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Significance of Assessing Vocabulary in the Classroom

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Abstract: This article discusses several ways of evaluating students' vocabulary progress in the classroom while learning foreign languages. Measuring vocabulary is also one of the main points in learning and teaching foreign languages, as well as evaluating language skills like reading, listening, writing and speaking.

Key words: assessment, multiple choice, quizzes, synonyms and antonyms comprehension.

Introduction

Today, it is necessary to acquire foreign languages for young generation. Having a strong vocabulary allows students to communicate well with other people and to succeed on standardized tests. It is fact that teachers teach vocabulary to students in their first language as well as to students who learn a foreign language. Depending on the aim in testing the vocabulary knowledge, methods of assessing vocabulary might be different. Teachers should learn how to assess vocabulary so they will be able to know how well their students are progressing.

Problem statement

As Schmitt considers, vocabulary is an essential building block of language and it makes sense to be able to measure learners' knowledge and use of it (Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001). Unfortunately, much less time is dedicated to the teaching and testing of vocabulary than to that of the other language skills. Despite the inadequate attention paid to it in the field, assessing vocabulary should have the same priority as other skills in that the important cornerstones of testing (validity, reliability, practicality, washback, authenticity, transparency and security) need to be considered in designing and evaluating tests of lexical knowledge and use. Vocabulary development is crucial both from a theoretical and practical standpoint. According to the Coombe's review experts in the field of vocabulary development are in agreement that vocabulary is central to the language learning process, and as such, it is generally recognized that a focus on strengthening vocabulary is necessary at every stage of a learner's language development(Assessing Vocabulary in the Language Classroom Christine Coombe). Folse (2003, 2004) as well as those who championed the lexical approach and lexical syllabus in the 1980s and 1990s (Lewis, 1993, 1997; Willis, 1990; Willis & Willis, 1989) point out that you can get by without the correct syntax or grammar, but not vocabulary. Folse (2003) goes on to state that without syntax, meaning is hindered; but without vocabulary meaning is impossible. From a practical standpoint, educators cite that lexical knowledge is important in the development of other language skills. According to Chastain (1988) the lack of needed vocabulary is the most common cause of students' inability to say what they want



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to say during communication activities. In addition, tests of vocabulary often provide a good guide to reading ability (Heaton, 1990). In this article, certain assessment decisions are pointed that teachers need to make in the assessment of vocabulary.

There are a number of ways to assess vocabulary in the form of tests and quizzes. It's ideal to use multiple assessments because each one has limitations on its own.

Synonyms and Antonyms:

This is the most common and natural way students will see vocabulary words in their independent reading time. Synonyms and antonyms are often undervalued but are so important. The human brain loves to build connections between new and old information. Often, when we begin to study synonyms and antonyms, we will share words that students are familiar with. That helps them connect the new vocabulary word to a word they already know, which will solidify the knowledge in their brains.

Synonym recognition (word in isolation or with context).

The teacher was **furious** when she heard the students talking during the test.

- A. angry
- B. calm
- C. happy
- D. delighted

Definition recognition (word level, minimal sentence context).

She is someone I absolutely **adore**.

- A. give a round of applause to
- B. feel affection for
- C. am revolted by
- D. disapprove of

Fill in the Blank:

Can students recognize the context that best fits the meaning of the vocabulary word? Be very selective about the sentences you choose. They should lend themselves to only ONE of the words, but also not be easy that it's a dead giveaway

Quick Definitions:

Lastly, the most straightforward way is to simply ask: "What is the meaning of _____?" I don't use this on every single question, but I do use it often on my assessments. It's straight to the point!

Matching Formats

Another common objective format used in vocabulary assessment is matching. Matching questions usually present the student with two columns of information. The student's task is to find the matches between the two columns. Items in the left-hand column are called premises and the items in the right-hand column are called options. The advantage of this format over MCQs is that there are more distractors to choose from.

Match useful expressions with context of use. Write the letter in the space provided.

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| _____ 1. when you are introduced to someone new | A. I'm sorry. |
| _____ 2. to apologize to someone | B. Stop it. |
| _____ 3. you don't know the answer to a question | C. Nice to meet you. |
| _____ 4. when you are joking with someone | D. I've got it. |
| | E. I'm just kidding. |



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F. I give up.

Sentence Completion or Gap Fill Items

Sentence completion or gap fill items assess a student's production of vocabulary. These items require students to read the sentence and then write in the correct or best response. Sentence completion items encourage students to learn and know the tested word rather than just recognize it. Sentence completion items are easy to construct. Despite these advantages, however, testers point out a number of disadvantages associated with this item type. One disadvantage is that because these items require students to come up with the answer rather than just recognize it, responding to these items may take the student longer. Consequently this could reduce the possible number of items on a test.

Translation - is another way to assess students' productive knowledge of vocabulary items. Of course, to monitor how effectively this is done, the teacher must have an adequate working knowledge of the students' L1.

Translate the underlined word into your first language.

His job is very demanding.

Conclusion

Although once viewed as an enabling skill of secondary importance to the four main language skills, vocabulary instruction has now come into its own. As such, it is crucial that this important language development skill is assessed validly and reliably. To accomplish this, several important issues need to be taken into account and decisions need to be made about how best to assess vocabulary in the classroom. Whatever decision is made, however, teachers must strive to make their vocabulary assessment principled, practical, varied and meaningful.

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