EXPLORING TECHNICAL TOOLS TO IMPROVE ENGINEERING STUDENTS' VOCABULARY

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ABSTRACT:

This paper relates to the exploration of "Technological tools for enhancement of learning". Much has been said and written about the importance of accuracy in English language communication, but my professional journey suggests that teachers and teacher trainers are often unsure about what exactly it involves. In this paper I will thus address three questions.

1. *What is accuracy? I will consider the concept in order to identify its key features.*
2. *Why is developing accuracy in communication, a valuable activity for English language teachers? Here I will outline some of the many benefits for learners, the features of accuracy offer.*
3. *Finally I will provide a brief overview of the procedures and tools available on the Internet as it is the age of information technology. I will also comment on some of the web tools that can facilitate teachers' efforts to improve learners' accuracy in communication and argue that using web tools is a feasible and valuable strategy.*

Key words: *Technology, webtools, learning strategies, vocabulary, lexical competence, semantic competence.*

Introduction

Accuracy refers to the mechanics of the language. A learner's communication is considered to be accurate when it is up to standard and free from errors. When a teacher or student fails to consider accuracy in the class, then students may sound less fluent and capable with the language. This can quickly cause problems when students need to use the language for more than casual conversation.

The ever-growing need for good communication skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching around the world. Millions of people today want to improve their command of English or to ensure that their children achieve a good command of English. The world wide demand for English has created an enormous demand for quality language teaching, language teaching materials and resources. Learners set themselves demanding goals. They want to be able to master English to a high level of accuracy and fluency. Employers, too, insist that their employees have good English language skills. Hence appropriate communication becomes a prerequisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's world.

To master appropriate communication, students need to improve upon their vocabulary repertoire. Vocabulary is crucial not only during the learning process but also during recruitment. Today students are living in a dynamic e-age. They can receive information with the click of a mouse in a fraction of a second. Students are very much hooked to the net as

never before. Teaching of vocabulary to such a group of students is very demanding and teachers have to tune themselves to the changing mindset of the student community.

This paper endeavors to discuss and share some of the web tools that can facilitate teacher's efforts to improve learner's accuracy in communication.

Learners' expectations

In the classroom that I teach i.e. first year engineering students, the learners come from varied socio-cultural background and different mediums of education. They have varied viewpoints and also individual thinking styles which have a great impact on the teaching/learning of English in the classroom. Sometimes when our learners are speaking or writing they find it difficult to retrieve the exact word they want to use. They also want their learning from the classroom to be practically applicable in their day-to-day life. They seek opportunity in the classroom to speak and practice as they know very soon they would need to face the interviewers from MNCs where along with their technical knowledge their ability to communicate effectively would also be evaluated.

Our students spend a significant time learning lexis. However, it is difficult to utilize vocabulary in authentic situations since textbooks are unable to offer sufficient information on usage. Therefore careful attention must be given to the selection of the specific aspects of lexis that teachers need to focus on.

Accuracy in communication

The Chambers 21st century Dictionary defines accuracy as "the state of being absolutely correct and making no mistakes, especially through careful effort".

Considering the above definition of accuracy we can classify accuracy into three types.

1. Lexical accuracy- which refers to using words appropriately and correctly in communication.

 2. Semantic accuracy – refers to communicating meaningfully with appropriate coherence.

 3. Structural accuracy – refers to the ability of the learners to use grammatically acceptable Sentences in communication.

This presentation focuses on Lexical accuracy which is necessary for the engineering students, as they need to have good vocabulary of technical termsas well as academic communication. Their word-building capacityis commonly used for study and work purposes. Being able to use technical vocabulary with ease and accuracy is necessary in order to work in an academic discipline or field. As they strive to achieve complex and more natural-sounding communication, the depth of vocabulary knowledge becomes more and more important. Therefore the knowledge of lexical accuracy plays a vital role since it provides: 1.Clarity

2. Correctness 3. Exactness and 4. Form of language usage. A systematic way of developing vocabulary includes grouping words in a variety of ways and presenting them through various types of tasks and games.

