A Practical Approach to the Teaching of Foreign Language Vocabulary: An Example of French

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Abstract

The importance of vocabulary in foreign language acquisition cannot be overestimated since speech or communication is embedded in appropriate choice of words and without which there is no essential communication. Besides, the learners of foreign language particularly, beginners find it difficult to communicate or make correct sentences because of lack of vocabulary. In the light of this circumstance it becomes an important to practically teach foreign language learners how to acquire, increase or develop enough vocabulary for easy communication. The action-oriented approach is hereby adopted to ensure real life communication in both in and outside classroom situation. This approach is important as the practice covers the social, cultural daily life. This also serves as methodology within the premise of action-oriented approach. For learners to be competent in the language they require different types of vocabularies in oral, reading, listening and writing and these invariably cover the basic competences which foreign language learners will have to develop for effective communication. Vocabulary grows when a person acquires new words. Acquiring any meaningful skills in the case of vocabulary is a lifelong process which will require some specific skills or strategies. When the social and cultural factors are considered in foreign language learning, there is need to also adapt the practical techniques that are of real life types for practical communication.

Key words: French Language, Practical Approach, Vocabulary, Foreign Language Learning, Communication.

Introduction

One cannot deny the importance of vocabulary in the acquisition of a foreign language. Words are symbols used by individuals in coping with their environment. Hence the need for effective teaching and learning of vocabulary. Vocabulary may be defined as either the total number of words in a language or as the total number of words in a language known to a particular individual. However, the size of vocabulary is by no means the only

indicator of language in application. Vocabulary occupies an important position in oral or verbal intelligent tests, and tests or interviews are used in either general placement in schools or selection for job outside classroom situation. If, to a large extent vocabulary is an appropriate means through which intelligence operates, its development should be given priority attention. This is more so in view of the fact that the French language is international language and a major foreign language in Nigeria.

In view of the foregoing, it is important to also appraise some problems arising from definition and the significance of vocabulary. The learner's initial difficulties in communication due to lack of adequate vocabulary often leads to distortion of meaning and concepts. This situation is linked to the immediate problems of insufficient professional teachers and lack of materials. Associated with these problems are those based on the language itself. There are idioms, phrases and (fixed) expressions which can hardly be well expressed except the learner has a good knowledge of the language. As such effective communication with increased vocabulary is desirable. The point is that there is the need to teach French vocabulary effectively.

Action –oriented approach in foreign language learning and teaching

The motivation to communicate is enhanced through having a genuine purpose with a task to be accomplished, a problem to be resolved, an obligation to be fulfilled, or an objective to be achieved. " (CEFR) Common European Framework of Reference: (2001:10). Though the CEFR (2001) proposes action-oriented approach, however, it has not explained its application in language practice with assessment and it is therefore our intention in this article to propose an action oriented approach in practical foreign language learning situations. However the Council of Europe (2001) seems to be comprehensive for the fact that it is possible to find the main approaches to language learning but does not prescribe particular approaches. This is like when questions are raised without providing answers to them. Nonetheless the CEFR (2001:29) takes an innovative stance in seeing learners as language users and social agents, and thus "seeing language as a vehicle for communication rather than as a subject to study" as communication tasks are recognized. What makes the approach action-oriented in language practice implies that the learning situation is authentic, open-ended and it involves an interaction with meaningful communication. To accomplish these action-oriented tasks, students require knowledge of the language and appropriate use of that language within a given cultural and social context. Such social acts involves speech acts (*les actes de paroles*), or words and groups of words that enable learners to communicate with a specific purpose in a real-life interaction. Examples include offering an apology, greeting, request, complaint, invitation, compliment, or refusal.

