
Vocabulary Building through Communicative Activities: An Effective Approach to English Language Proficiency

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Abstract

The paper explores the effectiveness of the communicative activities, especially those incorporated under the concept of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as a formative approach towards acquisition of vocabulary that subsequently leads to increased English Language Proficiency (ELP). Whereas conventional approaches tend to emphasize the short-term accumulation of the lexical breadth (number of words), this discussion shows that communicative methods are the only ones that can be applied to build productive depth of vocabulary knowledge (PDVK) that incorporates the understanding of how to use words, and how to combine them, and under what circumstances. Relying on the already developed theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the Interaction Hypothesis and the Involvement Load Hypothesis (ILH), the study identifies the cognitive processes (Noticing, Negotiation of Meaning, and deep processing with the help of Need, Search and Evaluation) by which interaction converts incidental exposure into long-term memory. The conclusions propose a 2-mode pedagogic model which purposefully incorporates explicit vocabulary teaching with implicit high-involvement communicative exercises to maximize the quantity of the lexicon of the learner as well as the quality of the functional quality of the vocabulary, which is the key to attaining high ELP.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Communicative, Vocabulary, Load Hypothesis, Pedagogic

Introduction

It is widely known that vocabulary knowledge is not only a part of English Language Proficiency (ELP) but its cornerstone as it is a primary result of the achievement to improve understanding and production on all four language domains. In the case of the English learner, the level and quality of their vocabulary is a direct measure of how they will comprehend the spoken language, be able to work through complex texts and be able to convey themselves effectively through writing and speaking. Learning of broad lexicon is a continuous developmental process.

One must get a higher level of ELP, as defined by standardized scales (e.g., Pre-functional, Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, and Proficient stages) to be able to make a change in passive recognition of words to the subtle, context-specific use. The English Learners (ELs) will inevitably fail to engage with grade-level academic resources and engage in high-level discourse without a solid vocabulary basis, thus halting their progress of learning the content and mastering the language. Researches indicate that the difference in vocabulary knowledge usually starts prior to school and unless specific tasks are taken to decrease this difference, the lexical gap just expands with the level of education acquired. Consequently, sustainable and profound lexical development should be the focus of the effective strategies of pedagogy.

1.2. Evolution of Lexical Pedagogy: From Form-Focus to Meaning-Focus

Traditionally, the learning of vocabulary was frequently based on the traditional approach, i.e., the Grammar-Translation Method (TGTM) which concentrated on the explicit learning of the grammatical rules and memorization of the isolated lists of words.⁶ This approach paid much attention to the linguistic form. The advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was a turning point wherein the instructional objectives shifted to focus on language as a social process that is interested in the effective transfer of meaning.

The main principles of CLT are as follows: it is learner-focused, employs real materials to mimic real-life use, and emphasizes interaction as the key means of learning it, therefore, accomplishing communicative objectives instead of learning to write error-free sentences.

But there are empirical studies that bring about a complex requirement in this transition. Comparative studies have sometimes indicated that students receiving TGTM instruction have fewer errors and higher production scores on first post-tests of grammar and vocabulary instruction than do students receiving CLT instruction (6 This structural tension implies that CLT might be less effective in prompting

immediate and shallow acquisition of size (breadth) of receptive vocabulary. But the theoretical basis of CLT, on the communicative competence of Canale and Swain, has an emphasis on the ability to reach complex communicative objectives, rather than merely the accuracy of the form, and this fact requires the emphasis on the quality, or depth, of vocabulary knowledge.

1.3. Aims and Scope of the Study

The objective of this research paper is to offer a subtle study of how communicative activities serve as an effective methodology of strong vocabulary development. The paper is designed to fulfill three primary goals: first, to examine the theoretical models (Interaction Hypothesis and ILH) that define the cognitive connections between communicative interaction and deep lexical processing; second, to distinguish between vocabulary breadth and productive depth and show how communicative tasks enable deeper lexical acquisition to be maximized, regardless of the context of learning; and third, to propose an evidence-based pedagogical approach that optimally integrates communicative strategies and explicit instruction in order to maximize lexical acquisition in a variety of learning environments.

2. Theoretical Frameworks for Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition

2.1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): Principles and Competence Models

The theoretical assumptions on which CLT is based have to do with the idea that language is primarily a social means of conveying meaning and structuring discourse, and not simply a set of disaggregated grammatical rules.⁷ This model is inherently related to the model of communicative competence promoted by Canale and Swain, which defines language mastery as knowledge not just of a set of isolated grammatical rules, but of the rules and conventions one needs to know to achieve communicative aims in an appropriate way.

An efficient implementation of CLT requires the presence of an environment in which the learner plays a central role and engages with authentic materials (working with newspapers, real conversations, etc.) to expose them to language used in a real-life context.⁸ Activities should be contextualized and have a clear communicative purpose, which is why tasks-based learning (TBLT) is a direct reflection of these principles and necessitates the need to design a poster, thus, compelling students to negotiate the roles, exchange information, and apply language to the context.

