

МЕТОДИКА НАВЧАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ І КУЛЬТУР

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DISTRIBUTION OF THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY TO BE MASTERED IN THE LANGUAGE COURSE BY STUDENTS OF TERTIARY LINGUISTIC SCHOOLS

Tarnopolsky O., Kabanova M.

otarnopolsky@ukr.net ; dsec.apling@duep.edu

Alfred Nobel University, Dnipro

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Tarnopolsky O., Kabanova M. Alfred Nobel University, Dnipro

Distribution of the English vocabulary to be mastered in the language course by students of tertiary linguistic schools

Abstract. Introduction. Effectively teaching English vocabulary in practical courses of English at tertiary linguistic schools is one of the most difficult issues in the efficient organization of the teaching/learning process. As research shows, the learning/acquisition of vocabulary directly depends on the number of repetitions in communication of every lexical unit to be learned or acquired. The sufficient number of such repetitions just cannot be achieved for every lexical unit introduced in the language course because time constraints do not allow ensuring that number in the existing conditions of teaching future translators/interpreters or language teachers.

Purpose. To discuss and determine the possible ways of solving the vocabulary learning/acquisition difficulty by rational distribution of the vocabulary to be learned/acquired into different categories with different approaches to organizing students' learning/acquisition of lexical units belonging to those different categories. **Methods.** Reviewing the studies devoted to foreign language vocabulary learning/acquisition and analyzing the authors' own practical experience in this area with the view of developing the above mentioned approach to optimal vocabulary distribution into different learning/acquisition categories for achieving students' better mastering and retention of lexical units. **Results.** This study revealed that the optimal categories into which the vocabulary to be learned/acquired should be divided are: 1) *the primary basic vocabulary* the lexical units from which are to be acquired by students mostly subconsciously through numerous encounters with them and numerous repetitions of them in communicative processes of their speaking, listening, reading, and writing in the target language; 2) *the secondary basic vocabulary* the lexical units from which are to be consciously learned by students through using specific procedures and exercises for ensuring such learning depending on whether individual lexical units are meant for being mastered receptively or reproductively – in this case, conscious learning may be aided by unconscious retention (acquisition) organized by the teacher wherever possible by addressing the resources of learners' involuntary memory; 3) *the optional vocabulary* acquired by students mostly subconsciously through involuntary retention occurring in the process of learners' extensive reading – this is why different learners may acquire different lexical units from such an optional vocabulary stock; 4) *the potential vocabulary* the lexical units from which the students mostly do not retain but consciously learn how to understand their meanings when encountering them in the English texts they are reading. **Conclusion.** The practical application of the suggested approach in courses of English for future translators/interpreters and language teachers has demonstrated its great positive potential in developing and improving students' lexical skills and enhancing those skills both qualitatively and quantitatively. This opens further prospects for research in the suggested direction.

Key words: vocabulary, vocabulary learning/acquisition for receptive and reproductively verbal communication, the number of repetitions for learning/acquiring a lexical unit in verbal communication, distribution of lexical units into categories for learning/acquisition, different ways of mastering the lexical material belonging to different categories.

Тарнопольський О.Б., Кабанова М.Р. Університет імені Альфреда Нобеля, Дніпро

Розподіл лексики англійської мови, яка підлягає засвоєнню в мовному курсі студентами мовних вишів
Анонція. Стаття підсумовує розробки авторів щодо оптимального методичного розподілу по категоріям для засвоєння тієї лексики, яку мають опанувати в курсі англійської мови студенти мовних ВНЗ. Автори

виходять з того, що засвоєння (стійке запам'ятовування з можливістю подальшого вільного розуміння та/або використання у власному мовленні) лексичних одиниць цілком залежить від кількості повторень кожної засвоюваної одиниці у мовленнєвій комунікації, при тому, що кількість таких повторень для рецептивного оволодіння (наприклад, для розуміння під час читання) має бути суттєво меншою, ніж для репродуктивного оволодіння (наприклад, для вживання у власному мовленні під час говоріння). Вказується, що в навчальному процесі мовного ВНЗ практично неможливо забезпечити необхідну кількість повторень у реальній англійській комунікації (говорінні, аудіюванні, читанні та письмі) усього того обсягу лексики, який підлягає засвоєнню студентами. Щоб уможливити таке засвоєння, автори пропонують розподілити усю лексику, яка вводиться у мовному курсі, на чотири основні категорії, згідно з якими використовуються різні способи опанування лексичного матеріалу, що належить до тієї чи іншої категорії.