Methodology

According to Council of Europe (2001:30) language learning should be directed towards enabling learners to act in real-life situations, expressing themselves and accomplishing tasks of different natures following necessary objectives to enhance communicative according to their different levels: beginners , intermediate and advanced (levels A1-C2). According to Askarova S et al (2020:610), it has become feasible to achieve such goals of communication in foreign language learning, as learners are directed to solve the tasks of teaching foreign language by creating the conditions for self-appropriation, acquisition and understanding of their knowledge. The task of a teacher is therefore not just to present knowledge to learners, but rather become more practical, to create motivation and form a set of skills to teach oneself. The purpose of a foreign language as a subject is to build communicative competence, that is, the ability and willingness to carry out direct foreign communication. Both the teacher and the learners should establish the spirit of co-operation which will lead to collective goal-setting for autonomy and cognitive activity as the basis for personal formation and development. The learning process is carried out in conditions of constant active interaction of all learners. The learners and teachers are equal subjects of instruction as learners are guided to perform varieties of speech acts relating to real life situations that will lead to acquiring large volume of vocabulary in French as a foreign language.

Types of Vocabulary

An individual using vocabulary in a language situation is considered to be using a set range of words in ordinary speech or writing. It is therefore accurate to note that there are four kinds of vocabulary: oral, writing, listening and reading. Each of these with their range and uses. The Encyclopedia of Education (1971:461) expresses this with clarity:

a. Oral Vocabulary: This consists of words actively used in speech. Words created for a particular moment of occasion are picked up and dropped due to changes in circumstances or milieu. The total range of these words includes those used in business trade, profession and those used socially within context of a cocktail or dinner party. The characteristic of oral vocabulary is that it is actively used by the speaker in unrehearsed situation. And this calls for mastery of words, terms of lexis for any effective communication. Since the vocabulary might be coming out from the residual knowledge or that the performance has already been a reflex action.

b. Writing Vocabulary: In more formal writing, the occasion, subject matter, and audience may require words seldom encountered in ordinary speech. Writing vocabulary like oral

vocabulary consists of words actively used since it is not under constraint of time. It may, however, have substantially wider range than the vocabulary of unrehearsed speech.

c. Listening Vocabulary: This is a stock of words which one responds to with meaning and understanding in the speech of others. The words in a listener's vocabulary are not necessarily those which he projects in his own active use. This may have a minimum of meaning to the user. The range of listening vocabulary may be wider than that of oral/writing vocabulary. Since it includes the words which the learner/listener has not mastered sufficiently to use in his own speech and writing. An example is the stimulus-response language situation in which the learner responds with understanding to the words he cannot necessarily formulate personally.

d. Reading Vocabulary: Reading vocabulary is a repertoire of words to which one responds in meaning and understanding in the writing of others. There is no time constraint, formal symbols and word affixes are open to verification in reading which may otherwise be missed in listening. Perhaps the reading vocabulary is more extensive than the other three since the reader can read the words that he cannot pronounce and may fail to recognize words when used orally.

Williams (1990:111) classified these into two categories as productive vocabulary and receptive vocabulary. Productive vocabulary is sometimes referred to as active vocabulary which can be recalled almost instantaneously when needed. While receptive vocabulary is called latent vocabulary; that is, it exists but not noticeable until some future time. That means that the context of the word provides a number of clues as to the meaning of words, but learners may not put to productive use all the words learnt while reading or listening. In these various groupings of vocabulary, it is good to note that either is important at each level; they are interdependent and this may be seen in the teaching procedures. It is nonetheless basic that oral precedes written language, and this should not be left unconsidered.

