**Lesson 4 Teaching Vocabulary in ESP Contexts**

**1- Course Description**

The Present lesson highlights one of the most important concerns of ESP; it is vocabulary or terminology. It takes technical vocabulary as a model of vocabulary teaching, and describes the process of how to select, present, consolidate and practise vocabulary acquisition.

**2-Course Objectives**

Bythe end of the lesson, students would be able to teach appropriate vocabulary related to the field of study they are supposed to teach.

**3-Course Content**

**3.1-Introduction**

All languages contain words. Most learners acknowledge the importance of vocabulary acquisition. According to Thornbury : “the acquisition of new words is the process which never stops” Building a good storage of vocabulary is the first and one of the most important steps when starting to learn a new language. People learn new words permanently and identify their meaning. However, vocabulary learning does not officially belong to the language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Nevertheless, there is no way of making advance in language without building vocabulary that can be applied into grammar structures and make meaningful utterances. Thus, it is difficult for students to communicate without creating and developing their own lexicon.

**3.2-ESP vocabulary teaching**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) represents a specific reason for learning a foreign language. There are distinguished two types of ESP: English for Occupational Purposes (EOP - learning English for a job) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP - learning English for a study specialization). At present these streams include a lot of other fields, e.g. English for Technicians.

**3.3-Technical Vocabulary**

As an example, the students at the vocational secondary school of furniture industry should study ESP vocabulary, especially English for Technicians. According to Hatch and Brown (312), “special lexical items are present in nearly all professions, and each branch has special vocabulary to cover abstract concepts.” Kennedy and Bolitho (56-58) distinguish these word categories for teaching technical vocabulary

• Technical Abbreviations, Symbols and Formulae – they partly cause the problems: Teachers´ role is to explain patiently their form and meaning, and students should practise them in spoken and written exercises

• Sub-technical vocabulary – words which are not directly a part of specific technical branch, but they occur generally in scientific and technical texts – e.g. derivation and conversion.

• Highly technical vocabulary - words that have a close thematic relationship and belong to the specific technical field.

The fundamental problem which has to be solved by authors designing technical teaching materials is: contemporary students at the vocational secondary school have little knowledge not only English, but also their profession. This fact reflects in these two factors: teaching material should be managed by students in both the language and specialization. Hatch and Brown (370) stress that “the specificity of any individual’s knowledge about a word depends on the person and his or her motivation, desires, and needs for the word.” There is also an important role of teachers to facilitate learning of technical vocabulary with the favourable secondary impact on the good general knowledge of English.

**3.4-Selecting vocabulary**

The initial step in teaching ESP vocabulary is to determine which words and special terms in fact to teach. Gairns and Redman (59) emphasize especially cultural reasons and the principles of need and level. Authors of teaching materials and teachers should take into account also the criteria of learn ability and teach ability. According to Harmer (154), one of the most common principles of vocabulary selection is to teach at first concrete words and gradually abstract words. Words like chair, table, sofa and wardrobe are easily presented and explained, because students can see or imagine the real things which the words represent. On the contrary, abstract words like density, qualifications, safety are more difficult to explain. There are a number of words that are connected with the idea of furniture (chair, table, sofa and wardrobe). Words that have this kind of thematic relationship are said to belong to the same lexical field. The texts of practical part also contain the lexical field of tool-related words that partly overlap with furniture words (hammer, screwdriver and saw) as well as terminology connected with trees (hardwood and softwood).

After selecting words for teaching purpose, it is also indispensable to decide what to teach about each naming unit. According to Harmer (158) and Thornbury (15), knowledge of a word involves knowing its:

* **Meaning** : meanings in context, sense of relation (synonyms/antonyms),
* **Form** : spelling and pronunciation, affixes, parts of speech,
* **Grammar** : plurals, countability, past simple/participle forms,
* **Usage**: appropriate register.

**3.5-Presenting vocabulary**

The main aim of presenting vocabulary is to insert the meaning, the correct form and appropriate usage of the new word into the student´s memory. There are quite lots of methods and techniques how to present the form and meaning of new lexical items. It depends on teachers, which form of presentation is the most suitable for the particular topic. According to Gairns and Redman (73), there are some traditional methods and techniques used to present new vocabulary:

**3.5.1-Visual Techniques**

* Visuals: photographs, blackboard drawings, pictures, videos, wall charts, pictograms and real objects; they are useful for teaching concrete words.
* Demonstrating : mime/facial expression and gesture – useful for teaching action verbs

**3.5.2-Verbal Techniques**

• Illustrative situations (oral or written) – this technique is helpful when the words are more abstract

• Synonyms and antonyms – using the words students have already known to teach them similar words

• Definitions and explanations – appropriate for intermediate learners. To make definition of words can be difficult, especially at elementary levels.

• Scales – if students know 'big' and 'small', for example, other steps could be to teach 'short' and 'long' etc

• Translation – it has been the most widespread activity used for presenting the meaning in classes

• Examples of the type – give examples of words you want to introduce.

•. Guessing from the context, matching/ labeling – learners match words to words or sentences or pictures. It belongs to so called discovery techniques: they activate the learner’s previous knowledge of a language and initiate the work with the new vocabulary. Discovery techniques demand the autonomous students with higher knowledge of English.

Taking into consideration the specific factors of ESP vocabulary teaching “many of the techniques traditionally used in ELT work can be exploited in ESP vocabulary teaching especially at the early stages when both subject and linguistic content are at an elementary level” (Kennedy and Bolitho 59). Consequently, presenting ESP vocabulary can be fully realized by methods and techniques mentioned above. Often even translation may be useful, necessary and appropriate because of the level of students at the vocational secondary schools and to avoid the fatal misunderstanding. During presentation wood/furniture vocabulary, teachers have a great opportunity to explain the purposeful meaning of a word in the context of the real life and work at the school workshops. However, this kind of presentation should be simple, interesting and amusing to motivate and encourage students´ interest.

