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**TEACHING VOCABULARY TO INTERMEDIATE EFL STUDENTS
MAJORING IN ENGLISH WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK
OF COMMUNICATIVE METHODOLOGY: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS
НАВЧАННЯ ЛЕКСИКИ СТУДЕНТІВ СЕРЕДНЬОГО РІВНЯ
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МЕТОДИКИ: ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ИХ РЕШЕНИЕ**

Розглянуто деякі проблеми навчання лексики студентів середнього рівня компетенції, які вивчають англійську мову як основну іноземну, в рамках комунікативної методики, запропоновано шляхи вирішення цих проблем. Основну увагу приділено проблемі навчання лексики студентів першого курсу у неоднорідних групах, яка може бути частково вирішена через навчання у співпраці в малих групах, що відповідає принципу комунікативності у навчанні іноземних мов. Групова робота дає можливість студентам різних здібностей засвоїти новий лексичний матеріал у процесі виконання комунікативних завдань. Проблема дисбалансу між активним і пасивним словниковим запасом студентів першого курсу може бути уникнуто через виконання різноманітних рецептивно-репродуктивних та продуктивних умовно-комунікативних вправ. Особливу роль відіграють вправи, які розвивають активний словниковий запас студентів у процесі ситуативного вживання засвоєних лексичних одиниць. Використовуючи читання та аудіювання як ефективні засоби навчання іноземної мови, викладачам слід розробити систему передтекстових та післятекстових вправ, які можуть допомогти студентам не тільки розширити свій словниковий запас, але й підвищити комунікативну компетенцію. Проблема відсутності ідеального підручника може бути вирішено завдяки творчому використанню наявних навчальних посібників, які можна доповнювати матеріалами, що підвищують зацікавленість студентів у мові, що вивчається. Адаптація деяких завдань до текстів, які не стимулюють розвиток активного словникового запасу студентів, заміна окремих завдань автентичними матеріалами можуть повністю змінити атмосферу занять, що допоможе тим, хто навчається, використовувати нові слова у процесі комунікації в різних ситуаціях.

Ключові слова: комунікативна методика, групи студентів різних здібностей, групова робота, активний словниковий запас, пасивний словниковий запас, рецептивно-репродуктивні вправи, продуктивні умовно-комунікативні вправи, комунікативна компетенція, доповнення, адаптація, заміна.

Рассмотрены некоторые проблемы обучения лексике студентов среднего уровня компетенции, изучающих английский язык как основной иностранный, в рамках коммуникативной методики, предложены пути решения этих проблем. Основное внимание уделено проблеме обучения лексике студентов первого курса в неоднородных группах, которая может быть частично решена через обучение в сотрудничестве в малых группах, что соответствует принципу коммуникативности в обучении иностранным языкам. Групповая работа дает возможность студентам разных способностей усвоить новый лексический материал в процессе выполнения коммуникативных заданий. Проблема дисбаланса между активным и пассивным словарным запасом студентов первого курса может быть преодолена путем выполнения разнообразных рецептивно-репродуктивных и продуктивных условно-коммуникативных упражнений. Особую роль играют упражнения, которые развивают активный словарный запас студентов в процессе ситуативного употребления усвоенных лексических единиц. Используя чтение и аудирование как эффективные средства обучения иностранному языку, преподавателям следует разработать систему предтекстовых и послетекстовых упражнений, которые могут помочь студентам не только расширить свой словарный запас, но и повысить коммуникативную компетенцию. Проблема отсутствия идеального учебника может быть решена благодаря творческому использованию имеющихся учебных пособий, которые можно дополнять материалами, повышающими заинтересованность студентов в изучаемом языке. Адаптация некоторых заданий к текстам, которые не стимулируют развитие активного словарного запаса студентов, замена отдельных заданий аутентичными материалами могут полностью изменить атмосферу занятий, что поможет обучаемым использовать новые слова в процессе коммуникации в разных ситуациях.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативная методика, группы студентов разных способностей, групповая работа, активный словарный запас, пассивный словарный запас, рецептивно-репродуктивные упражнения, продуктивные условно-коммуникативные упражнения, коммуникативная компетенция, дополнение, адаптация, замена.

