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Principles of Teaching Foreign Language Vocabulary to University Students

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Introduction

One of the most challenging problems university students encounter when learning foreign languages is acquiring lexical units and enhancing vocabulary skills. Numerous ways to tackle this difficult problem are associated with insufficient management technology in learning vocabulary. The results of monitoring the teaching-learning process and evaluating students' language skills show that the level of their vocabulary skills is low and does not conform to the curriculum requirements.

Teaching experience proves that the lack of sufficient lexical units in students' vocabulary complicates the process of learning a foreign language as a means of communication. Vocabulary learning process is highlighted in the works of V. Buhbinder, I. Bohdanova, Y. Burlakov, V. Korostelov, S. Kuklina, B. Lapidus, H. Rohova, T. Saharova, V. Skalkyn, E. Solovtsova and others. Although the problem of learning lexical units has been studied for many decades, it is still under discussion.

Objectives of the paper

Present the learning tools that would effectively promote assimilation of lexical units in students' memory, and define the pedagogical conditions under which students would acquire specific lexical units according to specific communication situation.

Results of research

Scientists traditionally define three main stages in acquiring vocabulary items: 1) review; 2) initial consolidation; 3) skills development to use lexical units learnt by students in different types of speech activity.

The first two stages are often combined into one – language presentation. It plays a significant role in teaching vocabulary. This stage affects efficiency of the following process of teaching vocabulary. Thus, the aim of teacher is to choose the most efficient way of presentation according to the level of educa-

tion, to the level of students' communication skills, and to the qualified characteristics of a lexical unit. A great variety of different semantization techniques allows teacher to set lesson objectives and choose relevant teaching methods.

Researchers have divided methods of semantization into two groups: *translatable* and *untranslatable*. Translatable methods imply the use of translation. However, translation sometimes leads to interference since the number of words is not the same in different languages, so this way of semantization should be accompanied by the analysis of other meanings of a lexical unit.

Translatable methods of conveying the meaning of lexical units include: one-word translation (English: a screw – гвинт; verbose translation (English: to realize – здійснити, виконати, реалізувати, усвідомлювати, перетворювати в гроші, продавати, виручити (*суму*), отримати (*таку-то суму за що-небудь*)); interpretation translation (this method is used in intensive methods of teaching English); explanation of the meaning of a lexical unit in students' native language. Besides the native language equivalent, information of coincidence or difference in the meaning of a lexical unit is given (English: big – means *value*, *size*; great – means *large value*, large – *big in more than one dimensions' area/volume*); definition/determination (English: watch – *a watch that can be worn on the hand or in the pocket*) [Бронштейн 2010].

Untranslatable methods are particularly valuable because they help develop visual, articulated and acoustic channels of information perception and understanding.

Untranslatable methods comprise visual semantization – objects, pictures, slides, gestures, movements demonstration and others; language semantics – using contest to illustrate the meaning of a lexical unit (English: *This flower smells good*); using comparison of a lexical unit with other known words, for instance, presenting synonyms or antonyms (English: *increase – rise, decrease – fall, increase – decrease*); definition – the description of a new word by using words students know (English: *income – money received, especially on a regular basis, for work or through investments*[1]); interpretation of a lexical unit in a foreign language (English: *sir – a respectful term of address to a man*).

All the above-mentioned methods of semantization have both advantages and drawbacks, making it almost impossible to define the only suitable method of a new lexical unit semantization.

The choice of semantization depends on several factors, primarily on word characteristics: its form, value, compatibility, convergence or divergence with the words in native language. Thus, lexical units expressing abstract concepts cannot be put under semantization through visual aids or illustrated sentences. Neither can it be done using one-word translation.

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[1] http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/income.

However, it is necessary to combine two or more ways, such as verbal (context) and nonverbal (drawing, movement, gestures, etc.). A story with elements of conversation that includes new lexical units can come in handy to teacher. Before presenting a new lexical unit, teacher makes the tempo of intonation slower thus emphasizing the new lexical unit. Then teacher semantisizes the new word using the method depending on above given factors involving students into the process of communication.

After presenting a new lexical unit, teacher stimulates further students' activities, making them use new lexical units orally or in writing. Thus, we deal with speech abilities that are based on skills including vocabulary, in other words, lexical skills must function in speech skills.

