

VOCABULARY FOR RECEPTIVE SKILLS: TO PRE-TEACH OR NOT TO PRE-TEACH?

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Texts in a foreign language have always been a valuable source of contextualized vocabulary (Thornbury, 2007, p.53). At the same time, the success in deciphering a text depends essentially upon the ability to recognize vocabulary in it. One of the ways to help learners to understand the text is to pre-teach vocabulary before the first exposure (see, for example, Reading and Listening sections LearnEnglish Teens by the British Council (4)). Nevertheless, if we want our learners to have authentic experience, we need to be very selective when we choose the vocabulary items to be introduced before the first listening or reading (Harmer, 2007, p.272). Thus, the question arises what unfamiliar vocabulary should be viewed as specialized and be introduced before the first listening or reading, and which items can be introduced after the learners have familiarized themselves with the general message of the text. In this publication we are going to share our tips for selecting and presenting vocabulary items at the first pre-listening or pre-reading stage.

Present-day approach to teaching receptive skills holds that first of all we need to get students into the context of communication and provide the motivation for the first listening/reading. First exposure does not need to yield 100% understanding. So, if a few words are new or unclear, it might not hinder gist listening or reading. The exception is the key-words. To make sure that the word we have selected to be pre-taught before the first exposure is really necessary at this stage, we need to check if it is essential at the lead-in stage and if we need it for formulating the task for the first listening/reading.

We can find plenty of useful vocabulary when working with authentic texts from online materials. For example, when we work with a TED presentation by Graham Hill *Why I'm a weekday vegetarian* (5), the chunk *to go vegetarian* can be

crucial for getting the message of the talk. To make sure our learners are familiar with it, the lead-in question can be *Why do people go vegetarian?* In case the learners are not sure, we can use CCQs to clarify the meaning: Somebody has gone vegetarian. Did they use to eat meat? (Yes) Do they eat meat now? (No) Have they changed their eating habits? (Yes, they have gone vegetarian). Thus, we will make sure that the learners are tuned into the topic and are familiar with the phrase.

In the text *How to do less ... but get more done* (3) we can find the idiom *to keep at bay*. Useful as it may be, it is rather connected with one detail in the text and cannot be used in a question that covers the whole text. Therefore, it is not essential to pre-teach it before the first exposure. The idiom can be introduced before the second listening. For example, we can prepare True/False statements and use it there. While students discuss if they remember these details before the second exposure, we will see if they can recognize the idiom or if we need to clarify it.

References

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