There are several ways of putting words in groups. Some of them are collocations, synonyms, antonyms, homophones, homographs, register, idioms and so on. The webtools highlighted in this presentation can be used to enrich learners' vocabulary enrichment. These web tools include dictionaries, thesauruses, flashcards creators and virtual learning environments. If students utilize the tools properly, then learning vocabulary will be much fun.

Just the Word (*JWT)*

Just the Word is very easy to use. Students can enter a word and it will come up with a list of collocates divided into grammatical functions. For example, if a word is typedthe students will get a list starting with that word and all the grammatical labels pertaining to that word. (Word + Noun, preposition and so on). These grammatical labels are perhaps a bit easier to understand than most of the other web tools. *JWT* is good for learners who are specifically interested in how words collocate in British English, as it seems to be based on the British National Corpus (BNC).Clicking on any of the collocations brings up a page of example sentences from the BNC.

Phrase-up

This is very easy to use and finds missing words, which the student can indicate with an asterisk (*). It is good for finding common modifiers and intensifiers. For example, in the sentences: It was * unlikely and he has a * temper clicking on the asterisk it gives quite a lot of information about those words. It is 'powered by' *Wordnik*, an online dictionary.

Fraze.it

Rather than show single collocates, *Fraze. It* shows the target word(s) in example sentences, mostly from newspapers. Students can do quite a bit of tweaking, for example by specifying tenses, type of sentence (form - statement, question or negative) or at the beginning or end of the sentence (rule), UK or US (zone), and context - business, entertainment etc. Clicking on Advanced Search brings up various possible combinations. It appears to work on single words, phrasal verbs and phrases. It also has a dictionary, synonyms, web definitions and a translator.

More Words

This is really a site for finding and checking words for Scrabble and other word games, but it is also good for finding words beginning and ending with certain combinations of letters, for example prefixes and suffixes.The easiest way to access it is just to Google, for example, "words ending in dom", and click on More Words, which will be in the first three or so search

results. If it gives the choice of "by frequency" students can go for that, otherwise they can open the list and scroll down and click on "by how common the words are" and then they will get them listed by frequency.

Ninja words

It is a superfast dictionary that students will enjoy because it gives them the definition quickly. (It is an iPhone app as well). Ninja words tool is smart, accurate, and are really fast. Ninja words is optimized to return a definition instantly as soon as students hit 'Enter '. Their search is spellchecked in multiple ways until it finds a good match. Ninjas like to define to the point and this effectively filters the junk. All definitions come from the ever-expanding Wicktionary data set.

Vocabulary Worksheets

Vocabulary worksheets are a great way to improve the learner's vocabulary as it is essential to improve language arts skills. With vocabulary lessons including crossword puzzles, word searches, fill in the blanks, word addition, and reading comprehension, the process of learning new vocabulary words is made simple and fun. These free worksheets for students are great tools for parents and teachers. The educational worksheets help to make subjects like reading, writing, math, and science fun! Each worksheet is engaging, educational, and easy to use. Whether a student needs extra help in math or wants to learn about a new animal species, there is a worksheet just perfect for a little fun and learning. The subjects are hyperlinked to help the learners get access without much effort.

Teaching Collocations with COCA (CorpusOf Contemporary American English)
COCA is a very useful tool that could help ESL/EFL students to learn vocabulary. It could also make vocabulary and collocations teaching easier for an ESL teacher. The fact that this is an on-line database that one could "play" with in order to produce differentcombinations of collocating words, could be very attractive for our computer savvy learners. For example, a word collocating with "debate" would also be "hot" (not "heated"), and besides, it would be mostly used in its plural form ("hot debates"). So for a low intermediate ESL student, COCA would be a great opportunity to check if he/she translates literally from his native language into English. Also, a lesson, attempting to teach collocations with the aid of COCA, could be a great hit with our mostly engineering ESL students. It has user friendly worksheets for students as well as teachers.

Conclusion
Digital tools have revitalized the teaching-learning scenario. A wide array of platform available on the web can be used by teachers to complement classroom learning experiences. The entire landscape of learning has undergone a sea change to generate user-friendly and economical tools for enhancing the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. It is time the teachers of English learnt the nuances of these tools and reframed their classroom strategies to face our new generation of blended learners.

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