2.2. The Interaction-Input-Output Chain in SLA

2.2.1. Comprehensible Input and the Affective Filter

Input is also essential to vocabulary acquisition. According to Krashen, the Input Hypothesis (1985), both the input of the Second Language (L2) must be understandable by the learner and needs to be pitched somewhat higher than the level of understanding of the learner ($i + 1$): otherwise, the process of language acquisition does not take place.¹³ The other requirement is the presence of a low affective filter: when the information presented to the learner is too complex to be understood, an inhibitory filter will activate, and the learner will disengage.

2.2.2. Negotiation of Meaning and Noticing

The Interaction Hypothesis, largely attributed to Michael Long (1996) assumes that conversational interaction helps in facilitation of acquisition through linkage of input (what is heard/read), internal learner capacities (selective attention) and output (what is produced).¹⁷ This is essential to lexical development.

Negotiation of meaning can be effectively used to address lexical ambiguity and facilitate the acquisition and storage of new vocabulary terms in learners when they face a problem of comprehension or production.¹⁵ Negotiation of meaning is especially effective in ensuring that learners notice the gaps in their linguistic knowledge.¹⁵

Memory traces are strengthened upon successful execution of lexical gaps via negotiation to a greater extent of passive reception. The negotiated interaction forces ensure that learners get to learn how to access possible lexical items in the memory and probe them in relation to the current task contextual provisions. This feedback loop input/output relationship such as input manipulated within a negotiation process and then motivated output correction generates a strong involvement that results in a long-term memory (LTM) effect that is far more effective than passively receiving information.

2.3. Cognitive Load and Deep Processing: The Involvement Load Hypothesis (ILH)

Cognitive efficacy of communicative tasks can also be ascribed to the Involvement Load Hypothesis (ILH), which was developed by Laufer and Hulstijn (2001). The ILH suggests that the amount of retention corresponds to the load of involvement that is imposed on the learner during processing.²¹ This construct determines the retention as a ratio of the complexity of the mental processes involved in doing so, and not just the time spent learning the word.

3.1. Delineating Breadth and Depth of Lexical Knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge is a multidimensional concept which is usually measured on two overlapping variables which include breadth and depth. Breadth entails the receptive or productive size of the lexicon of a learner, the mere number of words that they know. Breadth is also required to reach a minimum level required to understand general academic reading.

Thickness, on the other hand, is the depth and the quality of such knowledge. It involves a wide range of detailed information such as how the word is morphologically framed, what words it commonly co-occurs with (collocations), what words are synonyms or antonyms of the word, how often the word is used and whether it is pragmatically appropriate in different contexts and registers or not. The two dimensions have a significant correlation; without the underlying breadth it is impossible to achieve much depth development.

3.2. Productive Depth and its Correlation with Communicative Competence

The communicative activities are especially effective since they require the creation of the Productive Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge (PDVK). PDVK is directly related to higher speaking and writing. In the case of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students, who can hardly communicate with fluency during an oral presentation or a complex written task, diagnosis measurement and PDVK development are very important.

The productive quality of lexical knowledge is being able to master different aspects that researchers present in their works like Nation (2013) that require knowledge of word parts, semantic associations (e.g. synonym and antonym relations), and control of collocations. Actually, communicative activities, including role-plays or the exchange of information, require learners to actively recall and utilize subtly linguistic word knowledge, that is, the selection of not only a correct word, but also the most suitable word to the situation. This involves effective mastery of even the most common words (e.g., top 1000 most common word families which comprise more than 80 percent of spoken and written English).

3.3. Standardized Measurement of ELP and Lexical Use

The development of English language skills is commonly followed through hierarchy, where Ohio has defined these five levels of proficiency, including Pre-functional to Proficient/ Trial Mainstream. The realization of these high levels requires quantifiable development in productive lexical competence on reading, writing, speaking and listening levels.

In order to assess effective formulation of productive depth as a resultant product of communicative instruction, special measures are applied. As an example, the lexical richness, like Lexical Frequency Profile, measures the complexity of the L2 output in communicative activities through the evaluation of the percentage of high-frequency general service and academic words used by a learner. These measurements do not rely on recall tests only, but on the capacity of learners to incorporate their growing vocabulary into a spontaneous meaningful communication.

4. Communicative Task Design and Lexical Engagement

4.1. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT): Structural Requirements for Lexical Focus

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a direct teaching tool where language is acquired by incident through participation in real communicative activities which has an overt, non-linguistic goal, such as drawing up a map or creating an advert. The given methodology has empirically proven to enhance the spoken language production and comprehension skills, as well as the development of advanced vocabulary.

The effectiveness of TBLT lies in its capability to bring about real life contexts that require the learners to negotiate meaning and actively use the target language. TBLT can enhance the knowledge about the new words as well as complement the language skills of the learners by integrating vocabulary in the activities (e.g., by using special terminology required to use in a certain situation).

4.2. Analysis of Core Communicative Task Types and their Lexical Mechanisms

Effective communicative tasks must possess certain characteristics, including plausibility, high interest, versatility, and richness in terms of the language practice they provide.

