วิธีการทำให้ผู้เรียนได้รับความรู้ในการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์อย่างมีความสุข
HOW CAN VOCABULARY LEARNING BE MADE MEANINGFUL AND ENJOYABLE FOR LEARNERS?

พงษ์เทพ บุญเรือง[1*]
Pongthep Bunrueng

Received: 16 February 2021
Revised: 1 June 2021
Accepted: 5 June 2021

Abstract

Vocabulary instruction is essential for reading comprehension. In a classroom, it is often found that many students failed to stay connected to the text, did not comprehend the meaning of words and lacked the schema needed to understand the reading text. That is why teaching methods with the use of smart technology in the classroom should be under the teachers' responsibility. To help increase the knowledge of vocabulary meaningfully and enjoyably, several techniques are advocated, such as semantic techniques and mapping, and classroom management techniques together with various interesting games that still attract learners' attention whether or not they are out of favor or widespread.

Keywords: vocabulary learning/ meaningful/ enjoyable

[1] Ph.D, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Loei Rajabhat University
* E-mail: manpongthep@gmail.com

Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to all English skills, principally to reading comprehension; learners might not understand contents without knowing most of the word meanings. They might misinterpret the meaning of words as the meaning of words is not consistent for example the meaning of **"present"** is different depending on whether it is a noun or a verb. Hence, learners need to learn not only the lexis of the language but the use of the words or syntactic category as well. In the past, vocabulary teaching in Thai classroom situations was somewhat unsuccessful; learners could not apply the use of words, and had negative attitudes towards learning vocabulary. Two reasons can account for this failure. Firstly, teachers usually use the traditional method of vocabulary teaching such as giving a list of words to students to learn by h:eart, translating the definitions of words without telling how to use them and explaining too much vocabulary expecting that learners will have a need. Secondly, most of textbooks are from overseas and it has been found that there are many unfamiliar words contained in textbooks. Meantime, learners do not have background knowledge on some levels; likewise many words are too difficult for them to study. This paper is an attempt to focus on how vocabulary learning can be made meaningful and enjoyable for learners as it is believed that all learners need at first to know enough basic vocabulary in order to practice.

Discussion

Teaching vocabulary can be made meaningful and enjoyable if Thai teachers adjust their method of teaching and understand what the vocabulary really means. Because it is not important for learners to need to know every word in textbooks, they need to know only the words they want to use. In the past some problems of the method of vocabulary instruction annoyed them which is why learning vocabulary can not be made meaningful and enjoyable. To begin with, in a traditional method called “a definition approach”, learners usually look up words in a dictionary or just only memorize definitions or learners learn definitions or synonyms for instructed words. This method does not reliably improve their English competency, though it sounds very good for students to look up words in a dictionary but many definitions simply are not very good, for example a definition from Google (Telephone, 2021)

Telephone*: a system for transmitting voices over a distance using wire or radio, by converting acoustic vibrations to electrical signals.*This definition is certainly accurate but it is very hard to imagine that anyone who does not already know the meaning of word could be helped by this definition. It can be seen that most of the content words in the definition are less likely familiar to students than the word telephone itself.

Firstly and importantly, the problem found almost in all English classrooms is the “Google Translation Program” cherishing its automatic and rapid translation to all languages. This smart dodge always makes teachers very annoyed since when the learners come across words or sentences written in English they do not comprehend, they automatically use their smartphone to translate the target from words to paragraphs; this instant translation feature not only works with translating Thai to and from English but also all languages in the world. Henceforward, learners are not learning anymore if they still corrupt their language acquisition. It is necessary to ascertain the disruptive technology that affects teaching learning English classes.

Secondly, words given in glossaries are inappropriate to the selection. Two words taken from the glossary of a basal reader are **siphon,** which is described “to pull water from one place to another”, and **migration** which is told “moving from one place to another”. This is one reason

why learners cannot write meaningful sentences since the definitions alone tell little about how a word is actually used and unfamiliar words are distracting them in reading books enjoyably as well.

Later, the problem is occasionally from a contextual approach which is a common method to teaching vocabulary. Students usually guess the meaning from the context clues. It is not meaningful for learners as they do not understand the exact meaning. If learners already know what the word means, a context may look helpful. It is boring for learners who have no other knowledge about the meaning of a word. Consider the following sentence. "Although Ruby is thin, her sister, Jessy is obese." This context clue is clear only to someone who already knows the meaning of obese but the problem becomes obvious when learners attempt to substitute other words for this word for what the meaning is supposed to be.