Things to Note in Vocabulary Selection

Developing a vocabulary or teaching vocabulary in French language, like other should follow some basic criteria or principles. When these are properly adhered to, the learning/teaching of the language will be facilitated. The proper selection of lexical items is essential for purposeful communication. Garins and Redman (1986:61) outline some criteria which are also relevant to the teaching of French. These criteria include frequency, cultural factors, need and level and expediency.

a. Frequency: The work on frequency word-counts carried out over the years has been the basis for basic and simple vocabulary often used for communication and proficiency. The high frequency of an item is no guarantee for its complete usefulness. For example, the Threshold level prepared for the Council of European includes a lexicon of 1,500 word items. Also, le "dictionnaire du français fundamental pour l' Afrique" proposed for teaching in primary and secondary schools in African francophone colonies is another. The number and relevance of the vocabulary items should be considered in a classroom situation.

b. Cultural Factors: In selecting vocabulary items, one is also obliged to consider the cultural interest of the native speakers. Such interest may not be shared by the learners who may wish to express ideas and experiences quite outside those native speakers. For example, in a socio-cultural setting, le vin (wine) is an important to French as Kola nut (le noix de kola) is to most Nigerians. Generally while selecting vocabulary one should like to consider the worth of the native speakers' cultural background.

c. Need and Level: The need and level of communication should be taken into consideration. For instance, students who require reading French for travelling purposes or proficiency will have different lexical needs from those studying for pure academic reasons. The beginner language class will accept different level of vocabulary items than advanced students. For example, while basic items like la brosse (tooth brush), la dentrifrice (toothpaste), and du savon (soap) can be used for beginners, other items like le reservoir de chasse d'eau (cistern) and le vin au tonneau (win from the barrel or cask) may be more appropriate in the intermediate or advanced class.

d. Expediency: This is where the classroom situation dictates the need for certain vocabulary and without which the learners may fail to understand their teachers or follow the activity they engage in. One of such areas is grammatical terminology where specific instructions are given to guide the learners' activity. Learners should be used to words such as barer(cross), remplir(fill in), souligner(underline), and décrire (describe). Constant exposure to such words makes learners pay attention to particular lexical items at a time.

Development of Vocabulary

Vocabulary grows when a person acquires new words. Acquiring any meaningful skill in knowledge or learning as in the case of vocabulary is a lifelong process as such there should be specific skills or strategies that can make the effort of vocabulary acquisition rewarding at any stage. These strategies/ techniques are applicable in a situation where the learner's target language is entirely or partly new. Williams (1990) observes the basic aim

of language learning is to communicate. And this is by creating 'meaning effect which involves creating response. And language helps create in others those feelings which are native to us. Various techniques and strategies can be used to enhance vocabulary development.

Techniques of Teaching Vocabulary

In line with Gairns and Redman (1986, pp.73-77), we shall look at some of the methods related to teacher-centred and student-centred as applicable to French language class. These techniques are associate d to real life situations that give room to practical communicative situations

i Visual techniques

These involve the use of flash cards, photographs, black board, drawings, wall charts and realia (that is, objects themselves). They are particularly useful for teaching concrete items of vocabulary such as food, furniture, and certain areas of vocabulary such as places, professions description of people's actions and activities. For example, a set of sport activities can be used as a means of presenting items. For example, le footall, le tennis.

-Vous aimez le sport?
- Oui j'aime le sport
-Est-ce que vous jouez au football?
-Oui, je joue au football
- Et le tennis aussi?

Also photographs of different kinds of animals and birds can be shown to learners and they can be asked to identify them while making sentences or describing them.

-Comment ça s'appelle en français?
Ça s'appelle un chien
-Comment ca s'appelle en français?

The teacher may proceed in the intermediate class to let the learners identify the sounds of different animals. For example, the case of a cat and a dog. Here actions of the learners may be required as they be asked to imitate the sounds of animals and this may make the class more practical and interesting.

l'animal	**Le son**
Le chat	Miaou
Le chien	Aboiement

Also for beginners classroom objects can be presented to the learners for identification:
-Comment ça s'appelle en français?
-ca s'appelle un cahier
-Comment ça s'appelle en appelle?
-ca s'appelle un stylo

ii. Mime and Gesture

These are used to supplement other ways of conveying meaning. The teacher can illustrate by gesture or movement when teaching items like à gauche (left), à droite (right). Illustration will give vivid explanations. The teacher may also give orders in class with demonstrations. For example:

Tais-toi! (keep quite!)
Écoute! (listen!)

