# IIT Madras
## BSc Degree

Welcome to this module on Vocabulary. In this part of the course, we will talk about what is good Vocabulary. A lot of people often say that an x or a y, a certain person, a gentleman or a lady has a very good Vocabulary, what do they mean? Do they mean to say that they have many words, they know many words or do they mean to say they know how to use the words they know creatively to use them in a variety of ways?

Many people, many writers, many speakers in the world have been found to have known not lots of words; people say that Shakespeare knew fewer than 30000 words only, even when the English language had nearly 100000 words. How could Shakespeare then write so well that he continues to be popular even today?

There are many writers who knew perhaps less but who wrote more or as much and continue to be popular. No matter what we know, the moment we say we know a language, we say that we know Vocabulary, we have Vocabulary. This is one of the first things we learn in a language. We learn words first in a language. That is what attracts us; then we go to phrases, then we go to sentences.

So, today and in the coming sessions, we will talk about Vocabulary, but today we begin with what is good Vocabulary; how do we know that x has good Vocabulary, but y has not? What can we do such that we can also have a good vocabulary? In the rest of this session today and in the next, we will talk about good Vocabulary. Let us begin.

(Refer Slide Time: 3:08)

- Our vocabulary has all the words we know.

- All we know about all the words is also another part of our vocabulary.

- Many people know only one language, some others know two, three, four or even more languages, but no one knows exactly how many words they know.

In very simple, very plain language, the meaning of the word Vocabulary is all the words; in other words, our Vocabulary has all the words we know. It means it denotes; it indicates all the words we know constitute our Vocabulary. It is a treasure which has only words, but all the words that we know, that treasure is called, that box is called, that Almira is called name it as you like is called Vocabulary rather than call Vocabulary, you can call it Almira of words, you can call it a box of words, you can call it a bag of words, all that means Vocabulary.

We not only know words, but we also know about words. We know, for example, take the word 'cat'. We not only know what it means; we also know how it is spelt. We also know how it is pronounced. We also know whether it is a noun or a pronoun, a verb or an adjective or an adverb.

We also know many other things related to it. Take any other word, take a verb like 'read'. We know many things connected with it. We know that it is a verb, we know its spelling, we know what it means, we know how we can use it in a sentence. If two people read together, then we called it 'read'. If only one person reads, then we do not say read, we do not say one person read, we say one person reads.

So, along with our knowledge of the word comes knowledge of all the other things that are related to the word its spelling, its meaning, its category, whether it is a noun or a pronoun; whether it is a verb or adverb or adjective, whether it will be used with or without 's', whether it has a past tense, a verb like 'read' of course has a past tense, but its form does not change in the past tense, its pronunciation changes. You can say I have read all of Shakespeare, but spelling remains the same.

So, when we say, when we claim that we know a word called read, we not only know what it means, we also know how to spell it, we also know whether it is noun or verb, we also know if it changes form in a sentence and we have seen just know, if it is only one person, then it becomes reads, one person reads, John reads Bible every morning. Mary reads here email every few hours in her office. So, one person, but when they are two people, John and Mary read their Bible in the church on Sundays together, then we say John and Mary read.

So, along with the knowledge of the word 'read' along with the knowledge of its meaning, it is category whether it is noun or verb, along with its spelling, also comes the knowledge of how it is used. Also comes other bits of knowledge; we know how we can make other words out of it. So, we know from the reader we can get the reader. We can say John is a reader to a judge; John is a reader in a university, which means he holds a certain kind of position on the faculty of a university.

So, there are all sorts of meaning; we also know that being a reader at a university has nothing to do with read, it is a different kind of word incidentally it has the same spelling and similar pronunciation. So, Vocabulary includes all the words we know and not only that it, it also includes all that we know about these words.

Say for example, many people know only one language, many people in the world are monolinguals, they know only either English or Chinese or French or Hindi or Spanish or

Vietnamese or Japanese, they know only one language and there is nothing bad about it. It is not that those who know only one language are lesser human being than those who know more. It is just a matter of chance that one happens to be born at a place where more languages are used and one, therefore, usually learns more than one language.

