

Helping our ESP students to get access to the productive vocabulary they need

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Abstract

Over the last decade and half some ESP practitioners have made a concerted effort to carve out a distinctive niche for ESP in the area of domain-specific vocabulary. This paper argues implicitly that, while domain-specific words and domain-specific lexical behavior have some significance for ESP materials design, ESP practitioners might reap better returns on their study time if they take into account the significant new developments in EFL vocabulary theory, research and publication which are taking place in English Language Teaching (ELT) as a whole. Rather more explicitly, the paper welcomes the fact that these new developments all point in the direction of a much greater and more systematic role for vocabulary in the syllabus and in the classroom, but points out that in many ESP contexts there are time and other constraints which threaten to vitiate any attempt to adopt such an enhanced focus on vocabulary. The author then shows how one appropriate solution which has been developed in an ESP context at the International University of Japan (IUI) - the local dictionary - can help to relax the constraints without departing from the general principles suggested by the latest theory and research.

1. Introduction

There has always been a feeling within the branch of ELT which deals with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that vocabulary teaching and learning should play an important role in both course design and actual classroom practice (Robinson, 1990: 27-30). The main reason for this feeling has been the observation, true or not, that it should be easier in ESP contexts than in more general ELT contexts to specify learners' vocabulary needs and to design lexical programs to meet these needs (op. cit.). Little in the way of clear and coherent generalizations about vocabulary for ESP, however, emerged until Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 165-6) challenged the conventional wisdom that the vocabulary specific to the content domain should occupy a large share of any ESP vocabulary program. This criticism, together with their other criticisms of ESP claims to special status, literally rocked the ESP world (e.g. Swales, 1985: 174-6). One major reason ESP had emerged as a distinct branch of the ELT profession was precisely because the mainstream focus in the 1960's and 1970's on usage rather than use (Widdowson, 1978: 1-21) had left teachers working in academic and professional contexts no other option but to separate from the mainstream and look inwards at their content areas (Robinson, 1990: 22). In relation to vocabulary teaching and learning, Hutchinson and Waters' cry for a return to the mainstream fold was a little premature for in 1987 the movement to develop a new and more serious approach to the role of vocabulary in ELT was just beginning to pick up steam. In the ten years that have elapsed since that time,

however, the outlines of an approach to ESP vocabulary which can benefit from recent mainstream theory and research start to be visible.

This paper will present and illustrate the view that our ESP learners, like all English L2 learners, should be helped in a systematic and intensive way to get direct access to the productive vocabulary they need. Underlying this view are relatively recent developments in language acquisition research and syllabus design theory which have taken vocabulary from the fringes of second language pedagogy to its very center. Within this broad context, the paper will also briefly discuss Hutchinson and Waters' denial that ESP learners have any significant domain-specific vocabulary needs. The practical implications of these positions for ESP practitioners who are trying to enhance their learners' vocabulary acquisition will then be considered. Among these practical implications, the one that the paper identifies as critical is the implied stipulation of the new syllabus approaches that vocabulary learning be allocated large amounts of classroom time, a stipulation which is usually hard to satisfy in ESP contexts. The paper will then bring theory and practice together in one place by showing how the creation of a "local dictionary" for ESP learners enrolled in an MBA program at IUJ has offered one way of resolving the competing claims of current vocabulary teaching theory and of local program constraints.

2. Vocabulary moves center stage

A long time has passed since articles in academic journals about the role of vocabulary in ELT could plausibly claim titles such as Meara's (1980) *Vocabulary acquisition: a neglected aspect of language learning*. In the period since the late 1970's an impressive effort has been made at all levels of the ELT profession to make up for the neglect. It is possible to distinguish three powerful forces which lie behind this effort.

First of all, in the 1970s the search for alternatives to purely structural approaches which stressed the mastery of grammatical structure and the minimization of vocabulary learning load led to proposals that vocabulary be given an increased role (Wilkins, 1972: 111; Richards, 1976). The failure of the alternative approaches, particularly of the notional-functional approach pioneered by Wilkins, to actually implement this proposal (e.g. Wilkins, 1976: 21) only served to slow down and not to stop the momentum which was gathering. At the same time, new research insights became available which helped explain why structural approaches, whether overt or covert, were likely to disappoint. Corder (1967) and Selinker (1972) showed how the phenomenon of interlanguage contradicted the assumption that the presentation of a pedagogical grammar and its actual acquisition could proceed in tandem. At a later date Rutherford (1987) pointed out that the very notion of a pedagogical English grammar was itself suspect because it was not possible for such a grammar to provide an adequate description of the language.