Last but not least, this problem is a combination of definitional and contextual approach. This approach seems more effective than any others but it would be so hard to justify a contextual method in which the teacher did not finally provide an adequate definition of the word to help learners. For example, according to a dictionary, the word "**expand"** in one sense means "to increase in one or more physical dimensions, such as length or volume." A simple sentence such as "the balloon expanded as the little boy blew air into it." This might be helpful for learners to make sense of clear definition. Certainly, it would be ambiguous if the text comes alone, for instance, "the balloon.....as the little boy blew it up." It allows many interpretations such as grew larger or burst so this is why learners seem not to enjoy studying translation. As a result, it is very important to provide a natural context that is often essential in teaching learners how a word is used even if learners might group the connotations of some sense of words and produce inappropriate sentences (Nagy, 1988).

Besides problems in methods of teaching vocabulary, teachers themselves must clarify the understanding of the lexis of the language. They must have an adequate semantic knowledge. A recent study by Zechmeister, Chronis, Cull, D'Anna and Healy (1995) indicates that the receptive size of a college-educated native English speaker is about 17,000 word families. This family word means a base word and its inflected forms and derivations. Together, Richards (1985) identified that it is necessary for teachers to examine the question as a basis for formulating objectives in vocabulary teaching and also for the assessment of teaching techniques. He brought the characteristic of lexical competence as follows:

"Knowing a word means knowing the degree of probability of encountering it and sorts of words most likely to be found associated with it, knowing its limitations of use according to function and situations (temporal social and geographical), knowing its syntactic behavior such as cases and patterns, knowing its underlying forms and derivation forms, knowing its place in a network of association with other words in the language, knowing its semantic value (its composition), and knowing its different meaning (polysemy)"

Therefore, Richards' conclusion is very beneficial for teachers since it tries to relate different ways of teaching and practicing diverse aspects of vocabulary to the separate features of learners' lexical competence and acknowledges the complex nature of the vocabulary teaching.

From the discussion above, it can be seen that some methods of vocabulary teaching and the failure of teaching vocabulary are still problematic. The following ways might have qualities of effective vocabulary instruction and are made meaningful and enjoyable for learners. First of all, it is an integrating method. It emphases an outgrowth of diagrammatic theory. The purpose is to help learners to enjoy studying sets of relationships and understand new information by relating it to what they already know. Johnson et al. (1986) has researched this approach called "semantic mapping." An example of this is that the teacher might identify a theme or a topic of a story to students, and then choose one word that is

related to the theme such as the word '**transportation'** and write it on the whiteboard. Next the teacher asks learners to write down individually any words they think of related to this theme such as bus, subway, tram and sky train. Later, the teacher makes a composite class list on the whiteboard, having students group the words into categories. They might comprise places, people and emotions.

It can be seen that this procedure serves several purposes, in particular Thai classroom situations. To begin with, it activates students to think about experiences in their own lives and express the vocabulary that relates to the theme. It may seem unnecessary for English native speaker students but Thai students are passive and nervous to present and think critically. Next, this procedure allows the teacher to identify and assess the specific background knowledge of the students in that classroom and can provide appropriate materials for further teaching. Last, it provides a rich basis for further writing as well as reading since learners have chance to read, talk and write by brainstorming and happy in doing the activities. A semantic map taken from Google can be shown as follows (Semantic mapping, 2021)

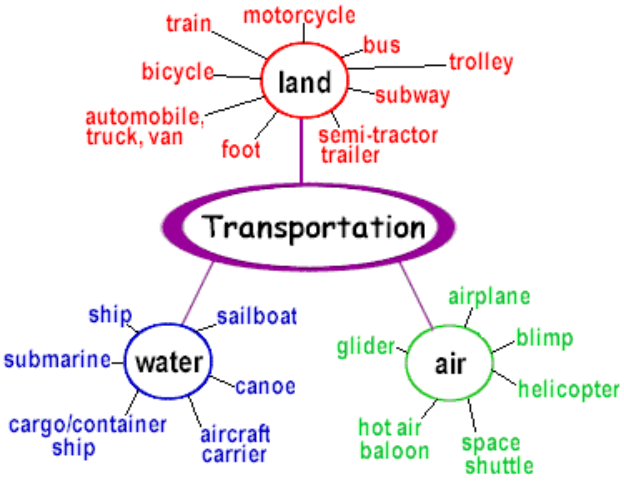


Figure 1: Semantic mapping

Secondly is a semantic feature analysis, part of integrating methods taken from the College of Education, University of Minnesota (2021). This method focuses on and specifies relationships between word meanings such as the class of words including insects, bees, ants, mosquitoes and wasps. Some words are already familiar to learners so they can immediately distinguish the meanings. To create this activity is to label words for the rows in a two dimensional matrix; the vertical column describes the distinguishably semantic feature as it is shown below. (Semantic Feature Analysis, 2021)

