

## Discussion on Several Ways to Help Students Increase Their English Vocabulary in Teaching

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**Abstract.** Generally speaking, the sum of words constitutes the vocabulary of a language. Vocabulary is one of the three major elements of a language. The total vocabulary of English is estimated to be about one million. Therefore, how many English words to master plays a vital role in English teaching and learning. Only by mastering enough vocabulary can one be proficient in English listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating.

### The Importance of Vocabulary in English Learning

English is a language rich in vocabulary and concise in grammar. It has a long history and is flexible in use, which is very popular for people to learn and use. English is one of the most widely used languages in the world. Recent estimated data shows that the number of people communicating with English as the first language is more than 400 million, and almost one in 10 people speaks English. People in the UK, US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other countries speak English. In addition, there are more than 20 countries in the world who use English as official or second language, amounting to about 800 million people. That is to say, almost one in 5 people in the world knows English to a certain extent. From the scope of use, more than 70% of the world's mail is written in English or the address is written in English, and 60% of the world's radio programs are in English. Most of the scientific and technological information in the world is published in English, and most international conferences take English as the first general language. English is one of the formal working languages of the United Nations. In short, in the international political, military, economic, technological, cultural, trade, transportation and other fields, English is usually used as a communication tool. Therefore, it can be seen that English is a key to the future.

Vocabulary is the sum of all words and fixed phrases in a language(or specific range), and is the building material of language. It can be divided into basic vocabulary and general vocabulary. In the process of language development, the basic vocabulary is more stable, and the general vocabulary is sensitive to reflect the development of society and the changes of people's life, and it is almost in a state of constant change. With the development of society, new words come into being, old words disappear, and vocabulary is constantly enriched.

There were about 140 thousand English words recorded during the Elizabeth period. So far, American English has broken through 500 thousand words. "New Horizon College English" (Second Edition) stipulates that the basic requirement of vocabulary is to understand and grasp 4200 words, and the higher requirement is to grasp 5500 words and grasp the ability to recognize new words according to word formation. The English teaching syllabus stipulates that students should master 2950 words when passing the English Test Band Three, for College English Test Band 4 and 6, they should master 4200 and 5500 words respectively, and for postgraduate entrance examination, they should master 5300 words.

From the above data, we can see the importance of college students to master vocabulary in learning English. We usually say that "If there is no vocabulary, language will lose actual meaning", and the increase of vocabulary in English learning is the necessary condition for improving listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation skills. The improvement of college students' English proficiency depends to a large extent on their vocabulary. In a certain sense, the mastery of vocabulary can indicate a person's level of foreign language. Therefore, without vocabulary, it is impossible to master language. As D.A.Wilkins, a famous British linguist, says, "without phonetics and grammar, people can't express a lot, but without words, people can't express anything."

The current situation is that some college students have poor English basis and find it very difficult to memorize words, so they have less vocabulary. They have low English listening, reading, and oral and written expression ability, so they are unwilling to learn English. There are many reasons for this, therefore, we hope that the following methods can help students increase their vocabulary.

## **Several Ways to Improve College Students' Mastery of English Vocabulary**

**Learning Vocabulary by Word Formation.** The composition of English words can be divided into 3 types: composition, conversion and derivation. Composition is the way to form new words by placing two or more than two words in a certain order, such as earth +quake=earthquake, air+tight=air-tight, counter+offer =counteroffer, type +writer =typewriter.

The characteristic of conversion is that the conversion of words can be realized without the aid of affixes, such as a verb as a noun: dream v. (to experience a series of images events and feelings in your mind while you are asleep), dream n.(a series of images, events and feelings that happen in your mind while you are asleep), a adjective as a verb: empty adj.(with no people or things inside), empty v.(to remove everything that is in a container), a noun as a verb: conduct n.(behaviour), conduct v.(to allow heat or electricity to pass along or through it), digest n.(a short report containing the most important facts of a longer report or piece of writing), digest v.(when you digest food, or it digests, it is changed into substances that your body can use).

The derivation method uses the grammatical morpheme to add prefixes or suffixes to a word to form another new word. According to the college English teaching course, there are several widely used prefixes and suffixes.

“anti-” means “opposed to” and “against”, such as anti-European, anti-body, etc.

“dis-” means “not”, “the opposite of”, etc., such as disadapt, disbelief, disproduct, etc.

“un-” means “not”, and “the opposite of”, such as uncool, unbelievable, uncertain, unlike, etc.

“mis -” means “bad or wrong”, such as misjudge, misunderstand, mislead, etc.

When a series of suffixes of “-ment, -ation, -tion, -sion, and -ion” are added to a series of verbs, they transform into corresponding nouns, such as manage – management, inform –information, produce – production, decide –decision, educate – education , etc.

When “-er, -or” and other suffixes are added to a series of verbs, they convert to the person who makes this action(with exceptions), such as sing-singer, teach-teacher, cook-cooker, silence-silencer, etc.

When “-hood, -ship, - dom” and other suffixes are added to a series of nouns or a small number of adjectives, they transform into abstract nouns, such as child-childhood, friend-friendship and free-freedom.

When the suffix of “-en” is added to a series of adjectives, they are converted to a verb meaning “to make or become”, such as sharp-sharpen, heigh-heighten, dark -darken, and broad -broaden.

Derivative words occupy a large proportion in English words, which are made up of root, prefix or suffix, and these three are called “three keys to enlarge the vocabulary”. Although the number of prefix and suffix is small, they are used on many occasions.

In practice, it is the derivation method that can arouse students' interest in English word formation. Therefore, in teaching, we should pay special attention to the analysis and mastery of prefix and suffix. It is clear that in order to expand vocabulary quickly, students must have a comprehensive understanding of the ways, characteristics and rules of English word formation.