The second force was generated by language acquisition research which led to the proposal of theories that, regardless of whatever forms language storage in memory takes - and the best hypotheses are that it takes redundant forms - , language is actually *retrieved* as pre-fabricated speech. Whether the theories focused on strictly memorized "chunks" of lexis such as two- and three-part verbs (Nattinger, 1988: 75), on lexical patterns which are regarded as "semi-fixed" (Krashen & Scarcella, 1978) or on units of discourse (Peters, 1983) hardly mattered because they all led in varying degrees to the conclusion that syntactic analysis follows rather than precedes a lot of, if not most, linguistic output.

The third force, which is partly related to the second, was the realization that the lexis/grammar distinction, while terminologically convenient, is not a real one. As Richards first pointed out (1976) and as others have explained at greater length (e.g. Sinclair, 1991: 81-98), it is more accurate to talk in terms of a *continuum* between lexis and syntax. Willis (1990: 21-2) has argued, for example, that it is more appropriate to deal with *would* as a lexical item than as an exemplar of the "conditional" and that the noun clause introduced by "that" is better understood not as a rule of "reported speech" but as a means for developing a lexical group of nouns and verbs which share in common the expression of thought, ideas and argument.

3. The lexical syllabus and lexical methodology

The huge increase in attention which vocabulary was receiving quickly resulted in calls for a lexical approach to language learning once lexical descriptions of the English language became available in a form which was detailed, accurate and clear. The premise behind these calls has been unambiguous:

A description of language which takes the word as its starting point offers more powerful generalizations and is more accessible to learners than a structural description.

(Willis, 1990: 27)

The Collins COBUILD project (Sinclair, 1991), with its vast computerized data banks of analyzable text corpora, has led the way in persuading syllabus designers that these descriptions are now available and that a lexical approach is both credible and feasible (Lewis, 1993; Sinclair & Renouf, 1988; Willis, 1990).

It is the view of this author that the lexical syllabus does indeed provide some reason for excitement. It offers the hope that the age-old gaps between instruction and acquisition and between language description and language use can be significantly narrowed. Against this optimism, however, must be set the sobering reality that all classroom approaches to vocabulary development which accept the current view that lexis is an important language

system in its own right demand that a lot of classroom time be devoted to vocabulary instruction. This is as true of methodological approaches which favor context-bound treatments of vocabulary (McCarthy, 1984; Nattinger, 1988) as it is of those which favor much more explicit treatments (Lewis, 1993; Sinclair & Renouf, 1988; Willis, 1990).

The demands on classroom time stem from our understanding of the complexity of productive English vocabulary acquisition and from the insights offered by contemporary vocabulary learning theory. English vocabulary learning for productive uses involves a high degree of complexity because of the multiple dimensions of words learners have to recognize and deal with (Richards, 1976) and because of the fact that the most frequently occurring words also include some of the most semantically and syntactically rich members of the English lexicon, such as the delexical verbs *have*, *take* and *give* (Sinclair & Renouf, 1988). Even if we follow Sinclair and Renouf's advice that only the most common meanings and the most typical patterns for words should be included in a general purpose English course, the amount of information the learner has to process remains very large. Regarding learning theory, it has been realized for some time that learners cannot be expected simply to memorize vocabulary because effective vocabulary memory storage and retrieval only takes place when learners engage with vocabulary in such a way that it becomes a part of their personal lexicon (Wallace, 1982; Allen, 1983; Gairns & Redman, 1986: 73-95; Hatch & Brown, 1995: 368-400). Simply exposing learners to lexis through word lists and reading texts and equipping them with high quality lexical resources such as the latest learners' dictionaries are strategies which by themselves are insufficient to generate the required degree of engagement. Regardless of the pedagogical approach which is used, whether it is in the form of a task-based syllabus (Willis & Willis, 1990) or in the form of systematic note-taking strategies (Lewis, 1993), it is clear that creating favorable *classroom* conditions for this engagement requires considerable amounts of classroom time.