The article is dedicated to problems of teaching vocabulary to intermediate EFL students majoring in English within the framework of communicative methodology. Some ways of solving these problems are suggested. The problem of teaching vocabulary in mixed-ability classes is paid special attention to. It can partially be solved by applying the system of learning in small groups, which satisfies the communicative principle in teaching foreign languages. Group work enables mixed-ability students to assimilate new vocabulary while performing communicative tasks. The problem of imbalance between learners' functional and receptive vocabularies can be overcome by doing various receptive-reproductive and productive relatively-communicative exercises. Special role is played by exercises which develop students' functional vocabulary at the practice and retention stages of vocabulary acquisition. Using reading and listening as effective means of teaching a foreign language, EFL teachers should create a set of pre-reading, pre-listening, post-reading and post-listening activities which can help students not only enlarge their vocabulary but also increase communicative competence. The problem of a lack of a perfect coursebook can be avoided by using available manuals creatively. Adding some materials which extend students' engagement with the target language, adapting some tasks on the basis of reading texts which do not promote the development of learners' functional vocabulary, replacing some activities with authentic materials can completely change the atmosphere of classes, which will help learners use the new words while communicating with each other in different situations.

Keywords: communicative methodology, mixed-ability classes, group work, functional vocabulary, receptive vocabulary, receptive-reproductive exercises, productive relatively-communicative exercises, communicative competence, addition, adaptation, replacement.

There is no denying that vocabulary knowledge is the single most important area of second language competence regarding academic achievement [3, p.149]. The acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is essential for EFL students since without an extensive vocabulary they will be unable to use the structures and functions they have learnt for comprehensible communication. Vocabulary, which is the biggest component of any language course, is crucial in expressing ideas and thoughts when communicating. Its development leads to mastering all four language skills. By learning new words, EFL students can increase their listening, speaking, reading and writing vocabularies and consequently improve their comprehension and production in the target language.

The status of vocabulary has been considerably enhanced recently due to the development of the communicative language teaching, which has been an influential approach for a few decades now. According to some of the fundamental principles of this method, the target language is the means of classroom communication and opportunities are given to students to express their ideas and opinions. The role of EFL teachers has also changed greatly. Nowadays they are no more the main source of new knowledge but advisors during communicative activities and facilitators of students' learning. With respect to learners, they play a central role in communication and interaction, have greater autonomy in communicative activities and take responsibility for their learning. They come up with a mutual solution by exchanging ideas and opinions with each other, help each other and learn from each other.

The importance of vocabulary in communication and the need to give it adequate attention in teaching encouraged many linguists to start discussion of theoretical and practical issues in teaching this language aspect to EFL students. Over the past three decades we have seen a number of works by R. Carter [1], I.S.P. Nation [4], J. Newton [5], N. Schmitt [6] and others which give comprehensive coverage of research in this field, offer EFL teachers practical guidelines on how to teach vocabulary and provide them with numerous examples of activities for learning and practising lexical units.

The purpose of this article is to consider some aspects of teaching vocabulary to intermediate EFL students within the framework of communicative methodology dwelling upon problems that may arise while teaching this language aspect to first-year students majoring in English and offer effective solutions to these problems.

The first problem that a university teacher is faced with while teaching communication skills to first-year students studying English as their major is mixed-ability classes. They are composed of a wide variety of students, all with their own needs reflecting the amount of education they have had in their native language, the types of previous instruction in English, their ages and emotional needs. Students of heterogeneous classes are at different levels – some with quite competent English, intermediate students, for example learners from specialized and private schools where the medium of instruction is English, some who have not yet achieved intermediate competence which involves greater fluency and general comprehension of some general authentic English, and some with a low level on entry who are not equipped with an adequate vocabulary to master their academic courses which are taught in English.