**Learning by Explaining Cultural Connotations.** Culture is the sum of material wealth and spiritual wealth created by human in the process of social and historical development, especially the spiritual wealth, such as literature, art, education, science and technology, etc. The purpose of learning English is to communicate, and vocabulary teaching is for this purpose. Human communication is a kind of language communication and a cross-cultural phenomenon. Language is the carrier of culture, which can not exist independently from culture. Without language, there is no culture. Language reflects a nation's history, cultural background, way of life and way of thinking. Therefore, we cannot ignore the link between vocabulary and culture in teaching.

In teaching, teachers usually explain the word according to the three principles of sound, form and meaning. They start with words, phrases, and then texts, and finally do exercises, asking students to read, write and make sentences. Without the explanation of connotation, origin, and characteristics of culture and differences between Chinese culture and western culture, it is inevitable to make mistakes and even make jokes. For example, the “soft money” means the “illegal political contributions” rather than “paper money”, the “green wash” means “creating environmental image” rather than “brush green paint”.

**Learning through Context.** Any language is not isolated, it is produced in a certain context, and is also carried out in context. The context here refers to the environment that uses the language. The internal context refers to the relationship between certain language fragments and certain contexts, and the external context refers to the social environment of language existing outside speech fragment. A notable feature of English words is the polysemy and the flexibility of lexical meaning. Therefore, to memorize words in a certain context can avoid students’ abstract understanding of vocabulary and also cultivate students to guess words according to the context, which is a fast way to memorize words and master words. For example, for the sentence “ I was near that bank yesterday”, if we stand by the river, it refers to the “river bank”, however, if we stand in the Wall Street, it refers to the “bank”.

**Learning by Association.** The so-called association refers to thinking of other related people or things because of someone or something, and the cause of other related concepts because of a concept. Association is the basis of memory activity. In lectures, we can increase students’ vocabulary by associative methods, so that students can think of related words. Specifically speaking, it is that when learning a new word or phrase, students can associate the same, similar or opposite words and phrases that have been learned before, and systematically induce, classify, compare and discriminate them in order to overcome confusion and achieve flexible application, such as give away, give back, give in, give off, give out, give up, synonyms(phrase) (be good at —do well in), antonyms(big — small), near synonym(take —bring), equivalents(husband — wife), homonyms(sea — see), etc. We can also associate the antonyms (two opposite words) to avoid rote learning, such as optimist-pessimism, export-import, positive-negative. We can associate words of similar form(different words with similar spelling) and homonyms (that are homophones), find and compare them repeatedly in teaching, so that students can remember them firmly, such as at a time, at no time, at one time, in no time, at times, in time and on time. At the same time, we associate synonyms (words with same or similar meaning) and near synonyms (similar but different words). There are more synonyms and near synonyms in English. For example, vanish, disappear, perish and dim all have the meaning of “disappearing”. The word “vanish” means “disappears gradually and slowly”. The word “disappear” refers to the “sudden disappearance”. The word “perish” refers to “extinction and perdition”. The word “dim” means “darkening and blurring.” Such association method can get the similarities or differences of different words in usage, which can increase students’ vocabulary and improve their English level.

**Learning through Teaching Activities.** Teachers are the key to teaching quality. In English vocabulary teaching, we can learn and improve through various activities inside and outside class. Firstly, teachers should prepare lessons well, make some courseware properly and combine the vocabulary with practice. Just like swimming, if we don’t go into the water, we can never learn swimming even if we have learned how to swim. This requires the teachers to ask students to make sentences with learned words, such as gain v. ① to obtain or win sth; ② to gradually get more of sth. n. ① financial profit; ② an increase in the amount of sth. Teachers gave students examples first.

For example:

“I hope she will gain by the experience.”

“Although he has been going on a diet for a year, he has kept gaining weight.”

“A fall into the pit, a gain in your wit.”

Then the students made a lot of good sentences, too.

For example:

“The rocket gained speed as it went up.”

“He exploited a mine purely for commercial gain.”

“Some scientists gain recognition only after death.”

In teaching, teachers can also use a series of auxiliary teaching aids, such as objects, pictures, toys, slides, as well as movements, expressions and other body language to teach vocabulary, which can be vivid, save time, and meanwhile attract students' attention. Confucius said, “People who know it are no better than those who love it; Those who love it are no better than the ones who love to know it.” Interest is the best teacher. As long as students are interested in these vivid pictures and photos, they can greatly improve their enthusiasm, initiative and creativity in memorizing English words, and they will get efficient memory in the short term. For example, when the teacher teaches the word “approach”, he can walk over to a student and ask him questions, and say, “I’m approaching Michael and asking him. Have you approached the word with caution?” When repeated several times, it is easy for students to understand that the “approach” means “to start dealing with a problem, task, etc”, and “to come near to sb/sth in distance or time”. Teachers can also use the methods of guessing riddles, organizing speaking competitions, writing compositions, recording cards, looking up dictionaries and singing English songs. Besides classroom learning, extracurricular practice is also an important part. Teachers should ask students to do homework, and participate in English corner, English evening and other activities, and through these various teaching activities inside and outside the classroom, students can feel that learning English is joyful. Of course, teachers should keep pace with the times and teach students in accordance with their aptitude. Vocabulary teaching is of vital importance in college English teaching. Teachers should innovate teaching methods and improve teaching standards. They can not let students' vocabulary completely stay at the stage of students' spontaneous learning, can not give the task of memorizing words completely to students, should guide students to master the rules of vocabulary memory, and encourage students not only to work hard in word memorization, but also use smart skills, so that students can continuously enhance their confidence in English learning, and really change from “want me to learn” to “I want to learn”, thus improving their English learning level.

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