4. Relating the new views of vocabulary teaching and learning to ESP contexts

If we accept the view of Hutchinson and Waters that, although ESP practitioners have to adapt to local circumstances, ESP methodology in general is not "different in kind from any other form of language teaching, in that it should be based in the first instance on principles of effective and efficient learning" (1987:18), it follows that the arguments developed in respect of vocabulary teaching and learning in general ELT contexts apply with equal force to ESP contexts. The attention of the ESP practitioner should then switch to consideration of how to apply general principles so that they take account of the local circumstances. In general, it is probably safe to say that three types of circumstance will need to be considered by most ESP practitioners. The first is a relative lack of classroom time, the second is the inability to track the learners over long periods of time and the third is

the degree to which the ESP practitioner can safely assume that local vocabulary needs analysis is unnecessary.

Although time for a truly systematic vocabulary teaching/learning approach may be available in some institutional learning contexts, it is generally the case that in ESP contexts conditions do not allow for true systematicity both because time is at a premium and because learners who enter the ESP program come with a relatively wide range of English proficiencies. Whereas in many institutional contexts English programs enjoy an autonomy which permits them to set their own targets and to schedule the expected completion of these targets, English programs in ESP contexts usually have to deal with targets and schedules which are short-term in nature and are externally proposed. At IUJ, for example, the target is the externally set one of preparing non-native speakers for the English demands of their graduate level studies. The scheduling is tight. The only opportunity the English teachers have to enjoy the undivided attention of their graduate students is during a pre-matriculation Intensive English Program (IEP) which comprises about 200 hours of classroom instruction. Thereafter, English instruction continues at a much lower level of intensity for only two terms and at the same time that the students' graduate content studies make insistent demands on their time. Furthermore, students who enter the ESP program come with a wide range of English proficiencies and a wide variety of English instructional backgrounds. It is not therefore possible for the course designer to predict with any certainty exactly what sort of lexical knowledge the students will bring with them in any given year. While these constraints are far from being so severe that they rule out any systematic approach to vocabulary teaching and learning, they do suggest that it might be wise for the ESP practitioner to consider shifting at least some of the teaching/learning focus away from the collective needs of the classroom towards the needs of the individual learner.

As regards local vocabulary needs analysis, until Hutchinson and Waters mounted their challenge to conventional ESP wisdoms it was usually assumed that learners in ESP programs had a higher degree of shared *future* vocabulary *needs* (as opposed to existing vocabulary knowledge) than learners in general English programs because the academic or professional domain the ESP learners intend to enter is likely to be lexically distinguishable from other domains (Robinson, 1990: 29-30). Exactly what sort of vocabulary needs ESP learners have in common has now become the subject of a small but lively debate. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have identified four types of vocabulary the ESP instructor needs to consider:

structural: e.g. are, this, only, however;

general: e.g. table, run, dog, road, weather, cause;

sub-technical: e.g. engine, spring, valve, acid, budget;

technical: e.g. auricle, schistosome, fissure, electrophoresis;

(p. 165)

They point out that, in terms of frequency of occurrence in texts, it is only the technical type which shows any significant variation with content domain and they further point out not only that studies have shown the technical type represents a relatively small percentage of occurrences in texts but also that such vocabulary is among the easiest for learners to decode and to use accurately (op. cit. pp. 165-6). Such an analysis leads to the broad conclusion that ESP as a whole needs to give priority to general vocabulary and to the more specific conclusion that academic ESP should also give priority to the academic “procedural” types of vocabulary (Widdowson, 1983: 92-94) which are central to expository and other “academic” modes of idea development.

Other analyses have suggested that, while Hutchinson and Waters are correct in arguing that the *frequency of occurrence of individual words* in particular domains may exhibit significant variance only with respect to technical and, to a lesser extent, sub-technical vocabulary, there may be significant domain variance in the ways words tend to associate with each other and in the particular meanings these particular associations may indicate. For example, Roberts (1984: 155) emphasizes that in the English language there are many words which can have both a general meaning and a more restricted domain meaning and that specific collocations are often used to signify this restricted domain meaning. He gives the example of “assets”, which clearly signifies a financial meaning when it is collocated with verbs such as “liquidate” or “sell out”, but which otherwise usually has the much more general sense of strengths and advantages. While it is not clear at this time to what extent exactly words behave differently in different domains and how significant this variance is, it is clear that a fairly large number of ESP specialists regard this and other types of domain-specific variance as significant (Robinson, 1990: 27-30).