Ключові слова: лексика, засвоєння лексики для рецептивної або продуктивної мовленнєвої комунікації, кількість повторень для засвоєння лексичної одиниці у мовленнєвій комунікації, методичний розподіл лексичних одиниць за категоріями для засвоєння, різні способи опанування лексичного матеріалу, що належить до різних категорій.

**Тарнопольский О.Б., Кабанова М.Р. Университет имени Альфреда Нобеля, Днепр
Распределение лексики английского языка, которая подлежит усвоению в языковом курсе студентами
языковых вузов**

Аннотация. Статья подводит итоги разработок авторов, которые касаются методического распределения по категориям для усвоения той лексики, которой должны овладеть в курсе английского языка студенты языковых вузов. Авторы исходят из того, что усвоение (прочное запоминание, дающее возможность дальнейшего свободного понимания и/или использования в собственной речи) лексических единиц полностью зависит от количества повторений каждой единицы в речевой коммуникации, при том, что количество таких повторений для рецептивного овладения (например, для понимания при чтении) должно быть существенно меньше, чем для репродуктивного овладения (например, для употребления в собственной речи при говорении). Отмечается, что в учебном процессе языкового вуза практически невозможно обеспечить необходимое количество повторений в реальной англоязычной коммуникации (говорении, слушании, чтении и письме) всего того объема лексики, который подлежит усвоению студентами. Чтобы сделать такое усвоение возможным, авторы предлагают распределить всю лексику, которая вводится в языковом курсе, на четыре основные категории, в соответствии с которыми используются разные способы овладения лексическим материалом, принадлежащим к той или иной категории.

Ключевые слова: лексика, усвоение лексики для рецептивной или продуктивной речевой коммуникации, количество повторений для усвоения лексической единицы в речевой коммуникации, методическое распределение лексических единиц по категориям для усвоения, разные способы овладения лексическим материалом, принадлежащим к разным категориям.

Introduction (problem statement). Hardly anyone can doubt that sufficient (corresponding to the teaching/learning goals) English vocabulary mastered by tertiary philology students (future translators/interpreters from and into English and future English teachers) is one of the most important manifestations of their language abilities and their qualifications as future specialists in the professional use of that language. There is no accurately defined number of English lexical units to be retained for communicative purposes by philology students. In what concerns this issue, it is not necessary to discuss in our article diverse, and often controversial, views on the exact volume of vocabulary to be mastered by learners to be able to speak, listen, read, and write in the target language on C1/C2 levels (according to the *Common European Framework for languages* [2]) that those learners are expected to attain. But in all cases, the stock of words that may be considered as a must for philology students by the end of their language course counts up to two thousands of lexical units for speaking, up to three-four thousands of them for listening and writing and essentially more than five (up to ten) thousands lexical units for reading. These figures are taken from the data concerning the standard vocabulary of an educated native speaker whose language level (C1/C2) students who have chosen English as their profession should strive to achieve. They also find support in the ideas put forward by a number of authors emphasizing that 2,000 lexical units mastered by a foreign/second language student is an absolute minimum to make communication in that foreign language possible [18].

