Eleventh Lecture: What is Vocabulary ?

In a Longman dictionary of contemporary English vocabulary is defined as " all the words that someone knows or uses " in a target language (2003 , p.1843) . Regarding Schmitt , Hedge and Nation vocabulary is the meaning carrier of a language that the learner and the speaker of the language need to comprehend and deploy in the four skills of the language (listening , speaking , writing and reading) (Schmitt , 2004 ; Hedge , 2000 ; Nation , 2001) .

While Lehr , Osborn and Hiebert define vocabulary as knowledge of words and word meanings that they have two form of oral and print . Oral words are those vocabulary words that the learner recognize and utilize in listening and speaking . Print vocabulary words incorporate those vocabulary items that the learner recognize and deploy in reading and writing (2004 , p.5) .

Regarding teachers the term vocabulary has diverse meanings . To illustrate , there are some instructors utilize this term to mean sight word vocabularies , which means learners ' immediate recognition of written words . While some other teachers deploy the vocabulary term as meaning vocabularies as the learners ' understanding of the words . Listening vocabularies is another meaning of the term of vocabulary that is use by another group of teachers that indicates the students ' understanding of vocabulary items that they hear in the spoken language . Content teachers employ the term academic vocabulary to relate it to content - specific words (Antonacci & O'Callaghan , 2012 , p.83) .

What is the importance of vocabulary in English language ?

Vocabulary is an essential element within a language that the learner acquires to learn ; because it is overwhelming the majority of meaning is carried lexically . Vocabulary is not the only element that convey meaning , but also there are some other vital feature like grammar , intonation , stress , tone of voice , rhythm , pauses , silences or hesitations , etc. According to McCarthy " no matter how well the students learns

- Word which has never been heard of
- Heard of the word but could not describe it
- The word could be acknowledged because of the perspective or through voice
- Capable of using and comprehending the meaning of the word in general, but cannot actually describe it
- Confident with the meaning and usage of the word.

Types of Vocabulary

There are four types of vocabulary :

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

Listening and speaking vocabulary represent spoken vocabulary and reading and writing represent written vocabulary.

1. Listening Vocabulary : This type of vocabulary refers to the words we hear and comprehend. Fetuses in the womb can perceive sound when their age is sixteen weeks. Moreover, babies keep on listening to various words when they are awake and thus we grow up listening to different words, thereby learning so many words throughout our lives. In our adulthood, most of us can identify and comprehend almost 50000 words. Children who are deaf are exposed to visual listening as they are exposed to sign language. But in this case, the number of words developed is far less than a normal child's secondary listening vocabulary.

2. Speaking Vocabulary : Speaking Vocabulary refers to the words we speak. Our speaking vocabulary is restricted. Most of the adults use almost 5000 to 10000 words for communication (for conversation and giving instructions). The number of words used in this case is far less than listening vocabulary, the reason being the level of comfort in usage.

If we consider our learning new language as an example, we can clearly realize the distinction between receptive (passive) and productive (active) lexical items. The vocabulary items that we can recognize and understand them are receptive vocabulary items. Whereas the lexical items that we can deploy in our communication and writing are productive vocabulary words. English language skills have classified by Schmitt into both receptive and expressive (productive) knowledge competence. As he states receptive knowledge competence regard to both listening and reading skills, while productive knowledge competence is concerned speaking and writing skills (2004, p.4). Oller argues that there is no needs to precisely separate receptive vocabulary from productive vocabulary because the students should acquire the knowledge of the vocabulary items receptively then use them productively. Thus, learning of these two categories of vocabulary providing a circle of long-term developing processes of language acquisition. (1979 : 3).

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Receptive and productive vocabulary

Productive vocabulary is an individual's vocabulary as defined by the words that he regularly uses , as opposed to those that she can understand when used by others . It is also called active vocabulary , whereas **receptive** vocabulary is an individual's vocabulary as defined by the words that he can understand rather than those that he normally uses . It is called passive or recognition vocabulary (" APA dictionary for Psychology ") .