Although new research findings based on text corpora analysis continue to keep this debate alive, it does seem possible to recommend in outline form a general approach to ESP vocabulary needs analysis, particularly in academic ESP contexts. For academic ESP in particular, general vocabulary and academic “procedural” vocabulary should be considered priorities while technical vocabulary should clearly not be considered a priority for academic and for most other types of ESP. At the same time, the ESP instructor should be sensitive to the possibility of domain specific variations in vocabulary behavior, particularly in relation to sub-technical vocabulary, and to the less well documented hypothesis that the domain’s cognitive structure may lead to stress being placed on certain aspects of words’ meanings.

5. The local dictionary as a response to the ESP program constraints at IUJ

The time and other constraints (described above) which apply in general to the English programs at IUJ apply equally to IUJ’s English for International Management Program, which helps prepare incoming non-native speakers to handle the English demands of their

English-medium MBA courses. Finding a relatively efficient, if partial, solution to these constraints involved, first of all, setting out clear learning priorities at the strategic and tactical levels. At the strategic level three priorities were established. First, more time and attention would be given to the learners' productive vocabulary needs than their receptive vocabulary needs for the simple reason that evaluations of the learners' MBA performance would depend more on their productive skills than their receptive ones. Second, the vocabulary would have to be selected and presented in such a way that the learners would feel sufficient personal engagement with the vocabulary to make the effort to "acquire" at least some of its salient features. The third, and least original, priority was that the vocabulary selection should be based on some sort of needs analysis. At the tactical levels, the constraints of time and variance in proficiency levels imposed themselves as key considerations.

Within this framework, the vocabulary program design problem could then be defined as the need to engage the students in relevant vocabulary learning without the need to allocate large amounts of time to in-class vocabulary learning activities and with some room to accommodate the differing needs of students at different proficiency levels. An important additional problem specification was that the "simple" solution of shifting vocabulary activities out of the classroom and on to the learners' homework schedule could only be implemented to a limited extent. This was because the IEP homework load reflects the need to pay attention to developing all the major language skills - reading, writing, listening and speaking - and because the post-IEP homework schedule is dominated by the learners' very heavy MBA assignments.

The solution which was adopted was to create a vocabulary program with two dimensions. One dimension comprises a conventional classroom-based vocabulary syllabus which by means of carefully scheduled study activities brought the attention of the learners as a group to bear on vocabulary which is considered to be a high learning priority. This syllabus approach is generic to ELT and requires no special elaboration. The other dimension, however, represents a specific response to the constraints inherent in the local ESP context. This second dimension comprises a kind of local dictionary which the learners could use as an individual self-access resource. This local dictionary would be compiled *purely* according to the productive vocabulary needs of the learners. The actual process of identifying and prioritizing these needs was simplified by first considering what kind of vocabulary the learners might feel sufficiently engaged with that they would actually take the time and trouble to consult the local dictionary in an active way. In view of the crucial importance of learner engagement, it was decided to give first priority to the vocabulary that the students were trying to use in their written work but were using unsuccessfully for one reason or another. Provided that the learners were motivated to engage in the process of investigating, understanding and improving the vocabulary they were trying to use for written expression they could be expected to consult the local dictionary actively. Such

motivation could be made a syllabus design objective by making arrangements for the learners' writing skills work to be organized within a framework which emphasized the drafting process and instructor feedback on drafts. A second condition which needed to be satisfied was the condition that the types of written expression the learners practiced during their English classes involved them in a range of loosely MBA-related topics which would give rise to a fairly wide range of MBA-related vocabulary from the structural to the sub-technical levels. Since the learners themselves accorded a lot of face validity to the use of such domain-related topics, this was a relatively easy condition to satisfy.