**3.6- Vocabulary consolidation**

As Thornbury (23) states, “in fact, learning is remembering. Unlike the learning of grammar, which is essentially a rule-based system, vocabulary knowledge is largely a question of accumulating individual items.” He distinguishes three basic types of memory (23):

* Short-term store : some information is held in memory for a very short time (a few seconds) Students are able to repeat a word that they have just heard from their teacher

• Working memory: it is a space, where a student first places information for later usage to recall a word repeatedly. It lasts about 20 seconds.

• Long-term memory: the capacity is wide and its contents are lasted over time.

The great challenge for learners is to transform vocabulary from the quickly forgotten (short-term store) to the never forgotten (long-term store), and to turn passive knowledge of vocabulary into an active form. Research into memory suggests that, in order to ensure that information moves into permanent long-term memory, a number of principles must to be followed. One of them is **use**. “Putting words to use, preferably in some interesting way, is the best way of ensuring they are added to long-term memory. It is the principle well-known as **Use it or lose it** (Thornbury 24). For this reason, words must be presented in their usual contexts, so that learners can get a sense for their meaning, their register and collocations. In separated vocabulary activities, words are often presented in the form of lexical sets. It is highly recognized that it is easier to learn the words that are thematically arranged but have looser relation than lexical sets. The system of practical exercises should be thoroughly organized so that the amount of new words does not discourage the student.

**3.7- Vocabulary practice**

Presenting a word in the class does not secure that it will be remembered for a long time. There are many practice activities that include repeating of the new vocabulary to fix the new words in the learners´ memory. The practice activities are divided into two main groups: receptive and productive.

**3.7.1-Receptive practice**: (the learner does not really produce the target words) includes these types (Thornbury 94-99):

**1)** Identifying – means finding words in a text or listening, e.g. underline specific words or expressions in the text, or tick, put in the correct column or list items that you hear.

**2)** Selecting – means recognizing words and making choices among them, e.g. circle the odd word in the line.

**3)** Matching – includes recognizing words and then pairing them with their synonym, antonym, definition, pictures to words etc. It can be intended to matching parts of lexical items to create collocations

**4)** Sorting – putting the lexical items into different categories, e.g. put these adjectives in two groups – positive and negative.

**5)** Ranking and sequencing – putting the lexical items in some kind of order, e.g. ordering items chronologically, ranking items according to personal preference etc.

**3.7.2-** **Productive practice** (the productive skills – writing or speaking – are incorporated in the vocabulary teaching,) includes these types (Thornbury 100): completion and creation.

* **Completion tasks** (context is given), often called gap-fills, are widely used not only in practice but also in revision stages. They include open gap-fills or closed gap-fills (multiple choice activities), crosswords,
* **Creation tasks**: the learner use the word in a sentence or a story, in writing, speaking or both forms, use affixes to build new naming units from given words.

Generally speaking, vocabulary practice is divided into **controlled** and **free**. Controlled practice has to come first, because controlled activities require the student to produce a certain structure, they practice accuracy and fix the pattern. The second phase, which demands productive use of vocabulary, is free practice. The specialists point out the usage of free practice in the class, because according to Lewis (151-152) “to know a word means how to use it in the real life to be able to communicate.” This is a typical example of the lexical approach where is a primary role of words which determine grammar. Free practice is aimed at fluency and is productive. However, Gairns and Redman warn against “a certain degree of stress involved in productive practice” (137). According to them, practice should be challenging, but not frustrating or stressful for the learner. They give several arguments in favour of productive practice of vocabulary in the classroom (137), above all, it promotes fluency and improves pronunciation, it helps the memory to store words, and retrieve them later, conversation in English is very motivating and it builds learner’s confidence, learners expect to get the opportunity to practise new language.

Another division includes spoken and written practice. Many vocabulary activities used in the class are based on discussions, dialogues, descriptions, role-play activities, or different written tasks. It has become a part of communicative classes, e.g. in the form of an activity well- known as ´Find someone who…`, memory games and funny games (hot seat) etc.

**3.8-How to Practise and Consolidate ESP vocabulary**

Students should be encouraged to think about the importance of the word, therefore the examples in context are highly useful. Moreover, this approach must be focused predominantly on learners, each unit has to have clear aims, motivating topics and challenging practical activities. The appropriate issues must be presented in the context of the real life, in this case, of the present vocational school, where “young people are given numerous opportunities to follow purposeful learning” (Buchanan 6). As Maehr points out, in this way, teachers can support the naturalness of learning vocabulary, and in such an enriched atmosphere, learners find ideal authentic reasons for learning a foreign language

According to Morgan and Rinvolucri (7) the new words are not learned mechanically, but associatively. Therefore the most progressive methods in ESP vocabulary teaching should be sorting words by process or activity, by categories (materials: hard and soft wood), by word families (to join, joiner, joinery), by theme/topic (types of furniture) and synonyms/ antonyms. Contemporary supplementary vocabulary books are typically organized thematically like in this thesis. Moreover, it allows learners to work independently on vocabulary areas that they are interested in.

ESP vocabulary can be practised and consolidated by similar methods and techniques used for practising and consolidation of general vocabulary. Writing tasks can include reports and different instructions for wood/furniture processing, making summaries from technical journals, describing processes and techniques, labelling diagrams and pictures, describing graphs and comments on charts etc. Nowadays a lot of students take part in various competitions where they display their projects and so they may create a short English summary of their presentations. There are different exchange practices with other vocational/technical secondary schools within the European Union, school trips, e-learning activities and participations in Comenius and Socrates programmes, where students can improve their ESP vocabulary in practical circumstances.

**3.9-References**

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