Therefore , **receptive** vocabulary means that you are in receptive control of the words that you understand when you hear them or read them , whereas a **productive** vocabulary meant that one is in control of the words that one use to express themselves in speech or in writing . Therefore , if you understand the meaning of the word when you hear it or read it so it is part of your **receptive** vocabulary , they are those vocabularies that you may know well or barely know , but still you understand them (" Receptive and Productive vocabulary " , 2012) .

Vocabulary and context

In order to get the meaning of the words we should use them or to put them in context , there are four kinds of context clues such as synonyms , antonyms and the general sense of the passage . One of the most important strategies that would help students to build their vocabularies and to increase their reading skills and how much they would understand is by learning vocabulary in context . Therefore , you would guess the meaning of the new vocabulary from the surrounding context instead of depend on the dictionary (" learning vocabulary in context ") .

Therefore , we would not understand the meaning of any word till we put the word in a context , therefore , this process is called decontextulaization . Therefore , if you stop every time when you come across new wor while you are reading you might forger the main idea of the passage and you may get tired . Therefore , the best way is to try to guess the vocabulary from context clues (" Learning vocabulary in context ") .

The fact that learning vocabulary alone or to say isolated words without context is just waste of time and effort because you would learn hundred and thousands of vocabularies but you will not know how to use them .

Types of lexicology

There are five types of lexicography which are: general, special, descriptive, comparative and historical lexicology. **General** lexicology is the broad study of words regardless of a language's specific properties. It is concerned with linguistic features that are common among all the languages in the world such as phonemes and morphemes, **special** lexicology is on contrast to the general lexicology. It looks at a particular language contributes to its vocabulary such as grammar.

Descriptive or synchronic lexicology , it means examines the words of a language in certain time period, therefore, this period could be at the beginning of its development, or at the current stage or at any period between the two. **Historical** or diachronic lexicology is devoted to the evaluation of words and word formation over time. It investigates the origins of a word and the ways in which its structure and meaning (" Wikipedia").

Lexeme, lexical item and grammatical items

Lexeme is the term used in linguistics to refer to a minimal unit of language. They are phonologically and semantically distinct and can stand alone as long as they contain a root morpheme. For example, *love, loves, loved and loving* are all forms of the lexeme love, or *run, runs, ran and running* are forms of the same lexeme which is run.

Lexical item or a lexical unit is a single word, part of words or chain of words that forms the basic elements of language's lexicon. This term is much wider than the lexeme and it covers also items which are not actually words but give meaning. For example, the affixes *er, meant, re and ly* are not words, however, they convey meaning in the following words which are: *establisher, establishment, recent and recently*.

Lexical unit is a division in the sense of a lexeme. For example, if the two meanings of a word are related, then they are lexical units of one lexeme, for instance, *pen for writing, pen-friend and penknife are lexical items of the lexeme pen because they* all have aspects of write in them.

So, **lexeme** can be a word which has a group of variants, whereas **lexical item** is a single word, a part of word or a chain of words that forms the basic elements of a language's vocabulary.

Grammatical items are items in a series occur whenever a sentence lists two or more things. The item can be any type of grammatical unit such as nouns, verbs, participles or subordinate clauses. For example, " to make her a famous muffins, Emma bought fresh broccoli, baker's chocolate, flour, sugar and eggs. So, *Broccoli, sugar, flour, and eggs* are lists of nouns. Therefore, one could say that grammatical items are two or more words that function together as a group. For example, "the old silly woman".

Lexical and grammatical words

Functional words are closed class which means we can't add new ones very easily such as prepositions and articles and they don't have any meaning, whereas lexical words, however, do have meaning. Lexical words are open class and we can make up new ones just like *willy-nilly, so we can invent new* lexical items.

Word classes

They are a category of words of similar form or function; a part of speech (" Dictionary", 2017). English has four major word classes which are, nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. They have many thousands of members and new nouns, adjectives, and verbs are often created. **Nouns** are the most common type of words , followed by verbs. Many words belong to more than one word class. For example, book can be used as noun or as a verb.

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