6. From error labeling to local dictionary compilation

The creation of a raw data base for the local dictionary involved the photocopying of over one thousand pages of learner-generated written text which had been annotated in detail by instructors. An initial attempt to record the error analysis data in statistical form was abandoned when it was realized that lexical error identification and categorization involve a high degree of subjective judgment on the part of the instructor evaluator about the degree of fit between what is written and what the author actually intended. In view of the practical need to create some form of local lexical self-access resource for the learners as soon as possible, it was decided to abandon the attempt to perform a rigorous error *analysis* and to focus instead on the less rigorous activity of subjective error *labeling*. This activity involved two steps. First, there was a search for patterns of lexical error which would enable some inferences to be made about the nature of the errors and their sources. Second, on the basis of these inferences, the features of lexical items which were identified as potentially problematic were ranked in terms of the benefits that treatments of them in the local dictionary might generate. This ranking was based on four considerations. The first two considerations were the apparent frequency with which the lexical item appeared in the written texts and the apparent difficulty of the item. The third consideration was the adequacy or inadequacy of the treatment of the lexical item in the reference books the learners had access to. The main reference book was the *Collins COBUILD Dictionary* (Sinclair et. al., 1995), which was issued to all the learners enrolled in the English programs at IUJ, though in most years a grammar reference book was issued as well. The fourth consideration was a guess about the amount of classroom teaching time that might be saved if the problematic features of the lexical item were fully covered by the local dictionary. The highest ranking was accorded to a lexical item which rated highly on all four considerations. In cases where an item rated highly only on some of the considerations, the lowest priority was normally given to the second consideration of item difficulty. The first, third and fourth considerations were treated as roughly equal in importance.

In practice, the local dictionary which emerged from this evaluation and selection process was partly analytic and partly descriptive in content and was part supplement to and

part amplifier of the learners' published resources. The four error ranking considerations led to the inclusion of two main types of lexical information in the local dictionary. The first type of information comprised lexical data which the learners appeared to need but which the learners' reference books did not provide or did not provide in adequate or clear enough detail. The second type of information comprised lexical data for which the learners' reference books provided adequate descriptive coverage, but which needed to be foregrounded either because the information related to lexical items which were a very frequent source of difficulty or because the information was buried inside long and complex entries in the COBUILD Dictionary or in other accessible published resources. The fact that the lexical data base was compiled from learners' errors meant that at least some of the information that was selected for inclusion in the local dictionary was analytic rather than descriptive in character. The two types of analytic information which appeared to be salient were overgeneralizations of syntactic patterns in particular lexical instances and the comparison and contrast of meanings among members of lexical sets. Regarding the issue of the prominence of lexical features specific to the MBA and related domains, the error evaluation identified a small but significant number of such features which appeared to be problematic for the learners. Almost all of the lexical items which were associated with these features were included in the local dictionary because they satisfied the selection criteria described above, with the result that their representation in the dictionary was stronger than their representation in the learners' written texts.

7. Some examples of entries in the local dictionary

Some examples of actual entries in the local dictionary are provided in order to illustrate some of the general points made above about the local dictionary selection and compilation process. Where convenient, the examples are also selected in order to illustrate the different aspects of lexical competence which have been recognized since Jack Richards' (1976) article in *TESOL Quarterly*. In all instances the examples are taken from the 1996 version of the dictionary which bears the title, *IEP TS:IM 96 Active Vocabulary Notes*.

(1) The first example relates to a short entry which focuses on the overgeneralization of a syntactic pattern in a particular lexical instance.

analyze (v.t.) Note that this verb cannot be followed by "that" + CLAUSE:

"The consultant **analyzed** the company's performance thoroughly."

~~"The consultant analyzed that the company was inefficient."~~

"Michael Porter **analyzes** competition among companies in terms of the industry structure in which they are situated."

Other examples of this sort of syntactic overgeneralization which are covered in the local dictionary include *consider*, *discuss*, *offer*, *permit* and *regard*.

(2) A large number of the problems learners appeared to have with lexis involved syntactic collocations which are lexically specific. A typical example is *level*.

level (n) The focus of this note is the misuse and overuse of **level**, in the form of the noun phrase, **high level**, and the non-existent adjective, "leveled". Here are two examples. Each one is followed by the correct version(s):

~~"The factory's operations had high level sophistication."~~

"The factory's operations **had a high level of** sophistication."

"The factory's operations were **highly/ very** sophisticated."

~~"He was a high leveled manager."~~

"He was a **top level/ senior** manager." [a manager with a high rank]

"He was a very **competent/ able** manager." [a manager who is superior in terms of ability]

Other examples in the local dictionary include *advantage*, *assist*, *cost*, *emphasis/emphasize*, *insist*, and the whole category of activity adjectives, such as *difficult*, which often appear in complex clauses beginning with an artificial *it* subject. Dealing with these syntactical collocational issues involves both the foregrounding of descriptive syntactic information which is present in good learners' dictionaries and the provision of additional analytic information.