Another problem is a lack of balance between learners' functional (productive) and receptive vocabularies. If high school students are not encouraged to extend their functional vocabulary, words which they can use in their oral and written speech, they may have real problems with developing their speaking and writing skills while studying at faculties of foreign languages where English is a medium of instruction. Such learners are unable to take an active part in social interaction activities which

are compatible with communicative language teaching, in particular conversation and discussion sessions, dialogues and role plays, drama and simulations, improvisations and debates.

Most senior secondary school teachers make it their aim to enlarge their learners' receptive (passive) vocabulary, words which EFL students understand while listening and reading but which they do not necessarily use. Besides, using reading and listening only as the aims of teaching a foreign language, school language teachers forget about their educational potential as means of teaching other communication skills and language aspects, vocabulary in particular. As a consequence, first-year students' active vocabulary is underdeveloped, which, in its turn, leads to their communicational barriers or failures.

Also, among the problems that EFL teachers encounter while teaching vocabulary to intermediate university students is an apparent lack of a perfect textbook which could be the means of education. Even at intermediate level there is an enormous amount of vocabulary for first-year students to learn and no manual can hope to cover it all. Besides, no matter how well coursebooks are planned, they can be inappropriate for teachers and students who approach them with a degree of healthy scepticism. Although modern textbooks offer development of learners' vocabulary skills through a wide range of stimulating and interesting interactive tasks, contain lexical exercises practising and activating all essential vocabulary including collocations and everyday English, provide a wide choice of speaking activities as well as authentic stimulating reading and listening tasks, they do not suggest a variety of ways of dealing with the meaning and use in communication of new words, do not offer ways of reactivating and continuing to work on previously introduced vocabulary.

All the above mentioned problems give serious reasons for considering them and finding effective solutions to them.

The problem of mixed-ability classes, where the whole teaching process may be threatened by information gap between students who can keep up with the teacher's explanation and those who constantly lag behind, is one of those which require special techniques and expertise [2]. EFL teachers should balance between the best students and those who are weak in studies and need special attention. To meet this task the system of learning in groups is applied which really satisfies the communicative principle in learning. Learning in groups helps to organize the process better by shifting certain responsibilities to the strongest students in the group and making everyone share in common work despite the learner's level. It is advisable that EFL teachers adopt a strategy of peer help and teaching so that better students can help weaker ones. Working with weak students in pairs or small groups, academically bright students can explain things to them or provide good models of language performance in speaking and writing. Using pair work and group work may help to provoke shy students into talking. When they are with one or two other students willing to work with them, they are not under so much pressure as they are if asked to speak in front of the whole class. Everyone involved in group work is interested, active and thoughtful. Group work allows mixed-ability learners to cope with any unfamiliar vocabulary they encounter. Constant use of new words is the best way of learning them. For this purpose it is necessary to organize students' work in a way permitting them to approach the new words from many different sides and in many different ways. J. Newton in his article "Options for Vocabulary Learning through Communication Tasks" [5] suggests using a number of means for exposing learners to new words during task-based interaction.

Options for dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary that promote cooperative learning can be considered within a three-stage task framework including pre-emptive, in-task and post-task stages. Among *the pre-task options* he singles out *predicting*, *cooperative dictionary search* as well *words and definitions* [5, p. 31–32]. *Predicting* envisages learners' work in groups to brainstorm a list of words related to the topic and build them into a word web which displays the words in semantic categories. After exchanging their word webs and comparing them, the groups can add new words that they do not have into their own webs. *Cooperative dictionary search* involves looking up specific words from the task in dictionaries, exchanging this information by working in rapidly changing pairs and filling in a word chart while listening. *Words and definitions* is an activity which consists in learners' matching a list of words with a list of mixed definitions. It is desirable to do this activity in pairs as an information gap task. Having a table with half of the words and definitions for the words held by their partner as well as gaps for the information they do not have, each learner takes turns reading their definitions and deciding on the matching word from their partner's list.

