

IIT Madras

BSc Degree

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WHAT IS GOOD VOCABULARY

- PART 1

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

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 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.

- 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”?

- 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.

- The first set of words with a similar meaning is known 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”.**

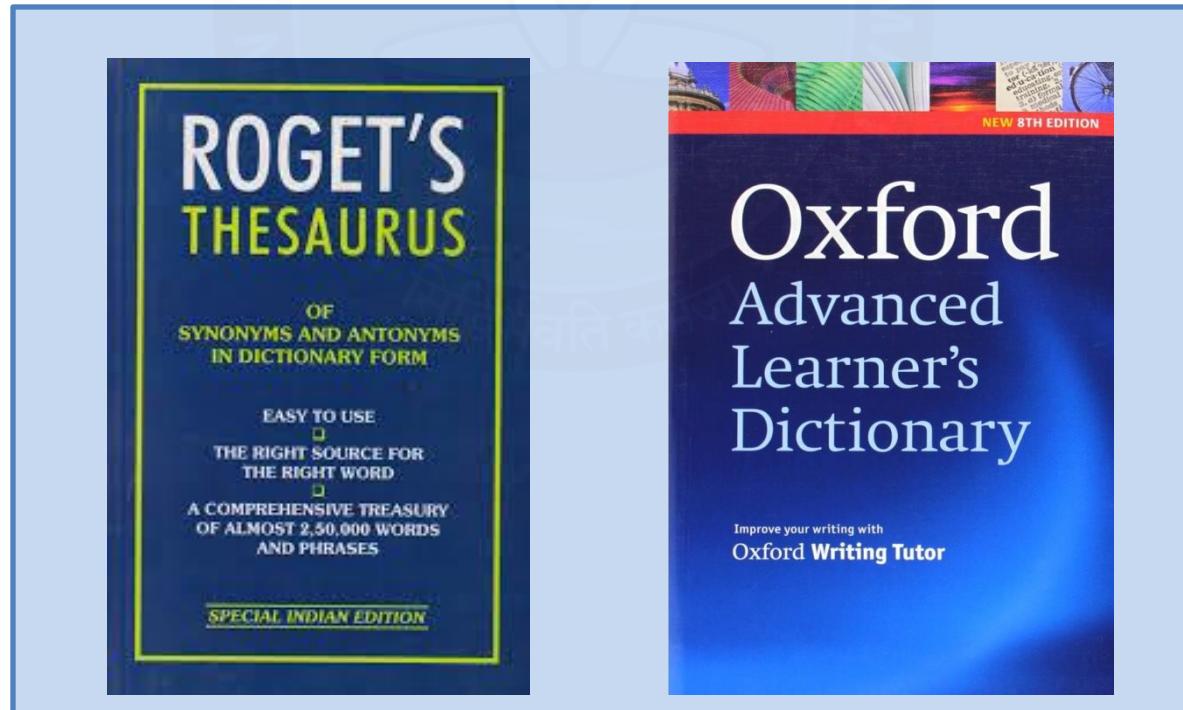
- The other set, where **words mean opposite**, is called “**Antonyms**”. So words like competitor, contestant, critic, enemy, foe, rival, etc. are antonyms of “friend”, but synonyms of one another.
- So if one knows only “friends” and “enemies”, then one can be said to have only a functional vocabulary. But if one knows their antonyms and synonyms as well, then one can be said to have a “good” vocabulary.

ACTIVITY

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

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

- 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.



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

Thank you!