

## How to draw learners' attention to vocabulary

(Nation, 2008, pp. 98-99)

Often a teacher needs to give attention to a word without too much interruption to an activity like listening to a story that is going on. The small amount of research on such teaching indicates that it has a strong effect on vocabulary learning.

### **How to give attention to a word quickly**

1. Use a known L2 synonym or a simple definition in the L2.
2. Show an object or picture.
3. Give a quick demonstration.
4. Draw a simple picture or diagram.
5. Break the word into parts and give the meaning of the parts and the whole word.

Example: transport = trans (across) + port (carry)

6. Give several example sentences with the word in context to show the meaning.

### **How to draw attention to the \*form of the word**

1. Write the word on the blackboard.
2. Get the learners to repeat the pronunciation of the word.
3. Show how the spelling of the word is like the spelling of known words.
4. Give the stress pattern of the word and its pronunciation.

Example: trans·port can be stressed either [trans-POHRT] as a verb or [TRANS-pohrt] as a noun.

5. Show the prefix, stem and suffix that make up the word.

Examples: transportation = transport (stem) + ation (suffix)  
demystification = de (prefix) + mystify (stem) + ation (suffix)

6. Teach spellings, if necessary.

\*form of the word: spelling, pronunciation, stress, and formation of the word

### **How to draw attention to the use of the word**

1. Quickly show the grammatical pattern the word fits into (countable/uncountable, transitive/intransitive, etc.).
2. Give examples of common expressions and word sequences using the word.

Example: The word *talk* can be used with *give* or *have*. However, the word *conversation* can be used with *make* or *have*.

3. Mention any restrictions on the use of the word (formal, colloquial, impolite, only used in the United States, only used with children, old fashioned, technical, infrequent).
4. Give a well known synonym, opposite, or a well known word describing the group or lexical set it fits into.

### **Guiding principles of quickly giving attention**

1. Keep the teaching simple and clear. Don't give complicated explanations.
2. Relate the present teaching to past knowledge by showing a pattern or analogies.
3. Use both oral and written presentation – write it on the board as well as explaining.
4. Give most attention to words that are already partly known.
5. Tell the learners if it is a high frequency word that is worth noting for future attention.
6. Don't bring in other unknown or poorly known unrelated words like near synonyms, opposites, or members of the same lexical set (Nation, 2000).

Sometimes, however, a teacher may want to spend more time on a word. In general, time should be spent on high frequency words or words that fill a language need that the learners have. When deciding how to spend time on a word, it is useful to consider the learning burden of the word.

### **References**

Nation, I.S.P. (2000). Learning vocabulary in lexical sets: Dangers and guidelines. *TESOL Journal*, 9(2), 6-10.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2008). *Teaching Vocabulary: Strategies and Techniques*. Heinle: Boston.