features / insects	6 legs	3 body parts	has wings	lays eggs	bites	stings
bees	+	+	+	+	-	+
ants	+	+	-	+	?	-
mosquitoes	+	+	+	+	+	-
wasps	+	+	+	+	-	+
cricket	+	+	-	+	-	-

Figure 2: Semantic feature analysis

The activity is suitable for a class discussion as it depends upon the use of words and features involved, for instance a wasp has 6 legs and does not bite so it gets pluses and minuses in the matrix. It may be necessary to use question marks when specific features cannot apply to some words. This activity can be open-ended so that learners might add some related words by themselves such as lice, fleas, bedbugs, bats and the like. It is very interesting for class activity in particular Thai settings because there are normally over forty students in one classroom. The teacher might group them into subgroups and proposes different words such as accommodation, food or places. Finally, learners are found to enjoy learning vocabulary and manage to discriminate the meanings by themselves.

There are many more ways to make vocabulary meaningful and enjoyable in language learning. This is the role of the teacher who will conduct these techniques so as to encourage learners to fulfill their English vocabulary competence. These are *"classroom atmosphere, realia, mime, action and gesture, here and now and games."* Firstly and importantly, classroom decoration is unavoidably required and the teachers must be very industrious to create this atmosphere. Wall papers and charts can be used to explain the meaning of vocabulary items such as synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, homophones and sets of ambiguity words. The atmosphere in the classroom is very crucial for EFL as it can help learners to be familiar with words. In addition teachers and students may help each other to work together to decorate the classroom. This might lead students to think of varieties of word items they want to know. Secondly, 'realia' is a method to bring real objects into the classroom. The teachers may bring a flower, a vase, a magazine into the classroom and ask them about words. It is a good method to illustrate real objects to students every day since it is helpful for the EFL situation, in particular beginner and intermediate levels to learn pronunciation. Meanwhile, learners are able to memorise and accumulate words without tiredness. Next 'mime, actions and gesture', is impossible for teachers to explain the meaning of words when teaching grammar, focusing on tense. Actions and gestures are possibly better explained by mime. The teachers may perform such vocabulary as crying, boxing, singing etc. when teaching progressive tense. This approach seems good for EFL learners to understand basic tenses since in some countries where English is taught as a foreign language tenses in the mother language do not exist, such as in Thailand and Laos. Later, a 'Here and Now' method is similar to 'realia' but it is more effective for the teachers who may talk about anything that quickly draws learner's attention for example weather, Facebook, Grab, Food Panda, Line TV's program, movies and top news. The Here and Now method is appropriate for writing skills. It is able to motivate learners for lessons as they may learn new words from teachers, and then construct sentences from what they already know. This approach can be meaningful for learners since they can either write or read the story they really want. Finally, they are able to memorise new words and to write appropriate sentences for they have background knowledge, especially the material is outstanding and natural. Lastly, games are a short term motivation but in EFL situations it can activate learners to enjoy playing with words. Games are challenging and competitive but they should be provided for appropriate levels, otherwise they may be very boring. One interesting game, that is popular among EFL, learners, is called "twenty questions." This game takes a long time so it should be played in English Clubs or during an activities' subject. To play this game, the teachers divide students into two groups and let them feel free to speak the target language, meantime the teachers should monitor and encourage them to take turns asking and answering activities. Eventually, learners find that it is interesting and enjoyable since they have to review many different words whilst some learners may recognise the particular words, others may not know the words. At last they have to share their vocabulary knowledge among their team members and

then find the right answer. This game is very useful as learners can enrich new words and can learn pronunciation in the same time.