So, there are some people who know two languages, some who know 3, some who know four and there are people who more than four languages; there are many communities in India, particularly in southwestern India places like Kerala, southern coastal Karnataka, Goa, Tuticorin, Rameshwaram side, etcetera where people know at least 3 or 4 languages. But that is the point, no one, no matter how many languages you know, no matter what your knowledge of the world, what your knowledge of any one language, nobody knows exactly how many words they know.

You can make a guess; you can say I know 50000 words; there is a safe guess that a college graduate ordinarily knows between 30 and 50000 words. A child, a young child, by the time the child is 5, the child knows about 5000 words. Older people, if you are in the business of reading, writing, teaching, if you are a lawyer, chances are you know more than 50000 words in the language of your work. But nobody can tell you exactly. I know 49978 words. Nobody knows their knowledge in a quantifiable measure, particularly when it comes to the knowledge of words.

But we know what we know. When we see a particular word, we know, 'arrey' this word comes from Hindi or Malayalam or Tamil or Latin or English, quite often, sometimes we may not, we also know the meaning, we also know lots of other things, but nobody knows the exact number of words they know that somehow has not been possible though people have tried, there have been attempts and people have generally found approximately near about you know so many words. Next.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:33)



- Some people understand nearly all the words they see and hear. Some others understand few words they see and hear.

- Similarly, some people can speak and write many different kinds of words; some others, on the other hand, can speak and write relatively few words correctly.

You know, look at their language behaviour, look at people's language behaviour, there are people who understand and who understand and who can speak nearly all the words they see,

all the words they hear, they know those, they do not know to look up a dictionary, but there are others in the same community, sometimes in the same family. God has created us all equals with some differences. Some people say that in the factory of God, there is mass production, but each piece is unique.

So, it is possible that in the same family there are some people who have many more words, who know much more than other members of their family. Just as it is possible that there are some members within the same family, within the same faculty who know just about a minimum and no more, so, that you know a particular language does not mean that you know so many words, it only means that you know some words using which you can use that language.

Just as some people can read and write, similarly some people can speak and hear. Some people, just as some people can hear and read, some people can speak and write many words. Some people may not; they may not write lots of words that does not mean they are handicapped; it only means their Vocabulary is a quote on quote "restricted", but it does not mean their word is restricted. With the same Vocabulary, with those very words, they do all that someone with a large Vocabulary does; that is another good thing about knowledge of words.

Words acquire new meanings, words can expand, stretch, you can use them the way you like, they are so flexible, but we have different kinds of people. Some people have many words, some people know many things about many words, there are others who may not have many words, or sometimes they have many words and yet they do not know as much about every word as some others do.

The point I am making is that all this knowledge with a lot of variety, with lot of flexibility, lot of possibilities, all these knowledge constitutes our Vocabulary. Our Vocabulary is, therefore, not only the number of words we know; it is also the other knowledge that we have, which makes for Vocabulary. Next.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:04)



IIT Madras
ONLINE DEGREE

- We can say somebody's vocabulary is good or bad depending upon their knowledge of the following.

1. Number & variety of words
2. Number of similar & different words
3. The way each word goes with other words
4. The way new words are made out of old words
5. The way each word is used in a sentence.

What are the other things? To be very precise, about each word, anyone who knows a language, so, practically anyone who knows a language, also knows many words. We may not be able to count them, but we know that we know many words about any subject, and we know a variety of words so that in different situations, we can say the same thing in different ways. So, you know the first feature of the knowledge of words, the first feature of Vocabulary is knowledge of a number of words, knowledge of a variety of words.

The next is a number of similar and different words. So, for example, we not only know that he is a teacher, we also know that he is a professor, we also know that he is a writer, we also know that he is a preceptor, we also know that he is an instructor. Similarly, we know a number of similar and different words, we know that she is a doctor, Mary is a doctor, we also know, therefore, that Mary is a healer, Mary is a creator of well-being, Mary is a creator of happiness, all of these things go together. So, we know a number of words, and we know a variety of words.

Similarly, we know a number of way; we know for, any word we know more or less some other words which are similar in meaning. For any word, we also know other words which are totally different in meanings. We will talk about them. When we say we know a language, we will have Vocabulary; we also know which word goes with which; if you have drink, then it will, it is followed only by water, not by rice. We do not drink rice in English, you do not drink air in English, you do not eat air in English, you eat solids in English, you drink liquids in English, and you breath gases in English.