Students must avoid internal translation and be able to use new words fluently, adapting to the change of communication situations.

Teacher should lay stress on lexical units that are read and pronounced with a great difficulty before performing situational tasks. Teacher should constantly add new words to the previously studied ones, thus increasing the number of communicative situations. In order to organize such process, the lecturer should prepare the so-called supporting cards or PowerPoint presentations, involving students into this process. In order to enhance students' vocabulary skills, teacher involves students in a number of creative activities.

In addition to classroom work, students should learn lexical units while working on authentic texts autonomously. They should always keep a vocabulary list, where they record transcription and translation of new words as well as use these words in word phrases; they are also supposed to look up synonyms and antonyms or derived words in a good dictionary. Students are recommended to record word phrases with prepositions and structural terms to apply them in an utterance or discourse. For this purpose, some on-line resources can be offered to students:
– http://www.visualthesaurus.com,
– http://www.merriam-webster.com,
– http://oxforddictionary.so8848.com,
– http://fortee.ru/2012/07/12/oxford-collocation-dictionary-online.

Role playing games and case methods are very effective to improve students' professional vocabulary skills. For example, situational tasks and games associated with opening a bank account, asking for loans, expanding business and the like can be good for students majoring in economics.

Teaching vocabulary to university students must be based on the four basic principles of the generally accepted educational technology.

1. Free choice principle. There are many values in life and the most recognizable one from Bible is choice. Every human activity involves choices. For example, teacher offers a number of activities in learning grammar and students make their choice giving their arguments.

2. Principle of openness [Гин 2001: 8]. In order to generate interest one can pay attention to specifying assimilation requirements. For instance, teacher offers problem tasks that students are to solve using their own thoughts and reading techniques (learning stylistics, lexicology, lexical items related to theory of economics).

Students get used to so-called „closed" activities, so to say, when there is the only solution to a problem. However, in our lives we face tasks that need to be solved in different ways; therefore students must be involved in so-called „open" activities, for example, discussing a problem issue. The thing is that the main objective in learning foreign languages is to acquire communicative competence, so the basic unit of speech is communication, and communication activity is regarded as a unity consisting of speech intention of at least two interlocutors, circumstances for communication and linguistic resources.

3. Principle of activity [Гин 2001: 9]. The only way to knowledge is activity. Teacher should pay attention to making students learn things in the form of activity that would improve their skills and competence. Teacher should use situations where students can use the acquired skills and competence (to visit an art gallery and make a presentation in English; to meet foreign partners etc.).

Along with providing students with physical, mental, moral and aesthetic education, teacher must always remember to develop in them communicative skills. Communication itself teaches people to be self-organized and grow professionally. The written language, being a mere record of the spoken language, is in the second place.

4. Principle of ideality [Гин 2001: 9]. The word „ideal" indicates that the most effective way of acquiring knowledge in professional training is to use the „methods of intensive training": *emotionally-semantic method* (I. Shekhter), *relaxopedia* (Y. Shwartz), and *rhythmopedia* (G. Burdenko, Y. Markhma). However, students often fail to comprehend the term „perfection", finding it obscure. Thus, mastering vocabulary is of great importance for a professional. To achieve perfection, the teaching methods below can be used:

„Attractive objectives". At the beginning of the lesson we often set abstract objectives which are hardly ever seen by students. For example, analyzing a grammatical rule teacher usually says, „Today, we plan to learn the interrogative forms in order to avoid mistakes when speaking English". Here teacher does not clarify what mistakes students can make. Teacher also destroys the objectives by saying the phrase „when speaking English". Students might think they are going to have to have a talk with native speakers soon, or those mistakes refer to spoken English only. It would be better to formulate the aim as follows, „Let's imagine you are in a bank in England. You are to put questions to a bank clerk in order to open a deposit account".

„Surprise!". It is well-known that there is nothing better for stimulating mental activity than something grabbing our attention.

„Fantastic addition". It is always useful to implement real situations with fantasy. For example, 'Imagine that you live one hundred years ago', 'Change the meaning of a word to another', 'Invent fantastic plants', 'Consider the topic from an unusual point of view, for example, being an alien or an ancient Greek' etc.

„Find an error!". At first students are warned to identify errors in speech or while working on the text when teacher deliberately makes mistakes. Gestures and intonation can prompt to make a certain stress on errors.

