7 Teaching vocabulary

A Warm-up

1 Imagine you are going to travel to a country where you do not speak the language. How are you more likely to prepare?

a by learning some words and phrases
b by studying the grammar rules of the language

Explain your choice.

2 Look at the quote from David Wilkins. To what extent do you agree with him?

> The fact is that while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary *nothing* can be conveyed.
>
> David Wilkins, 1972

3 Compare your answers to 2 with the other members of your group.

B Meaning, form and use

1 Your trainer will teach you a word from another language. What do you need to know about the word to be able to use it when speaking? And what about when writing?

2 What information will learners need about nearly every word or phrase they learn? What information will they sometimes need?

3 What are the implications of the above for learning and teaching?

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C Presenting techniques

1 Look at the teaching techniques listed below. For each one say whether it primarily focuses on form, meaning or use.

	Teaching technique	focus on form, meaning or use
1	the teacher shows pictures, realia or uses mime	
2	the teacher uses definitions	
3	the teacher uses translation	
4	the teacher uses word relationships (e.g. *it means the opposite of…, it's a type of…, it's a part of…*)	
5	learners repeat the word or phrase	
6	the teacher writes the word or phrase on the board	
7	the teacher indicates the stress pattern on a word after writing it on the board	
8	the teacher provides additional information (e.g. *this word is very informal*)	
9	the teacher highlights the use of new vocabulary in context (e.g. by showing an authentic piece of communication, such as a video clip)	

2 Which techniques have you used in your own teaching?

3 Which techniques would you use to teach these groups of words?

Group 1 (elementary class): *grape, plum, strawberry, cherry*
Group 2 (pre-intermediate class): *to dig, to paint, to saw, to hammer*
Group 3 (intermediate class): a pet, *to put down (a pet), to vaccinate, a vet*
Group 4 (upper-intermediate class): *alone, lonely, solitude, isolated*

D Eliciting vocabulary

1 Eliciting new language can help teachers gauge and respond to their learners' knowledge in a student-centred way. Look at a–e below. Which pieces of advice do you consider to be helpful for a new teacher when eliciting? Compare your ideas with a partner.

a Try to trick the learners or they will find it too easy.
b Plan how you will elicit things before the lesson.
c Ensure eliciting is as simple and quick as possible.
d Make sure you elicit everything – never give in and just tell the learners.
e If the learners don't get the word quickly, try giving them the first sound of the word.

2 How would you try to elicit the following words?

a a watch
b a game show
c a hurricane

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3 Complete this summary about eliciting new language. The first and last letters of the missing words have been given to you.

> It is good to i_____e learners when presenting new language. However, there is also nothing wrong with teachers g____g learners information sometimes. If you e____t new language, make sure it is done q_____y. Be p_____d to tell learners what something means, rather than create an elaborate g_____g game!

E Checking understanding

1 Even after a focus on meaning, teachers sometimes need to check that learners have understood. Look at the following techniques. Talk to a partner about the strengths and weaknesses of each.

a The teacher asks a learner to translate the word (or phrase) into their own language.
b The teacher monitors how words are used in a subsequent activity.
c The teacher asks, 'Do you understand?'.
d The teacher asks the students to use the word in a sentence.
e The teacher asks short, easy-to-answer questions. For example: 'If you are *furious*, are you a little bit angry, or very angry?'.

2 A teacher has just taught the word *shoplift*, and given the example sentence 'The kids were caught shoplifting sweets.'.

She then asks:
a Did the kids pay for the sweets?
b Is this a crime?

Work with a partner and discuss the following questions.

i Why does the teacher ask these questions?
ii Answer questions a and b.
iii What do you notice about the answers?

3 Imagine you are teaching the words and phrases in bold in the following sentences. What questions would you ask to clarify understanding?

1 She picked up her **briefcase** and left.
(The teacher is worried that the word will be confused with 'suitcase'.)
2 The car was **a write-off** after the accident.
(The teacher is concerned that learners will not understand the scale of the damage.)
3 Houses are often more expensive near the **coast**.
(The teacher is concerned that the word will be confused with 'border'.)

4 Work in a small group. Discuss when you think it is useful to use questions such as those in 2 and 3 above, and when you think it is not useful. Be ready to report your ideas back to the class.

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F Practising techniques

1 A teacher has just presented a set of vocabulary relating to transport. Here are some practice activities. Do you think they are all useful? What are the differences between them? Share your ideas with your group.

1 The learners discuss transport problems and developments in their own countries.
2 Learners work in small groups. The teacher gives each group a set of cards with one of the target words written on each card. One learner must take a card and can use mime, drawings, definitions, relationships with other words, or any other means to elicit the word from the other members of her group.
3 The teacher prepares a gap-fill exercise and the learners have to complete the gaps with one of the target words. For example: 'When the _____ _____ turns red, you have to stop!' (Answer: traffic light).
4 The learners work in pairs to write a short dialogue, in which they have to use a minimum of four of the new words and phrases.
5 At the beginning of the following lesson, the teacher re-elicits the words and phrases taught.

2 Look back at the groups of words in C3 (above). How would you practise them with learners?

KEY WORDS FOR TEACHERS

Check you know the meanings of these terms.

- *eliciting*
- *form, meaning, use*
- *concept checking*
- *collocation*
- *recycling*

REFLECTION

You are teaching an intermediate class that shares the same L1 and are at around B1 level of English. The learners tell you that they would like to learn more vocabulary. They mention topics such as money, going out for dinner, and environmental issues.

Work in groups. Choose one of the topics the learners requested and plan:

- five or six items you would teach
- what information the learners will need about each item
- how you could convey the meaning of the words
- how you could make both the spoken and written forms clear
- how you could check that the words have been understood
- how you could provide practice of the new items

Reference

Wilkins, D. (1972). *Linguistics in Language Teaching*. London: Edward Arnold.

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