But there are languages where you can use 'eat' not only with solids but also with liquids. In a language like Bangla, for instance, you can say I eat rice, you can also say I eat water, you can also say I eat air, even in Hindi, you eat air, you sometimes also drink air. Though they are idiomatic, the point I am making is when we know some words, we also know which other words it can go with, which other words it will follow or precede, how it relates to other words? We also know that.
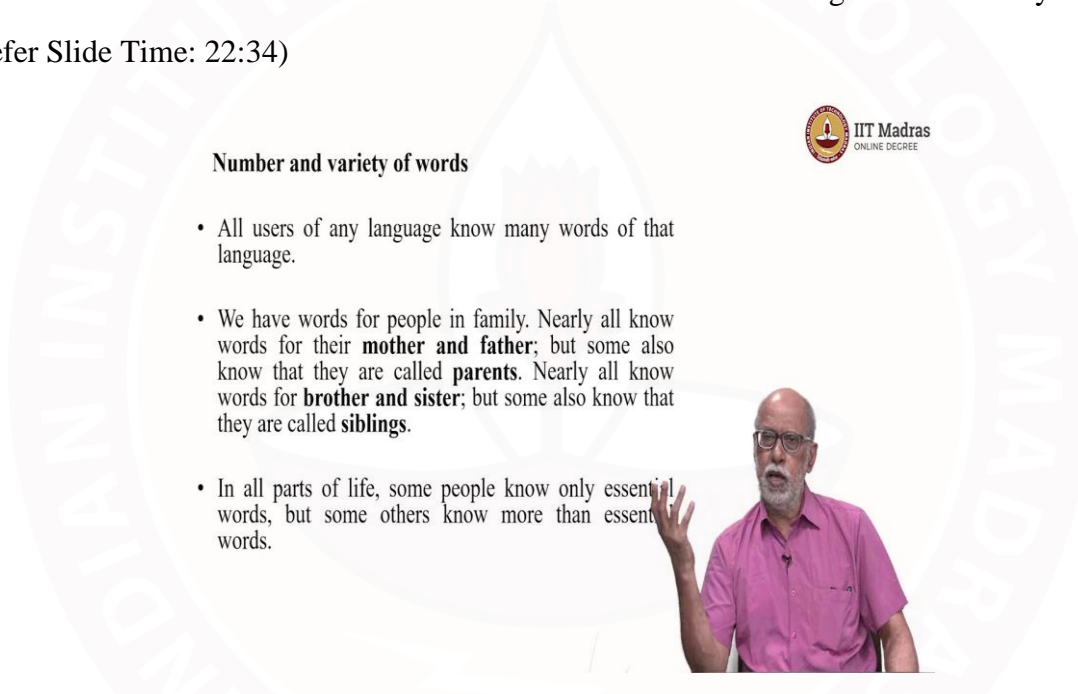
The third feature, the first was a number and variety of words. The second was similar and different words. The third is the way each word goes with other words. There is a place if you have 'the' it is quite likely to be followed by a noun; if you have 'a' 'an', if you have 'an' it is quite likely to be followed by a noun which is spelt with either a or e or i or o or u quite likely. Sometimes there may be an exception, like when you can have a word beginning with m, and you can still say an, he is an MA, he is an MLA, he is an MP. You can say that because of abbreviations because the letter is pronounced 'm' where the sound 'a' is there.

But generally, when we use 'an' then it is followed by a noun and it is followed by a, it is, sorry it starts, it is ay spelling begins with either a or e or i or o or u, a e i o u, a or e or i or o or u, one of these letters. It is possible that 'an' is followed by an adjective, you can see an elegant house, but 'an' here is a reference to house, which is a noun, but because it is immediately followed by elegant which starts with 'e', so rather than 'a' we have used the 'an', we will talk about these things. But the point here is it is definite; it is fixed which word can be followed by which other kinds of words. It is not that any word can go with any word, then we will have chaos, then we might not understand the meaning of words.

