



Proficiency in L2

Vocabulary in L2

What does knowing a word mean?

- Form
- Meaning
- Use

- Wesche (1993) developed a Vocabulary Knowledge Scale with five stages: (a) the word is unfamiliar, (b) the word is familiar but the meaning is not known, (c) a translation into the NL can be given, (d) the word can be used appropriately in a sentence, and (e) the word is used accurately both semantically and grammatically.

Incremental learning of vocabulary

- Learning vocabulary is not a one-time affair
- A first encounter with a word may draw a learner's attention to a particular word
- Subsequent encounters provide learners with opportunities to determine relevant semantic and syntactic information.
- The important point is that learning words is a recursive process and does not occur instantaneously

- Knowledge of the lexicon also involves knowing how to combine elements to create novel lexical items.

Receptive and productive knowledge

- Usually comprehension is more than production

Form

- Pronunciation
- Spelling

- Homophones
- meet – meat
- right – wright
- flower - flour

Meaning

- Meaning – arbitrary
- Connotation
- Denotation

- Polysemy

I can run a mile in five minutes

Trains are running still, despite the fog

We've run the computer program but nothing happens

He's been running a restaurant

The river runs to the sea

Supplies are running low

What's running at the Inox this weekend?

My nose's running since last night

- Homographs
- The little boat was buffeted mercilessly by the waves
- Are you having a sit-down meal or a buffet at the wedding?
- A product may carry a price which cannot easily be discounted
- I'd heard rumours, but discounted them

Use

- Syntactic contexts
- Some verbs require objects, some verbs require indirect and direct objects, some verbs require animate subjects
- John beats
- John puts on
- John eats/ John eats all vegetables
- John sleeps

- Interpret verbs in context
- John rents a bicycle from Mary
- John rents a bicycle to Mary

English psych verbs

- The children fear ghosts (experiencer = subject)
- Ghosts frighten the children (experiencer = object)
- The newspaper pleases John
- John likes the newspaper

- Phonological similarity (e.g. meet - meat)
- Orthographic similarity (e.g. read – read)
- Syntactic similarity (e.g. We declared/ stated/ announced/ asserted that John was the President)
- Semantic similarity (e.g. keep – put)

Success with Words

I. Accuracy

II. Suitability

III. Effectiveness

➤ All three of the above entail choices about the verbal possibilities – in other words, **diction**.

I. Accuracy

➤ To say anything, you could opt for so many words.

➤ Take the verb ‘*say*’ itself:

Say (express), *state* (express formally), *assert* (express strongly), *suggest* (present for consideration), *claim* (express as being true), *maintain* (uphold), *declare* (make known), *proclaim* (say publicly), *affirm* (say supportively), and many more . . .

Inaccurate Words

- **malapropism** – an inaccurate word.
- An example from Mrs. Malaprop's speech:

*“but the point we would request of you is, that you will promise to forget this fellow – no, **illiterate** him, I say, quite from your memory”*

(obliterate)

Sheldon's The Rivals

Some Malapropisms from student writings:

- **harassing** solar energy.
- **incoherent** with each other.
- **lucrative** language.
- the technical **recourse**.

(harnessing, incompatible,/inconsistent, innovative, discourse)

II. Appropriateness

- Suitability as the writer/speaker, the subject matter and the potential audience.
- Formal/informal/colloquial/slang
- language is constantly changing and so is this categorization getting constantly reformulated – today's slang is tomorrow's colloquial idiom and informal speech of the day after.

- People don't realize all the time I spend on the job. I am insane about work.
- *People don't realize all the time I spend on the job. I am mad about work.*
- Can you give a legible description of the highlights of the company's economic package?
- *Can you give a clear description of the highlights of the company's economic package?*
- The enemy used a fatal weapon.
- *The enemy used a lethal weapon.*
- Never before, had their income permitted them such a generous expenditure.
- *Never before, had their income allowed them such a generous expenditure.*

- *“I’m so upset about my birthday party pictures. My brother is making faces behind me in every picture, what a photo bomb!”*
- “photo bomb” means a person or an object is accidentally or intentionally in a photo and as a result, ruins it.
- *“I got a job promotion even though I don’t go to work half the time. I’m so sick.”*
- “sick”, which literally means ill. However, in slang it refers to something being awesome or cool.