Conclusion

In the past, teaching vocabulary in Thai settings was unsuccessful as there are many negative factors, for instance the method of vocabulary teaching is complicated, the teachers lack techniques and materials are too difficult for some levels. In particular, the teachers themselves lack lexical competence and semantic knowledge as Richards (1985) mentioned. To make classes meaningful and enjoyable in vocabulary instruction importantly, the teachers should adjust their methods of teaching, not to teach only the meanings of words but how to use the vocabulary as well. Furthermore, different activities should be provided to advocate classes to be meaningful and enjoyable, such as teaching vocabulary networks (semantic mapping feature analysis, grid, and superordinate terms) to enrich their vocabulary.

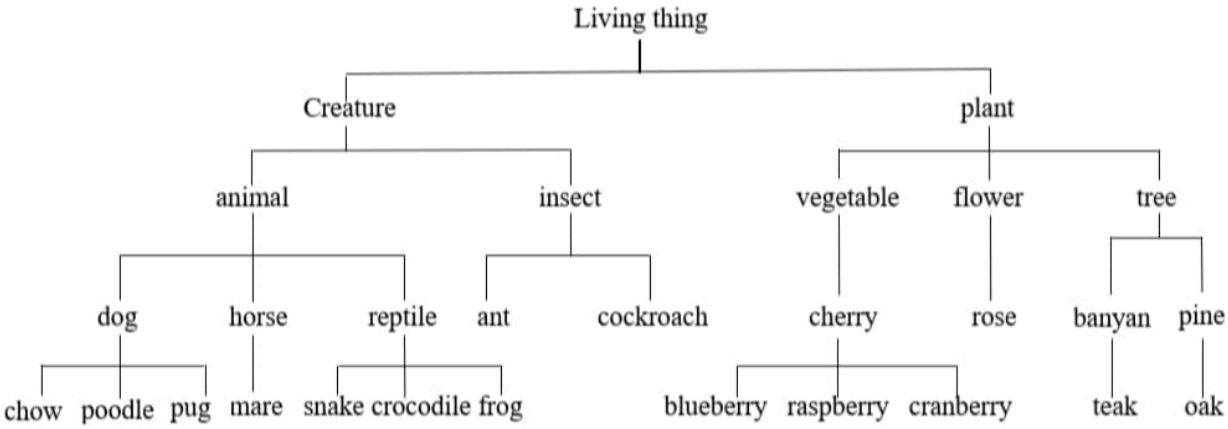


Figure 3: Superordinate term

Inevitably, the atmosphere in the classroom should be made by teachers and learners, such as having wall pictures, vocabulary charts, in order that students are able to clarify some sets of words, ambiguity, homonym and polysemy. Moreover, teacher's techniques should employ 'realia', 'gestures and actions', and 'here and now' so as to encourage learners to enjoy learning vocabulary. Additionally, the challenging activity is playing games which definitely attract a lot of learner's attention.These fun and meaningful activities are primarily found on the Youtube channel so teachers can search for them to help design teaching vocabulary. When learners are inactive or the English subject is scheduled in late afternoons, a vocabulary game is a better way to encourage them. Finally, they will find that vocabulary games make classes meaningful and enjoyable.

REFERENCES

Carter, R. et al. (1988). *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. London : Longman.

Cervatiuc, A. (2007). *Highly Proficient Adult Non-Native English Speakers Perceptions of their Second Language Vocabulary Learning Process*. Calgary: University of Calgary.

Harmer, J. (1991). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*: London: Longman.

Johnson, et al. (1986). *Semantic Mapping*. The Reading Writing Thinking. International Literacy Association.

McKnight, A. (1994). *Linguistics for Language Teaching: A Study Guide*. Geelong:

Deakin University Press.
Nagy, W. (1988). *Teaching Vocabulary to improve Reading Comprehension the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication the United States of America*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English.
Richards, J. C. (1985). *The Concept of Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Semantic Feature Analysis. (2021). Retrieved February 9th, 2021, from https://www.cehd. umn.edu/ University of Minnesota.
Semantic mapping. (2021). Retrieved February 8th, 2021, from http://mavoigt.weebly.com/ semantic-maps.
Superordinate terms. (2021). Retrieved February 15th, 2021, from https://englishlinguistics missjung.weebly.com/semantics--discourse.
Telephone. (2021). Retrieved February 7th , 2021 from https://www.google.com.
Zechmeister, E.B., Chronis, A.M., Cull, W.L., D'Anna, C.A. & Healy, N.A. (1995). Growth of a functionally important lexicon. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, *27*(2).