When we know a particular word, we also know how we can make new words out of them. So, for example, you know the meaning of the word 'person', then you also know how you can make a new word out of it, so you have 'personal' another word 'personalise', yet another word 'personify', yet another word 'personality', yet another word 'personification'. Now all of these words have been made by adding things to a word called person. So, when we know a particular word, we also know how we can make new words out of it that is also part of our Vocabulary.

And then finally, when we know a particular word, we also know how it can be used in a sentence. So, for example, we said now said John reads books, Mary treats people, Mary cures people, she is a doctor, John is a professor and John, therefore, reads books because John is only one, so in read, we add 's' for John reads. Mary, one person, we add in word treat; in the word cure, we add an 's'. So, all this is part of the knowledge that in a sentence, this word can take this form in this context. That is also our knowledge of Vocabulary. Next.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:34)



**Number and variety of words**

- All users of any language know many words of that language.

- We have words for people in family. Nearly all know words for their **mother and father**; but some also know that they are called **parents**. Nearly all know words for **brother and sister**; but some also know that they are called **siblings**.

- In all parts of life, some people know only essential words, but some others know more than essential words.

Let us look at I said number and variety of words. In other words, we call them synonyms and antonyms. All users of any languages know many words of this language. Say, for example, all of us know essential words, we know the words for mother and father in any language you know, but all of us may not know a word like parents, all of us know brother and sister, but we may not know a word like siblings. So, if you only know essential words, that is fine. But if you know more than what is essential, then you, then it can be said that you have a good vocabulary, you have a large vocabulary. Go to the next.

- Let us take food, as another example. Many of us know "food". Some also know meal, breakfast, lunch, dinner, supper, snacks, cookies, savouries, sweets, fries, stuffed, etc.

- So we can say that those who know more words than only "food", than only what is necessary, have a better vocabulary.

Similarly, you know a lot of similar words, words which means similar. Say, for example, food. Now related to food or words like meal, breakfast, lunch, dinner, supper, snacks, cookies, savouries, sweets, fries, stuffed, I am sure you know more words than I can tell you off. We also know more words than only food; I mean, if you know only food, then we will say our, we do not have a very good vocabulary, but we know all of those words that we said above, then we can claim that we have a better vocabulary. Next.

- For another instance, let us look at an example:

> At first, Swaminathan was uncertain of his happiness in the new school. But he excited the curiosity that all new comers do, and found himself to his great satisfaction the centre of attraction to Second C. All his new classmates, remarkably new faces, often clustered round him to see him and hear him talk. He had not yet picked the few he would have liked to call his chums. He still believed that his Albert Mission set was intact.

- How many words do you find here that mean nearly the same thing as "Friends"?

Look at this extract. Can you tell me how many words you can find here for friends? Take a minute; how many words did you find here for friends? Go to the next.

- There are words like the following. They mean nearly the same thing as "friends".

  "Second C, classmates, faces, chums, set"

- So we can say that one who can write or understand these words has a better vocabulary than another who cannot write or understand these words.
- If you know friends, then chances are that you also know words that mean the opposite of friends, words like enemy, rival, competitor, contestant, foe, etc.

So, in this context, the highlighted words Second C is a section, but in this case, it means a group of friends, classmates, group of friends, faces, new faces, faces do not exist without people. So, here faces has with the word faces has been used for friends. Chums, friends who are so are so close that you share all confidential things with them; set, just like classmates, a group of friends. So, those who know all these words can claim to have a good vocabulary. Next.

- The first set of words with a similar meaning is know as a set of "**Synonyms**", i.e. words that mean almost alike.

- So, for instance, words like, Avenue, alley, lane, path, thoroughfare, etc. are synonyms of "road". They do not mean exactly alike, but they mean much like one another.

- **Words like abode, apartment, bungalow, flat, house, nest, residence, villa, etc. are synonyms of "home".**
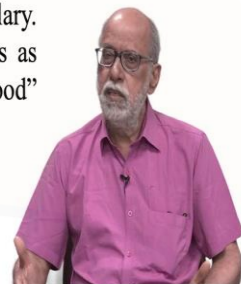
So, words having a similar meaning, words that have similar meaning are known in the language of grammar as synonyms, syno means similar, nyms meaning, words with similar meaning. Say, for example, look at a word like 'road', how many words, how many other words can you think of which have nearly the same meaning? So, you have avenue; you have alley, you have lane and bilanes, you have a way and subway, you have path, thoroughfares, street; I have not named them all; you can add to them.