Unfortunately, it is a very rare situation that philology students finish their course of English with the retained vocabulary more or less close in volume to the figures given above. There is nothing surprising in that because it has already been an established fact that a new word is retained in the human long-term memory only after numerous repetitions [9; 20]. The repetitions that are meant here are not mechanical repetitions characteristic of rote-learning. Rote-learning, when students many times repeat a new word with its translation to remember it, is a grueling and mostly useless work because effective memorization is very rarely achieved [11]. What is meant by numerous repetitions are repeated and multiple encounters with the word or phrase in oral and written speech (listening and reading) and repeated and multiple re-using of that word in speaking and writing. Words live in communication only and it is only through being repeated (recycled) in written and oral, receptive and productive communication that they can enter the student's long-term memory and be retained there for further use. However, the problem is that not every new word that is introduced in the language course can be recycled sufficiently in different forms of communication. Some words, the most frequently used, can be repeated in communication enough times for good memorization and are, therefore, properly acquired. But a lot of others, less frequently used, are not repeated enough and, as a result, are quickly forgotten by learners.

This situation is inevitable because of time constraints in the teaching/learning process. There is simply not enough time to ensure sufficient number of repetitions in communication for *all* lexical units that are supposed to be included into students' word stock but do not occur frequently enough in their speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities to be remembered from one encounter until the next one. And this embraces quite a lot of lexical units from the vocabulary minimum for philology students because that minimum is quite large in volume.

Since that situation is practically inevitable, some means should be found to circumvent it and find some solution for the vocabulary retention problem for philology students who are learning English as their major. That issue is the subject matter of this article.

The analysis of recent research and publications. In the 60-70s of the last century in foreign language teaching/learning research conducted in the former Soviet Union a real "boom" could be observed in studies devoted to learning and acquisition of foreign language vocabulary by students of secondary and tertiary schools. There were numerous dissertations and other publications on that subject [4; 5; 9; 12; 13, and many others], and quite a few important facts were established concerning the improvement and facilitation of vocabulary learning and acquisition. Since then, "the high wave" of research on vocabulary learning/acquisition has gradually subsided so that in recent years in Ukraine dissertations analyzing vocabulary teaching are rather rare though still occur from time to time (see, for instance [14]). Practically the same situation exists in other countries but works on foreign/second language vocabulary teaching are still published periodically in the 21st century [1; 10; 16; 18; 19; 20; 21] – though not as frequently as in the second half of the century preceding it.

However, all the research done in this area both in the last and in this century allows drawing some conclusions as to the further directions in the studies of vocabulary learning/acquisition by philology students at tertiary linguistic schools with the view of its radical improvement for solving the problem indicated above. Those conclusions are as follows:

1. All vocabulary units to be learned/acquired by students need numerous repetitions in communication to be retained either for recognition and understanding in speech reception or for fluent using in speech production [9; 20].

2. The learned/acquired lexical units can be retained in student's either receptive word stock (recognized and understood when reading and/or listening) or belong to the reproductive one (vocabulary units can be used by the student in oral or/and written speech) [7; 8].

3. Receptive mastering of a lexical unit is achieved faster and easier than its reproductive mastering because less repetitions in communicative contexts are required. For instance, according to M.A. Pedanova

[9], to retain a word for recognizing it and its meaning while reading requires from 10 to twenty meaningful encounters with that word in texts read. For a word to be retained for reproduction in oral or written speech, the number of repetitions in communication needs to be increased two times or even more. The number of repetitions required to retain a word also depends on its characteristics: whether its meaning is abstract or concrete, whether it is short or long, whether it is being memorized in isolation or in chunks, i.e. surrounded by other words in meaningful contexts, etc. [12; 16; 21].

4. Lexical units are first learned/acquired receptively and only later, through further repetitions in communication, reproductive command is achieved. That is why speech reception, especially reading, intensive and extensive, is the principal source of replenishing learners' both receptive and reproductive vocabulary [10; 15; 21]. One of the greatest advantages of extensive reading for replenishing vocabulary lies in the fact that various encounters with the word to be learned in the reading process allow acquiring and retaining its different aspects: semantic, orthographic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic, as well as its collocations [19, p. 201]. Thereby the natural way of word acquisition is implemented – the word is not retained at once in the entirety of all its aspects but acquired gradually, i.e. one aspect after another [20].