The teacher keeps his finger on the lips and on the ears to demonstrate the meaning of the statements.

iii. Verbal Techniques

Use of illustrations, situations (oral or written). This is more useful when items become more abstract. For the learners to understand what the teacher explains, he will be obliged to use more than one situation to explain the content and context. For example, Je vous en prie (Don't mention). In a situation where someone has demonstrated an act of kindness by presenting a gift, and you thank the fellow, the alternative reply is 'Je vous en prie

A. Ce bouquet est pour vous
B. Merci beaucoup
A. Je vous en prie.
You are about to hurt yourself and then you are forewarned.
A. Attention Monsieur!
B. Merci (beaucoup)
A. Je vous en prie

iv. Expressing willingness or acceptance to do something, the expression "Très volontiers' is apt but not restricted to these examples:

(a) - Vous Voulez aller au cinéma ?
- Très volontiers
(b) Vous voulez prendre une tasse de café?
Très volontiers

The first illustrated the willingness to go to cinema and the second to take coffee.

v. Use of Synonymy and Definition

Synonyms like antonyms and definitions create problems but are inevitably used for teaching meanings. Synonyms can be used with low level learners where complex explanations may create room for incomprehensibility.

Misérable	-	pitoyable
	-	Malheureux
	-	lamentable
	-	désagréable, cruel
	-	Deplorable, triste

The variance may give a better clue to meaning, but may give a different meaning than the one intended. In another dimension, the teacher may decide give definitions and request the learners to identify what the object or the person that may represent. And this should be followed by explanations within context of usage by the teacher.

le facteur (postman)
le cultivator (farmer)
le libraire (book seller)
…est l'homme qui distribue les lettres.
…est un commerçant qui vend des livres.
...est un homme qui travaille dans les champs
(… est un homme qui cultive la terre).

For a written exercise the learners may be asked to fill in the blank spaces with the appropriate word.

vi. The Use of Contrasts and Opposites

A word may be given, and the learners will be asked to find the opposite while describing real life situation and physical objects. Le sac est lourd (the bag is heavy) Le sac est leger (the bag is light)

Leger (light)	-	lourd (heavy)
bon (good)	-	Mauvais (bad)
gauche (left)	-	droite (right)
blanc (white)	-	noir (black)

These can also be explained with illustrations.

vii. Scales

This is applicable when learners are presented with either contrasting or gradable items. When, for example, one regrets his/her actions. There are various ways to show the magnitude of regret, with reference to Courtillon and Salins (1993).

Excusez - moi - Je suis désolé/I am sorry
- Je suis vraiment dessolé /I am sorry/really sorry
- Je suis vraiment navre/ I am deeply sorry.

Similar possible acceptance to the excuse given by someone.

Ca ne fait rien - It doesn't matter.
Ne vous en faites pas - Do not worry.
Ce n'est pas vraiment de ta faute-It's not really your fault.

viii. Semantic analysis can also be used to illustrate the meaning of super ordinates such as furniture or vegetable. The learners can be asked to describe the different classes of objects and items as they work in pairs or groups with the examples given below. This may be suitable for an advanced French class.
Le meuble (furniture): la table, le lit, le fauteuil, etc.
le légume (vegetable): des. haricots, des tomates, des carottes

ix. Glosses of Words and Phrases from a Passage

This activity involves definitions of words and phrases as they are used in passage. Pairs of learners can take part, each pair being given a copy of the list of definitions, not the words related to the list. The aim is to be able to match the words in the passage with the glosses.An example:

Un repas au restaurant.

Aujourd'hui, c'est l'anniversaire de madame Morel. La famille va prendre le dîner dans un restaurant. Madame porte une belle robe bleue et Cécile porte une robe verte. Monsieur Morel et Jean aussi sont élégants. Glosses

(Text selected, Lereman, 1973).

