Vocabulary Acquisition:

From Meeting to Using

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Outline

• Introduction
• Words words words – how many are there? How many do we know?
• What does it mean to “know” a word?
• Sources of input – reference works
• Approaching a text
• Research
• CPE coursebook analysis
• Activities
Words, words, words....

• How many words are there to know? (and why is the word “word” not always helpful?)

OED 20 volume version – 171,476 headwords
47,156 obsolete
9,500 derivations
Shakespeare invented around 1,700 words
Spanish – 100,000 words
Portuguese – 390,000 words
Dutch – 430,000 words
EXEMPTION-EXERT

- exemption
- exencephalus
- exenterate
- exenteritis
- exequy (exequial, exequious)
- exerce
- exercise
- (exercisable, exercisable, exerciser)
- excitation
- excite
- exercitor
- exergue (exergual)
- exert (Oxford Shorter English Dictionary)
Word counts

• Educated adult NS 18,000-20,000 productive, maybe up to 40,000 receptive
• 5 year old – 5,000
• 8 year old – 10,000
• FCE: 2,500 active head words
• CAE 3,500
• CPE 4,500-5,000 (CEFR)
What does it mean to “know” a word?

Meaning, spelling, pronunciation
Word grammar, derivations
Connotations and register
Use – according to context
Frequency
Idiomatic use
Multiple meanings
Dictionaries and other references

• learner dictionary
• thesaurus
• collocation dictionary
• corpora
• chat rooms...
# Learner dictionary - information

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utter

• utter
• [only before noun] used to emphasize how complete something is *That’s complete and utter nonsense!* *To my utter amazement she agreed. He felt an utter fool.*

• utter something (formal) to make a sound with your voice; to say something: *to utter a cry. She did not utter a word during lunch (= said nothing). My mother hardly uttered a word the entire afternoon. He uttered a great cry of anger.*

**Look at these dictionary entries and answer the following questions:**
• What 2 meanings are given for *utter*? Which is the most common meaning?
• Can you use *utter* after subject + to be?
  e.g. The destruction was utter
• What about *complete*?
• What’s the most common word found next in the following expression?
  That man is a complete __________
  Is the verb *utter*
• regular?
• transitive or intransitive?
• What’s the connection between *utter* (vb) and silence?
• What’s the noun form of *utter*?
Word frequency

- The first 25 words are used in 33% of everyday writing.
- The first 100 words appear in 50% student/adult writing.
- The first 1,000 words make up 89% of student/adult writing.
- 3,000 words make up 95% of common texts.
Approaching a text

• Alexander Frater – Chasing the Monsoon 1990 p138

He had left me outside a colony of squatters’ shacks, small ephemeral dwellings made from scavenged materials. This was garbage-dump architecture, its constituent parts abandoned by the affluent world outside but put to good use here. I noted packing-crate timber, rusting corrugated iron, bits of polystyrene insulating materials, lengths of piping and plastic sheeting.
Research

• Frequency alone does not determine the likelihood of acquisition. Exposure is not enough.
• Motivation, relevance, interest.
• Affective factors. The words they need, the words they like. Idiolects
• Discrete steps, stages, or input-intake-output continuum – able to understand vague, general meaning------------------------- free use of lexis enters active vocabulary
• Learners avoid words they perceive as difficult. Prefer to use general, frequent words rather than infrequent, specific ones.

NS lexicon continues to expand, whereas syntactical knowledge remains stable.
CPE coursebook Unit 1A Contents

-vocabulary connected with the performing arts
-word formation
-(open) cloze
-(reading) word check
-nouns + prepositions
-collocations
-compound words
Some of my words......

- columpio
- potro
- abedul
- notorious – well-known for some bad quality or deed. *a notorious criminal*
- notorio – que es importante y conocido. *La belleza de sus composiciones es notoria*
- sleaze
- bling
Collocations

• My colleagues_____ congratulated me on my promotion.
• He thanked her_____ for her help.
• The bank_____ denied having made a mistake with my account.
• I_____ advise you to seek legal advice.
• I promise_____ to pay you back next week.
5 Principles

• Cognitive Depth
• Retrieval
• Associations
• Re-contextualisation
• Multiple Encounters

(Scott Thornbury 2013)
So, can we help?

- Talk about vocabulary! Create an affective link
- Integrate skills – writing and speaking tasks

Recycle:
- Anagrams / Crosswords / Sopa de letras
- Synonyms and antonyms: permeate – seep
- Derivatives / Prefixes and suffixes
- Hypernyms & hyponyms / Lexical sets
- Collocation / chunking
- Write a story / poem / etc.
- Story: So at last the opening night arrived.....
- Songs for phrasal verbs –up/down; on/off
References

Gairns R. & Redman S. Working with Words (1986) CUP
Meara P. - Many excellent articles and books
Schmitt N. Vocabulary in Language Teaching (2000) CUP
Thornbury S. https://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/2013/06/02/v-is-for-vocabulary-teaching/


- Thesaurus – connotations not available. Oxford Learner’s Thesaurus
  In print: MacMillan, Cambridge, Oxford
- Chat rooms e.g. Babel
- Longman Communication 3000
The End.....

Thank you!

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