5. Like in all other areas of mastering a foreign/second language, there are at least two principal ways of gaining command of the new vocabulary – through learning or through acquisition [17]. The first is a conscious way when new lexis is overtly introduced and often explained by the teacher which is followed by students' attempts to memorize it deliberately and gain command of it through practicing new vocabulary in special lexical exercises [7; 8; 10]. The other way – acquisition [17] – is implemented through involuntary retention [3] of new vocabulary which requires much less efforts and often occurs even without numerous repetitions due to the extreme need in that particular word in communication, its close connection with the goal of the activity, personal interests, etc. [3; 6; 21]. It may also follow frequent encounters with the word in communication when it is retained even without student's conscious wish to retain it. Acquisition through involuntary retention is a much better, faster, and more efficient way of replenishing vocabulary; therefore, it should be used whenever and wherever possible in foreign language teaching and learning process [10].

6. Besides, receptive and reproductive vocabulary, there is also the so called students' potential vocabulary which is not so much the word stock retained in learner's memory as his or her ability to understand the meaning of an unknown word when encountering it in written speech (reading) by way of eliciting that meaning through guessing it from the context of the text being read, from the known root of the word and known word-formation elements (suffixes, prefixes, conversion, etc.), or from the common roots with the words of the same meaning in students' L1. All authors recognize the enormous importance of potential vocabulary for teaching students to read in the target language, especially the importance of their ability to guess the meanings of unknown words from the contexts of the texts being read [18]. This is why the ways and means of forming students' potential vocabulary were thoroughly researched in the 60s and 70s of the last century [4; 5; 13] and nowadays there is hardly any textbook of English that does address the issue of developing learners' relevant skills.

A lot of other conclusions arrived at in the preceding research on issues concerning students' learning/acquisition of English lexis can be discussed – for instance, the issues related to the optimal ways of introducing and explaining the meanings of new lexical units or to the learning activities for better learning/acquiring them, etc. But those conclusions that have been analyzed above are sufficient for interpreting our own suggestions as to the ways and means of improving teaching philology students their target language vocabulary so as to try and overcome the problem of insufficient recycling in communication of a great number of new lexical units from it.

The purpose of our study, as it should be clear from everything said above, was the development of procedures for improving teaching English vocabulary to philology students learning that language as their major. In particular, the purpose implied finding the ways and means for helping students

to master the planned volume of English lexis despite the difficulties involved in ensuring sufficient number of repetitions in target language communication of every lexical unit included into that planned vocabulary.

The results of the study. The principal way of achieving the purpose of our study formulated above was considered to be in optimal methodological distribution of the vocabulary selected for learning/acquisition by philology students. Every category of lexis into which that vocabulary is distributed, or divided, is supposed to be learned/acquired by using specific learning/acquisition procedures, so that such distributions with relevant procedures make it possible to compensate for insufficiencies in the number of repetitions in communication of certain lexical units belonging to some categories.

Four categories of distributing the vocabulary selected for the entire course of English have been selected.

The first of them was called *the primary basic vocabulary*. It comprises the lexical units without which speaking, listening, reading, and writing on a certain topic included into the list of topics for the practical course of English at tertiary linguistic schools is totally impossible. For instance, for the topic on ecology this category of vocabulary includes words reflecting the basic (for this particular topic) notions like “*environment*,” “*recycling*,” “*power*,” etc. Selecting the word stock to be included into the category under discussion, it should be remembered that what is usually called “*the Basic English Vocabulary*” of about 1,000 lexical units reflecting the most fundamental notions in practically every kind of human intercourse and without which no communication is possible (verbs like “*run*,” “*understand*,” “*write*,” nouns like “*school*,” “*people*,” adjectives like “*good*,” “*kind*,” etc.) are always well-known and well-retained by philology students even before they start their English course at their universities. Therefore, such lexical units do not need to be included into the primary basic vocabulary.