„Revision games". Researchers know that, unfortunately, the most common and inefficient method of revising vocabulary is a reproductive one. Nevertheless, students prefer to learn lexical items by heart because this method does not require significant mental efforts [Гнаткевич 1980: 19]. Instead, revision games are a good alternative to traditional methods aimed at efficient vocabulary revision:

– *Lexical threads* are easy to plan and aid memory. Teacher splits the students up into two groups. One student gives teacher a letter from the alphabet. Then each group calls out a verb, in its infinitive form that begins with the letter chosen. Each group calls out a new word and you record it on the board. The group that cannot think of anymore loses. It is highly motivating when learners see how much they know. For this activity language emerges from the knowledge of the students and teaching is kept to a minimum. If someone shouts out a word the others do not know, the students usually tell each other what the word means as the games goes on. It helps them recall words they may have only seen once or twice and aids memory[2].

– *Adopt a word* is a good idea for speech development, involving students in contributing words, researching and presenting. Teacher gives students templates with headings:

Word	Meaning	Part of speech	Example of usage

Then students choose a word that they would like to adopt and do some research on it using the template. Each student then gives a short presentation on their adopted word until all the class has had a chance. The words are then stuck to a large paper chart on the wall[3].

„Control review". Students make up a series of questions about the topic they learn. Then some students ask questions and others give answers. It is necessary to have students put questions to all aspects of material being learnt. Students work in pairs, two by two on the task.

„Review with expansion". Students put a number of questions, the answers to which will elicit additional information. Some points of the issues should be left open.

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[2] https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/lexical-threads.
[3] https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/adopt-a-word.

„Result-survey". At the end of the lesson, teacher asks students reflection stimulating questions. For example, 'What were the main issues in the lesson?' 'What points did you find the most interesting?' (It is necessary to distinguish important and interesting things). One can have several answers to one question. Students' views may differ, and teacher may also add to the discussion expressing their opinion [Скуратівська 2003: 45].

Unfortunately, the most hazardous and quite common teaching method is to punish students by assigning extra, more complex and time-consuming, homework. Instead, teacher should discuss with students the most efficient kind of task to be assigned in order to have students learn new material. Teachers should not be manipulated during such discussions but should take the suggested ideas into consideration.

This method proves to be advisable when dealing with several types and forms of tasks. All the described teaching methods provide the best learning trajectory in having students memorize lexical units, and contribute to the development of students' long-term memory, improving their communicative competence.

The research results of students' learning activities were taken from the module tests according to credit-module system. The data were collected at the beginning and end of the experiment. The level of students' educational achievements has been calculated according to the scale of assessment for the suggested credit-module system, where the amount of learned material is measured on the scale below:

– *Elementary level* – 35–60% – „unsatisfactory",
– *Intermediate level* – 61–74% – „satisfactory",
– *Sufficient level* – 75–89% – „good",
– *High level* – 90–100% – „excellent".

Scale evaluation of results makes it possible to determine the general level of educational achievement of students in learning English. The obtained data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Level of students' learning activities

Levels	Pre-experiment		Post-experiment	
	Control Group	**Experimental Group**	**Control Group**	**Experimental Group**
Elementary	16%	19%	14%	10%
Intermediate	35%	34%	36%	28%
Sufficient	39%	38%	38%	46%
High	10%	9%	12%	16%

Conclusion

Implementation of the considered teaching methods in experimental group caused an increase in the number of students with high level of educational achievements. The obtained results of the survey indicate the positive impact and the effectiveness of the suggested methods and principles of teaching foreign language vocabulary to university students.

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Abstract

One of the most challenging problems university students encounter when learning foreign languages is acquiring lexical units and enhancing vocabulary skills. The article provides the study of the methods and principles of teaching foreign language vocabulary to university students as well as their advantages and drawbacks. The general levels of educational students' achievement in learning English are determined on the basis of the pilot research carried out at Donetsk National University in Vinnytsia and Vinnytsia National Agrarian University. Although the results of the pilot research show students' weaknesses in the process of learning lexical units, they prove the positive impact of the presented methods and principles of teaching English at university.

Keywords: principles of teaching vocabulary, lexical units, methods of teaching, pilot research.