Among *in-task options* such activities as *interactive glossary* and *negotiation* [5, p. 32–34] give the opportunity to students of mixed-ability classes to use a strategy of peer help and teaching. For *interactive glossary* learners are given definitions of task vocabulary on strips of paper, with the word on one side and the definition on the other. The definitions are divided among the students and laid face down beside them. When a learner needs help with a particular word during a task, he or she asks if anyone in the group knows the word. If not, the learner has to guess its meaning from context and check the written definition by asking another student to read it to the group. When the option *negotiation* is used, members of the group who know the meaning of the specific word try to explain it to other learners who do not know it. Using the word in new context, students are supposed to make rich associations with existing knowledge.

In the *post-task stage* J. Newton considers only one option which is called *vocabulary logs* [5, p. 36]. It is compatible with a communicative approach to teaching foreign languages as EFL students participating in this activity take responsibility for their learning by choosing the words they will revise and the way they will do this. They decide on five words that they met for the first time in some tasks and which will be useful for them. Then they complete the table with these words, example sentences, their collocations, definitions and show their plan for revising the words which may include learners' making flashcards using the words in new sentences, creating an imaginary story using all the words and telling it to or writing it for a partner. In the end, students test each other in pairs on new words.

The problem of imbalance between learners' functional (active) and receptive (passive) vocabularies, when EFL students' active vocabulary is limited or poor, can be solved by doing various receptive-reproductive and productive relatively-communicative exercises. When new vocabulary is presented, the stage of automatising the students' activities with the new lexical units begins. It includes different levels: word-form, free word-combination, phrase and speech segment levels, when students try to connect two or more syntactically structured and communicatively independent sentences. At the practice and retention stages of vocabulary acquisition learners are encouraged to do a lot of exercises which have a beneficial effect on vocabulary learning. There are a number of exercises which aim at helping students to memorise different unknown words and enrich their functional vocabulary: imitation, substitution, completion and transformation exercises, answers to various types of questions, independent use of

lexical units in a sentence, uniting speech patterns into a speech segment – a dialogue or a monologue.

Another way to enrich learners' functional vocabulary and improve their speaking and writing skills is to use reading and listening as effective means of teaching a foreign language. The focus in reading and listening lessons is not only the content but also the language. EFL teachers should develop their students' ability to extract the content from the language that expresses it so that they can become efficient independent readers and listeners. A text and an audiotext may serve as a good model or source of knowledge. Pre-reading and pre-listening activities may equip learners with language to use while reading and listening to the text as well as doing follow-up activities at the post-reading and post-listening stages. The role of reading as a communication skill is especially important while teaching first-year students majoring in English whose active vocabulary is not extensive enough to acquire and increase communicative competence, which is the main goal of Communicative Language Teaching.

Considering problems of teaching vocabulary to intermediate EFL university students, in particular the problem of a lack of a perfect textbook which could be used by university teachers working at faculties of foreign languages, it is worth mentioning that one of the premier teaching skills is using textbooks creatively. A coursebook ought to be related to critically. EFL teachers "should be aware of its good and bad points in order to make the most of the first and compensate for or neutralize the second" [7, p. 187]. If not everything in the textbook is wonderful and teachers want to bring their own personality to the teaching task, addition, adaptation and replacement of the coursebook activities are very important.