This makes this particular vocabulary rather compact. It includes hardly more than 1,000-1,500 lexical units (to determine its exact volume, special research should be organized). But, being basic for certain topics, those lexical units should be processed especially thoroughly and retained so as to be “operationally ready” for immediate use in speaking and writing and for immediate and unimpeded recognition and understanding in reading and listening – thus, both receptive and reproductive command is required. It is comparatively easy to achieve because, being basic for a certain topic, such lexical units are constantly and very frequently repeated in whatever communication on that topic. Therefore, relevant words, phrases, and collocations may and are to be acquired by students mostly subconsciously through numerous encounters with them and numerous repetitions of them in communicative processes of their speaking, listening, reading, and writing in the target language (involuntary retention). It does not mean that there is no place for conscious learning in this case because quite frequently such, most essential, lexical units for a certain topic, need to be first thoroughly explained to students with their attention concentrated on them as just the most important ones. But conscious learning should be limited only to the first encounters with the lexical units belonging to this category. Further on, no special conscious lexical exercises are required because numerous repetitions in communication should take care of retention and of ensuring operational readiness of that specific vocabulary for communicative use.

The second category was called *the secondary basic vocabulary*. It includes lexical units that are mandatory for students to remember and use in communication but which are not of primary importance for such communication on a particular topic. Therefore, they are less frequent and the sufficient number of repetitions in communication required to master them is difficult to provide, unlike the lexical units from the first category. A good example from the topic on ecology is the word combination “*fossil fuels*” which is important for communication on it, yet is not used in that communication as often as, for instance, the words like “*recycling*” or “*power*.”

There are not less than two thousand lexical units belonging to this category that need to be included into the vocabulary minimum for philology students. Involuntary retention, i.e. acquisition, of these vocabulary items cannot be relied upon because of their lesser frequency in communication though the conditions for such acquisition should be created by the teacher whenever and wherever possible.

What facilitates the task is that a good part of the second category vocabulary is supposed to be retained by students only receptively which requires much less efforts. A good example is the word combination “*fossil fuel*” given above in which the word “*fuel*” should be mastered both receptively and reproductively while the word “*fossil*” may be included into the students’ receptive vocabulary only. But whether receptive or reproductive, lexical units from this category should be mostly learned and not acquired due to insufficient number of repetition in communication which precludes totally involuntary retention. It necessitates the assistance of the teacher to be rendered to his or her students in their efforts to deliberately and consciously gain command of the vocabulary items in question. Such assistance should be rendered at the stage of introducing new lexis when, together with explaining new items, the teacher may teach students the basics of *mind-mapping* [22]. A mind map is a kind of diagram used to organize information visually. It is hierarchical and shows relationships between notions. There is always a central notion and subordinated notions (e.g., “*power*” is a central notion and the notion of “*fuel*” stems from it and is subordinated to it). Thus, mind maps are created around a single concept, drawn as an image with major ideas connected directly to the central concept, and other ideas branching out from those. Mind mapping greatly helps and facilitates memorization because information in the human memory is organized in quite a similar way. But to be really helpful, lexical mind maps must be compiled by every student individually because the notional associations of each of them are different. The task of the teacher is only to explain to students how to do it and stimulate their efforts in this direction.

After explaining and mind-mapping the new lexis belonging to the second category, the students are required to process it in a number of lexical exercises for completing learning. Those exercises are well known and do not need to be discussed here. It is only worthy of note that with the suggested organization of learning there is time enough to in the course of English at higher linguistic schools to provide for students’ gaining command of those approximately 2,000 second category lexical items.

The third category of lexis containing a little less or more than 2,000 lexical units was called *the optional vocabulary*. It is acquired and not learned – as a rule, through extensive reading, and it is mostly receptive though a substantial part of it may become reproductive when repeatedly recycled in communication. A good example of an item from the third category is the word “*disposable*” (the same topic on ecology) that students rather easily acquire when extensively reading texts on that topic, though they practically never guess the meaning of the above-indicated word from the context or from word-formation elements. But if some kind of prompt is given, the acquisition is almost instantaneous.