Jargon

- **Jargon** - ‘the technical vocabulary or idiom of a special activity or group’ – neat and neutral
- ‘obscure and often pretentious language marked by a roundabout way of expression and use of long words’
- E.g., ‘*reconfigure your browser to reject all cookies except those from trusted sources . . .*’ is jargon only if you are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the technical aspects of the internet.

(Cont . . .)

- There will be occasions when we have to use jargon, especially in technical reports, or reports where the primary reader will expect a high level of technical language.
- However, if there is any danger that your readers won't understand the technical words and phrases you use, don't. Find an alternative, more common or direct word or phrase - the one that your readers themselves would use.

III. EFFECTIVENESS

- Watch your connotations
- Watch your tone
- Use simpler words
- Avoid worn out usage

Euphemistic and dysphemistic language

- Many triplets can be devised that express **positive**, **neutral**, and **negative** connotations:
 - *Slender/thin/skinny*
 - *Frank/blunt/insolent*
 - *Overweight/plump/fat*
- Bertrand Russell on a BBC programme gave an example of this with the following: ‘I am *firm*, you are *obstinate*, and he is *a pig-headed fool*’.
- The idea prompted *The New Statesman* to set a competition for its readers. Here are some of the published entries:
 - I am *sparkling*. You are usually *talkative*. He is *drunk*.
 - I am *a creative writer*. You have a *journalistic flair*. He is *a prosperous hack*.
 - I *day dream*. You are an *escapist*. He ought to see a *psychiatrist*.

Potential of Words

- “When an idea is wanting, a word can always be found to take its place” – Goethe
- Illustrates the potential of words to mould/manipulate thoughts and even reality.
- Orwellian Newspeak
- Big Brother, Disputed Territories, Vaporised (becoming an unperson)
- Non-neutrality of language

- Notice from a Hotel: *We are pleased to confirm your reservation. It will be held on a space available basis.*
- Hansie Cronje's confession: *I was not entirely honest.*
- Ronald Reagan's: *Mistakes have been made.*

Biased Words: Adjective

- The widest spread of **hidden bias** is in the **adjective**.
- old - *old and worn*;
 - tall - *tall and handsome*;
 - plain - *plain and tasteless, plain and dumb*;
 - slippery - *slippery and unreliable*;
 - rough - *rough and uncouth, clumsy uncultured*;
 - green - *green and inexperienced*;
 - blue - *blue and down hearted*;
 - level - *level and judicious*.

Biased Words: Noun

- **Bias** in a **noun** is even more **potent**, a noun objectifies the way an adjective cannot, it can only qualify.
- (I am not a *deserter*, I *deserted*)
- x is *ungrateful*. (attribution of a quality)
- x is *an ungrateful person*. (solidifies the quality)
- x is *an ingrate*. (we have branded x)
- x *fusses*, x is *fussy*, x is *a fussbudget*;
- x is *extravagant*, x is *a spend thrift*;
- x *takes his time*, x is *slow*, x is *a slowpoke*;
- x is *easy*, x is *a pushover*;
- x *cribs*, x is *a cribber*.

Biased Words: Verbs

- Approval / disapproval:
- They *solved* the problem/they *stumbled upon* the problem.
- He is *protesting*/he is *complaining*.
- He *persists*/ he *doesn't give up*.
- She is *resting*/she is *loafing*.

Use Short Words Whenever You Can

- **Short, easy-to-read words** help your writing to ‘**flow**’ - long words interrupt the reader's concentration, especially if there are a lot of them. For example, the words in the following sentence are, individually, probably familiar to you.

In accordance with the Government's and the organization's agreement regarding the future sustainability of the middle-hill irrigation projects, continuing assistance will be given by the organizations concerned with project implementation until such time as the feasibility of returning ownership to the project beneficiaries with a reasonable guarantee of sustainability, long-term economic benefit and local participation in the decision making process has been established.

(Cont . . .)

- (In other words, ‘*Project funding will continue until we are sure we can hand the project over to the local users safely*’.)
- All these long words together simply give the reader a headache.

Look at these sentences...

- Improved administration and management of the intervals in work related to personnel coffee periods must be constant aim in order that the maximum utilization of labour from the minimum number of personnel may be achieved.
- The maximum quality of your endeavours should be achieved.
- As a nurse, I work within a therapeutic milieu structure.
- We have escalated the interface in the demilitarized zone.

What they actually mean...

- For more work, take shorter coffee breaks.
- Do the best you can.
- I work as a nurse in a hospital.
- Our peaceful cooperation is on the rise.