Now, in they do not mean exactly alike, alley is not the same thing as lane and avenue is not the same thing as street, road is not the same thing as bilane, but they all mean public thoroughfares upon which people can walk without restriction or without much restriction. So, they have a great deal of similarity in their meaning. These are synonyms.

We have another example, all the words like abode, apartment, bungalow, flat, house, nest, residence, villa, they can go for home. You can say I am going home; you can also say I am going to my flat. I am going to my apartment in various context. So, a good vocabulary includes a good stock of synonyms. Next.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:21)

- The other set, where **words mean opposite**, is called "**Antonyms**". So words like competitor, contestant, critic, enemy, foe, rival, etc. are antonyms of "friend", but synonyms of one another.

- So if one knows only "friends" and "enemies", then one can be said to have only a functional vocabulary. But if one knows their antonyms and synonyms as well, then one can be said to have a "good" vocabulary.

Similarly, there are antonyms; we also know the words that mean the opposite. When we know night, what is the opposite of night? We know day, we know a word called dark, what is its opposite? It is bright. We know the word poor; we also know the word rich. Opposite of the poor is rich. So, we also know antonyms. If we know friends, chances are quite often we also enemies. Here, for example, I have said, what are the antonyms of friends? The competitor, contestant, critics, enemy, foes, rivals, etcetera. So, friends and enemies, friends and foes are antonyms. Next.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:10)

# ACTIVITY

1. Find about five or more Synonyms/ Antonyms of the following words:

a. Ask  b. Bad  c. Good  d. Student  e. Teacher

What you can do is to check whether you have a good vocabulary, and we talk, we will talk further about it, we will further explain all the other things that we have said. But let us check if we have enough synonyms and antonyms. So, I have given you these words, ask, bad, good, student, teacher. How many words you know which means similar, which have a similar meaning, synonyms and which have different, opposite meanings, antonyms. Make your own list and check with the dictionary, check with the Thesaurus, check with the answers we have given you. Go next.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:54)

- Just as we have dictionary for information about words, we also have "Thesaurus" which lists words according to meaning. This will help you use accurate words.

- It will help you understand the difference between words like accept, acknowledge, admit, agree, approve, assent, consent, etc. and also all their antonyms like differ, disagree, dissent, etc.

ROGET'S THESAURUS
OF SYNONYMS AND ANTONYMS IN DICTIONARY FORM
EASY TO USE
THE RIGHT SOURCE FOR THE RIGHT WORD
A COMPREHENSIVE TREASURY OF ALMOST 2,50,000 WORDS AND PHRASES
SPECIAL INDIAN EDITION

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary
Improve your writing with Oxford Writing Tutor

Just as you know, we know we have dictionaries. Allow me to take a minute on this. Just as we have dictionaries which gave you the spelling of words, meaning of words, category of words, usage, pronunciation, similarly we have Thesaurus. A Thesaurus is a collection of words, a grouping of words according to meaning. So, all words which mean good are

together, fine, nice, excellent, marvellous, splendid, outstanding; they are all together. All words that mean bad, bad, evil, low, lowly, dirty, foul, they are all together.

So, Thesaurus is a collection of words according to meaning. A good writer should have, or anyone who aspires to be a good writer should have both a dictionary and a Thesaurus. You may have it on your laptop softcopies, they are available these days, or you can have them in hardcopy traditional way, but it must be available, if you have, if you want to become a public speaker, good use of language, a good writer of language, you must have these books.

(Refer Slide Time: 30:11)

## ANSWERS

1.

a. ascertain, enquire, examine, get, investigate, question, tell

b. dirty, evil, harmful, ill, low, poor, unwell

c. agreeable, desirable, excellent, fine, great, marvelous, outstanding, splendid, terrific, wonderful

d. boy/girl, lad/lass, disciple, intern, learner, pupil, taught

e. guide, guru, instructor, master, preceptor, professor

Compare your work with the given answers or, as I said, with a dictionary and with Thesaurus. Thank you very much.