The more extensive is student’s reading and the more varying is it as to genres (not only fiction but also popular science, different articles from periodicals, even technical instructions and culinary recipes), the greater are the opportunities for students to retain voluminous and diversified vocabulary.

This category of vocabulary is called *optional* because learners should better choose themselves their reading materials to make reading interesting and attractive for them, thereby motivating them to retain what they have learned when reading – together with the lexical units through which the interesting meaningful content was rendered. But this will lead to different students acquiring somewhat different vocabulary units – emphasizing the optionality of vocabulary items mastered in this manner.

If properly organized, extensive reading can provide, as the practical experience of a number of university English teachers have shown, for students’ receptive acquisition of about 2,000 lexical units, some of which are, as it has already been said, mastered reproductively as well. Together with approximately 3,000 lexical units belonging to the first two categories, it provides students

with the learned or acquired word stock of close to 5,000 items. This is quite sufficient for speaking, listening, and writing in English on the C1/C2 level – the target level for philology students majoring in this language. But it is not sufficient for reading in English on such a level of language command because in this case an ability to recognize and understand up to 10,000 lexical units is required.

To solve this problem, the fourth, last, category of vocabulary was postulated. It is *the potential vocabulary for reading*. It serves for reception only – understanding previously unknown words in the texts being read through guessing their meanings from: a) the contexts of what is being read; b) the known roots of particular words and the known meanings of their word-formation elements (prefixes, suffixes, conversion, etc.); c) the comparison with the words of the common root in students' L1 or some other L2 known to them. The lexical units belonging to the potential vocabulary are not either learned or acquired because, after understanding their meaning while reading, they are not retained in learners' long-term memory (though it may happen and often does if such items are repeatedly encountered in the materials for reading – they may even enter the students' reproductive vocabulary). What is being learned, and learned quite consciously (there is no place for involuntary retention/acquisition here), are the ways and means of guessing unfamiliar words' meanings through one of the three procedures indicated above. It is a very important teacher's task to teach such procedures to students using the well-developed approaches [4; 5; 6; 13] and to constantly practice those procedures in the teaching/learning process. In this way, as it has been established in special research [4], the potential vocabulary may double the learner's actual vocabulary. In our case, it means that a student may understand up to 10,000 lexical units when reading texts in English which is quite sufficient for C1/C2 level of language command.

Conclusion and prospects for further research. The suggested approach is based on distributing the English vocabulary to be retained by philology students studying English as their major at Ukrainian tertiary linguistic schools into four categories: 1) *the primary basic vocabulary* the lexical units from which are to be acquired by students mostly subconsciously through numerous encounters with them and numerous repetitions of them in communicative processes of their speaking, listening, reading, and writing in the target language; 2) *the secondary basic vocabulary* the lexical units from which are to be consciously learned by students through using specific procedures and exercises for ensuring such learning depending on whether individual lexical units are meant for being mastered receptively or reproductively – in this case, conscious learning may be aided by unconscious retention (acquisition) organized by the teacher wherever possible by addressing the resources of learners' involuntary memory; 3) *the optional vocabulary* acquired by students mostly subconsciously through involuntary retention occurring in the process of learners' extensive reading – this is why different learners may acquire different lexical units from such an optional vocabulary stock; 4) *the potential vocabulary* the lexical units from which the students mostly do not retain but consciously learn how to understand their meaning when encountering them in the English texts they are reading. Our practical experience in using this approach has shown that it really helps in solving the problem of ensuring the intensive replenishment of learners' English vocabulary, developing and improving their lexical skills, and enhancing those skills both qualitatively and quantitatively. The prospects of further research in this direction lie in confirming such positive results in special experimental studies and in actual practical distribution of all the English vocabulary minimum for philology students into the suggested four categories.

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