4.2.1. Information Gap Activities

In order to solve an issue or finish a task, two or more people must have different pieces of information that must be verbally shared. This is known as an information gap activity. Drawing dictations and barrier games are two examples. Because these activities provide an instantaneous, strong drive (need) for communication, they are effective lexical acquisition engines. In addition to offering abundant chances for practicing recently taught vocabulary and promoting the use of effective questioning and explanation (the Search component of ILH), they require the speaker to use language accurately and the recipient to listen carefully.

4.2.2. Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Tasks

Effective vocabulary is particularly taxed by assignments that allow students to evaluate a situation, identify an issue, discuss possible remedies, and reach a consensus. They are appropriate for upper-intermediate to advanced students and frequently call for specific vocabulary sets (e.g., business terminology, language for explaining various problem kinds, or vocabulary for giving suggestions). These kinds of assignments foster advanced critical thinking and teamwork. Nevertheless, there is a pedagogical risk: students may lose patience and turn back to their own language if they don't have the necessary vocabulary, which would counteract the communicative advantage. The required language must therefore be anticipated and pre-taught by teachers.

4.2.3. Repetitive and Game-Based Activities

Repetitive exercises and structured games, like Quickfire Rounds, in which students explain target words, or sequential games like "I went to market," are essential for helping kids retain vocabulary. For new vocabulary to successfully be transferred into long-term memory, research consistently demonstrates that multiple exposures to novel terms are necessary. Words are moved from receptive knowledge to fluent productive usage through the strengthening of memory traces and easy retrieval made possible by these activities.

Importantly, the ability to manage abstract terminology is a fundamental requirement of communicative activity. Concrete words that can be backed up by visual annotations are the subject of a large portion of empirical research on vocabulary memory. However, abstract words—which are difficult to visualize—are crucial to academic and professional English fluency. The contextual and conceptual framework required for the deep processing and fruitful mastery of this complex lexicon is provided by communicative tasks, especially those that involve negotiating abstract ideas, solving problems, or discussing ethical quandaries. This pushes education beyond the bounds of purely visual aids.

5. Empirical Evidence and Cognitive Efficacy

5.1. The Link Between Negotiated Interaction and Long-Term Vocabulary Retention

The importance of negotiated engagement in L2 vocabulary acquisition is well supported by empirical studies. Research on two-way activities shows that students who actively negotiate for meaning do noticeably better on vocabulary tests and have better lexical item memory than control groups. High-competence learners

are not the only ones who gain from this; even pupils with low language proficiency show that they can successfully negotiate meaning.

A cognitive amplifier is what negotiation does. The interaction sequence forces students to concentrate and internalise the proper use of lexical terms by requiring both understandable input and necessary output. By providing strong, instantaneous corrective feedback, the negotiating sequence itself helps to establish the word's proper form and meaning in context.

5.2. Contextualization and Long-Term Memory (LTM) Retention

In order to help students comprehend both the definition and proper usage of new vocabulary, contextual learning—which involves placing the term in tales or real-world situations—is crucial. The amount of focus and in-depth processing given to a word's shape and meaning increases the likelihood that it will be retained when it is met in context. This deep processing is maximised by retrieval chances incorporated into communicative activities.

Significant cognitive spillover effects are produced by intense language learning and the active, meaningful use of an L2 in communicative contexts, in addition to linguistic gains. Intense L2 engagement has been linked in studies to improved general cognitive skills, particularly language aptitude (LA) and working memory (WM). This implies that communicative activities have a twofold benefit: they educate and improve the fundamental cognitive resources necessary for all academic endeavours while also facilitating language acquisition.

5.3. Comparative Analysis: Communicative vs. Explicit Instruction

Although communicative activities are excellent at producing productive competence and lexical depth, research indicates that they shouldn't be used alone. Explanatory training that emphasises word meanings and form memory considerably boosts learners' vocabulary gains across meaning recognition and recall measures, according to studies comparing incidental learning (Read-only) with learning supported by explicit teaching (Read-Plus). After incidental exposure, explicit instruction—usually in the form of direct definitions, synonyms, or word collocations—is an essential consolidation technique.

According to this findings, merely implicit, communicative instruction may not be sufficient for systematic covering and the quick initial consolidation of breadth that is frequently required for curriculum progression, even while it produces improved depth and retention through ILH mechanisms. Using the effectiveness of communicative activities for deep, contextual application and the efficiency of

explicit teaching for form consolidation, the issue is not to pick between approaches but to strategically integrate them.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, increasing vocabulary through communicative exercises is a fun and successful way to improve English language skills. Learners progress beyond rote memorisation to acquire deeper word memory and practical language application by incorporating interactive exercises and real-world scenarios. Communicative techniques like role-playing, group discussions, and problem-solving exercises give students worthwhile chances to use new words in real-world contexts. This method simultaneously improves speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities in addition to expanding vocabulary. In the end, communicative vocabulary instruction promotes learner autonomy, motivation, and self-assurance, transforming language acquisition into a dynamic and intentional process that meets the demands of contemporary English language learners.

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