- La fête qui rappelle quelque chose, le jour de la naissance par exemple.
  L'ensemble des personnes liées entre elle par le mariage ou par la filiation.
- La maison où l'on sert à déjeuner et à dîner pour un certain prix.
- vêtement de femme plus ou moins long qui couvre tout le corps.

The passage given to the students will have the words in italics.

Translation

Translation is another effective means of vocabulary teaching. It saves time in giving a winding explanation that may be more confusing to the learners. For monolingual groups, translation is a valid approach to explain the danger of false cognates. For instance, the French word 'sensible should be translated as sensitive' and 'ministre' as minister not ministry.

Student-centered Vocabulary Learning

The ability to communicate freely with a maximum satisfaction has been a priority in language teaching as it applies to vocabulary. The students should therefore be engaged in meaningful activities.

1 Acting Out

Words that have to do with psycho-motor can be dramatized in the classroom. It is the teacher's task to arrange the learners into small groups for action words. Items like chanter (to sing), battre les mains(to clap hands), sortir(to go out), and frapper(to knock or beat).

For both beginners and intermediates classes, a song can be taught at different times. In the case of songs, the learners will be exposed to other vocabulary items. Music generally can stimulate the learners to further learning. Acting out can take other forms of speech acts or role play in situational contexts. Vocabulary exercises should centre around interests related to home,
social life, sports and entertainment.

2. Asking Others

The learners can ask other questions on objects in or outside the classroom. Où est -ce que je peux acheter un livre? (dans une librairie),
J'ai faim ou est-ce que je peux manger (dans un restaurant), Je cherche une pièce à louer mais où? (dans un hôtel), J'ai mal aux dents je veux aller (chez un dentiste). The questions above have been directly or indirectly asked on where to buy a book, eat or hire a room and whom to meet with toothache. And the listener/learner is expected to supply the answers, as supplied in the brackets.

In both the beginners and intermediate classes, the learners can be asked to describe objects in the classroom or household gadgets or questions asked with the objects.

- Où est le stylo?
- Le stylo est dans le livre du professeur
- Où est le tableau?

- Le tableau est sur le mur de la salle de classe.

These questions were asked on the location of pen and board and the answers are given accordingly.

3. The Use of Dictionary

In the absence of a teacher or peer to ask, the learner can use the dictionary to solve the linguistic or semantic problems. The dictionary usage is an important resource to clarify the uncertainty and ambiguity and it gives the learner the autonomy about rightful decision in the learning of vocabulary and language in general. "Le dictionnaire fundamental' by Jacques Davis is here recommended for that purpose.

Conclusion

The teaching of vocabulary in basic French has often been reduced to object identification or nomination by questions like "Qu' est-ce que c'est? *(What is this?).*But we are rather advocating here to bring into display the various skills/techniques employed with practical examples in the teaching and learning of vocabulary in French. The larger combinations of these techniques will make for effective teaching of language. To effect this objective, it is worthy to consider both external/internal factors which may include: similarity or dissimilarity of the target items with the learners own language, context/scope of the syllabus, the amount of exposure to be given to the items chosen.

The action-orientated approach has given room for real life vocabulary acquisition in foreign language for effective communication. The action-oriented approach in FLE that implies developing learners' language competences through interactive language and/or linguistic activities requires a creative approach to the organization and construction of the learning process, creating the conditions for the formation and development of practical skills and skills of owning a foreign language speech. We wish to emphasize that none of the strategies is preferred to the other because each one serves a purpose and also complements each other. We also propose that the action oriented approach for the teaching of vocabulary is much appropriate in the foreign language teaching and learning since it is premised on real life situation thereby taking care of the social and cultural relations inseparable from human interactions through language usage in real life situations. This is invariably a practical approach to foreign language learning besides the vocabulary which is part of the language itself. Therefore, it is necessary to create such conditions in class as learners learn the language material in a natural way, in the process of communicating with the teacher and students among themselves in real life situations, in various dimensions.

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