Since modern textbooks do not suggest a wide variety of ways of dealing with the meaning of new words, *addition* is a good alternative for teachers who want to add activities and exercises which extend the students' engagement with the language or topic. Modern manuals which can be used by intermediate university students studying at faculties of foreign languages offer a number of monolingual ways of presenting vocabulary. Among them are *visual techniques*, which are usually restricted to using pictures, and *verbal means* of conveying the meaning of unfamiliar words, including *synonyms*, *opposites*, *explanation*, *word-building* (using parts of words, prefixes or suffixes to help students build words), *matching* words to their definitions, *dictionaries* (using dictionaries to check the meaning of unknown words) etc. However, such ways of presenting vocabulary as *guessing from context*, when learners use the context surrounding a word to guess its meaning, *familiar or famous words*, a technique which involves reminding students of famous or familiar places where they might have come across the new words before, for example in film titles, songs or pop groups; *examples*, when learners are given examples of words which need to be presented; *translating* into mother tongue and *decoding*, when students try to decode abbreviations using the target language, are not presented in modern teaching complexes and can be added to what they provide in enjoyable and useful ways in the form of games or game-like activities.

Another option is for teachers to adapt what is in the book. If a reading text in the coursebook is dealt with in a boring or uncreative way, teachers can adapt the lessons, using the same basic material, but doing it in their own style. Adapting an original textbook idea by putting it in their own activities, teachers stay faithful to the language and topic of the writers. Thanks to *adaptation*, working with words can be enjoyable and satisfying for learners. There are many ways of dealing with the use in communication of new words. The range of exercise types and activities compatible

with a communicative approach is unlimited. EFL teachers should encourage students to be involved in such communicative processes as information sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction. Adapting the coursebook materials, EFL teachers should include such social interaction activities as conversation and discussion sessions, information-gap or opinion -gap activities as well as role plays, simulations (drama-like classroom activities in which students are themselves in a problem solving situation.), improvisations and debates.

When EFL teachers decide that the textbook activities are not appropriate for extending their learners' vocabulary and developing their speaking skills, they can replace them. *Replacement* activities are really good for the teacher and the class. They completely change the atmosphere of the lesson and its unusualness makes it memorable. Materials used in Communicative Language Teaching can be authentic, not specially designed for educational purposes. They include newspapers, magazines, notes, e-mails, advertisements and songs. Doing various communicative activities which can be created on the basis of such language-based realia, learners can fix the new words in their memory and use them in the process of communication in different situations.

To sum up, vocabulary is an important part of the English teaching process. Without it, no amount of grammatical or other types of linguistic knowledge can be employed in foreign language communication. However, handling vocabulary involves more knowledge and skills than many EFL teachers think. Besides, there are some problems that university teachers working at faculties of foreign languages can face while teaching this language aspect to intermediate first- year students. The problem of mixed-ability classed can partially be solved by applying the system of learning in groups, which satisfies the communicative principle in teaching foreign languages. Group work enables students of multilevel classes to cope with any unfamiliar vocabulary they encounter. Communication tasks and activities promoting cooperative learning can not only be an extremely productive site for vocabulary expansion but they can also help learners to use this vocabulary to meet meaningful task goals. The problem of a lack of balance between learners' functional and receptive vocabularies can be overcome through a set of various receptive- reproductive and productive relatively-communicative exercises which should be done at different levels, starting with word-form level and finishing with speech segment level. Special attention ought to be paid to exercises which can help EFL students memorize unfamiliar words and develop their functional vocabulary at the practice and retention stages of vocabulary acquisition. Besides, using reading and listening as efficient means of teaching a foreign language, EFL teachers should create a set of effective pre-reading and pre-listening activities which can provide learners with language to use while handling reading and audio texts as well as post-reading and post-listening tasks which can help students increase communicative competence. Finally, the problem of a lack of a perfect coursebook to be used by university teachers can be avoided by using manuals creatively. Addition, adaptation and replacement of any textbook activities are very important if teachers are concerned about how to make the process of teaching interesting and not to stop themselves as teachers going backward.

A promising area of future research might be the problem of testing vocabulary. There are a lot of different types of vocabulary-testing techniques which can be used by EFL teachers working at faculties of foreign languages. Some of them are of primary importance while teaching vocabulary to intermediate EFL university students studying English as their major in mixed-ability classes. They have their advantages and disadvantages and need special consideration.

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