THE LEXICAL COMPONENT IN ESP COURSE DESIGN

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Although vocabulary study is often neglected in cour
se design it must be re-examined on account of its relevan-
ce to reading comprehension. Strategies to acquire and
retain lexical items must be interspersed with reading
strategies. In this paper a brief account of the biblio-
graphy in this area will be presented and some suggestions
on how to include vocabulary building in course design will
be given.

In terms of reading strategies vocabulary is tackled
through guessing, which means that the learner is supposed
to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words using the informa-
tion he gets from the context, the knowledge he has of the
world, any grammatical feature the word has, such as pre-
fixes, suffixes, etc.

The tendency today with reading comprehension courses
is to concentrate mainly on features of discourse and refe-
rence items, neglecting vocabulary as if students will be
able to guess and retain the meaning of most unknown words
as soon as they come across them in their reading tasks.

We are conscious, however, that vocabulary constitutes
a problem to the student and that many unfamiliar words in
a passage can decrease interest and prevent reading compre-
hension. How often do we have students who ask the meaning
of words already presented in previous texts? The problem
is that they did not have enough practice with the word so
as to retain it. There may be other reasons, of course,
and it is up to the teacher to minimize this problem of
vocabulary retention by including in his work tasks and
exercises to build the students' vocabulary.

In planning a course one should examine the vocabulary of the passages selected, make lists of words, select the most important or frequent items, group common words which have a special meaning in a particular area, examine whether technical vocabulary may cause problems to the student or not. Usually the student knows the technical vocabulary from other disciplines of his area of study. Nevertheless it can be a problem to the teacher.

Ewer (1979) says that specialized lexis is not usually a large problem since the items are mainly "international" (Greek or Latin origin). He states, on the other hand, that non-specialized lexis does need special attention, "and EST teachers should examine a wide sample of the literature of their students to locate the most frequent items in each case" (p.29). Not only the most frequent but the most important we should say.

I would like to present you now with some examples of models for vocabulary structuring. I do not want to get into the theoretical background of those models; my aim here is simply to show some of the work which is being done in this area and hope that it will bring you some insight in how to include vocabulary in your course design.

Let's begin with an example of Leher's work(1974) which is based on semantic field and componential analysis.

Semantic field:

cook			
boil	fry	bake	roast
simmer	saute deep-fry		

(adapted)

Componential analysis:

	water	oil or fat	cooking action	special utensil	cooking speed
BOIL	+	-	vigorous		
FRY	-	+			
SIMMER	+	-	gentle		

<div align="right">(adapted)</div>

Synonyms are in the same slot; incompatible terms are se-
parated by a vertical bar; subordinate terms are under the
horizontal line.

Another work on vocabulary is done by Godman & Payne
(1981) who propose a taxonomic approach to vocabulary. They
say that words must be seen in relation to one another:
"Every technical term is related to other terms concerned
with the same phenomenon or related phenomena..." (p.26).

Taxonomic display of some technical terms

Biology (habit and mode of life)

aquatic	terrestrial
marine	terricolous
freshwater	amphibian
estuarine	amphibious
risparian	amphibiolic
	arboreal
	aerial

Adams-Smith(1979) made an enquiry as to which crite-
ria among contextualization, glossary or work on roots and
affixes was more appropriate to acquire and retain vocabu-
lary. According to the students' preferences it was the
use of roots and affixes. Her investigation involved
Arabic-speaking Medical students and those people have great
difficulty with Latin or Greek origin words.

A - Contextualization:
        When the stomach is so large that it crowds the
organs, a condition known as megalogastria exists.

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B - Glossary:

    dyspepsia - poor digestion

    anhidrosis - absence of sweat

C - Suffix and prefix

    derma refers to the skin

    -tis means inflammation

    <u>Acrodermatitis</u> means inflammation of the skin of the
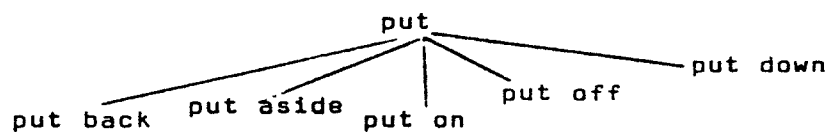   extremeties

Swales (1981) suggests three ways of tackling the problem of vocabulary:

    1. pre-reading work

    2. interspersed vocabulary work within reading

    3. post preliminary reading

Whether the teacher uses one or the other is up to him who knows his class and therefore is aware of what is appropriate to them.

Swales(1981) suggests some ways of structuring vocabulary. Those include:

    a) listing (key words of a text,...)

    b) semantic groupings or fields (smile. laugh. grin,
       chuckle, giggle,...)

    c)operational sequences (wet-wash-rinse-dry)

    d) trees

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                        put_____
                      /  /    |    \       \
                     /  /     |     \        put down
            put back put aside put on put off
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    e) oppositions (heat-cool; boil-freeze)

    f) cognates/non-cognates

In relation to cognates we cannot forget that students not always realize that there are words which with little or no modification have the same meaning in English as in the native language. So, it is for the teacher to call the learner's attentition to this fact including this item in

his course design.

Concluding I would like to say that reading strategies
are very important in reading but for the student who has
little knowledge of the language something else must be done.
And this means a serious work on vocabulary. There is not
an answer to the problem. But with our experience as tea-
chers we can help students to build up their vocabulary.

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