars established that the average active vocabulary of an adult English speaker is around 20,000 words (their passive vocabulary being around 40,000 words). Moreover, it is incredibly difficult for a language learner to ever know as many words as a native speaker [2].

So does someone who can hold a decent conversation in a foreign language know 15,000 to 20,000 words? Is this a realistic goal for a learner of English to aim for? Research findings prove that people who have been studying languages in a traditional setting – say French in Britain or English in Japan – often struggle to learn more than 2,000 to 3,000 words, even after years of study [2].

Naturally enough, learning vocabulary is often perceived as a tedious and laborious process, which results depend on the effectiveness of different approaches for presenting vocabulary items as well as on adequate monitoring of the vocabulary acquisition process.

While teaching vocabulary items one should take into account the following things: 1) *pronunciation and spelling*: the learner has to know what a word sounds like (its pronunciation) and what it looks like (its spelling); 2) *grammar*: learners might note tense forms, transitive or intransitive verbs, plural forms of nouns, adjectives or verbs together with their following prepositions and so on; 3) *collocation*: it makes a particular combination sound “right” or “wrong” in a given

context. e.g. “to take a decision” but “to make a conclusion”; 4) *aspects of meaning*; 5) denotation; 6) *appropriateness*: learners should differentiate between formal and informal discourse and certain dialects; 7) *word formation*: one may teach the common prefixes and suffixes as well as the combination of two words.

The above considerations provide a rationale for applying practical techniques of vocabulary testing, such as: multiple-choice, cloze test, detection, transformation, matching, translation, synonym and antonym, definition, rearranging, and odd one out.

The formats to assess vocabulary can be divided into two kinds: recognition based items and productive based items. Recognition based or oriented items include the most common items such as multiple choices and matching, while productive ones include items such as gap-fill and close tests.

One should remember that vocabulary tests ought to measure only the knowledge of vocabulary, but they should never require the competence in other areas. Consequently, only words which belong to such categories as: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs (so called content words) can be included in vocabulary tests, because function words, namely articles, determiners, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs can only occur in grammar tests.

References:

1. <https://public.oed.com/updates/>
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-44569277>

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ПОГЛЯД Ч. ДІККЕНСА НА РЕАЛЬНІСТЬ ТА ВІДОБРАЖЕННЯ ЇЇ В ЙОГО ТВОРАХ

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