(3) The third example relates to the semantic comparison and contrast of the members of a lexical set. *Opportunity* and *chance* were considered prime candidates for inclusion in the local dictionary not only because of their relative frequency and their demonstrated potential to cause confusion but also because it is particularly important for MBA students to distinguish their meanings.

opportunity (n) The meanings of **chance** and **opportunity** overlap to a large extent, but **opportunity** is favored when multiple possibilities are the direct result of systematic action and **chance** is favored in contexts which emphasize "unexpectedness", "randomness" or "statistical possibility".

(1) Lets look first at the areas of overlap:

"The annual trade convention was a perfect **chance/opportunity** for the company to demonstrate its new products."

"While we were in Tokyo we had the **chance/opportunity** to visit the Tokyo Tower."

"The recent manufacturing advances mean that the company has a great **chance/opportunity** to increase its sales rapidly."

(2) Now lets look at the differences in the uses of the two words:

"Women around the world are demanding equal **opportunities/chances**." [these are multiple possibilities which result directly from systematic government and business action]

- “The newly agreed trade treaty should offer plenty of **opportunities/chances** for exporters in both countries.” [these are multiple possibilities which result directly from systematic government action]
- “It was only **by chance** that we discovered that this company had developed the process we needed.” [the discovery was not planned and was unexpected]
- “The **chances/opportunities** of a new venture capital company remaining independent for more than five years are quite low.” [statistical possibility]

Other examples of lexical set analysis provided by the local dictionary are *conditions/situation, influence/effect* and *way/method*.

(4) Semantic collocation turned out to be an area where the MBA domain appears to exert a strong influence on some key words. For example, the *COBUILD Dictionary* entry for the noun, *strategy*, provides just a few sentence illustrations which show the verbs *launch, achieve* and *be* can be collocated with it. In their written texts, however, the learners demonstrated that they were in need of a much wider selection of verb collocates for this noun, apparently because in MBA contexts it is treated transitively as an ongoing activity as much as it is treated as a finished product. The entry for *strategy* in the local dictionary focuses on this transitive relationship with verb collocates.

strategy (n) Although this noun is simple, please note the different verbs that are used with it. These verbs are listed in the same order they might be used from the start of a strategy to its finish.

think about a strategy or **borrow/adopt a strategy**

outline the strategy

develop the strategy

formulate the strategy, present it to others and discuss it

revise the strategy

finalize the strategy

implement the strategy/ put the strategy into practice / translate the strategy into reality

make adjustments to the strategy

make radical changes to the strategy

phase out the strategy/abandon the strategy

Other examples of a focus on domain-influenced semantic collocation in the local dictionary are *balance, barrier, cost, credit* and *tradeoff*.

(5) Semantic collocation was also a major issue in lexical instances which are not specific to the MBA domain. This category is one of the largest in the local dictionary. The example below concerns *agreement*, which is accorded fairly good coverage by the *COBUILD Dictionary*. This word was such a frequent source of error in the learners' written texts, however, that it was decided to foreground it in the local dictionary.

agreement (n) Note the collocations and sentence patterns below:

“The two companies **reached** an **agreement** to form a joint venture.”

“The two companies **made** an **agreement** to form a joint venture.”

~~“The two companies **took** an **agreement** to form a joint venture.”~~

“The two companies **were in agreement** about the need to expand the joint venture’s operations very quickly.”

“The **agreement** to expand the joint venture’s operations did not specify how this should be done.”

Other examples in the local dictionary include *doubt, effort, evaluation, idea, influence* and *issue*.

(6) Words which have more than one important meaning were often candidates for inclusion on the grounds that they caused learners difficulties frequently enough to warrant foregrounding. A good example is the verb, *commit*.

commit (v.t.) This verb does not only mean **do**.

1) Generally, it means to “do something bad”: e.g. “He **committed** a **crime**.” and “He **committed** the basic **mistake** of not researching the market before launching the product.”

(2) In a business context it can mean “allocate”: e.g. “The company decided not to **commit** any **resources** to the proposed investment program until the new technology had been proved.”

(3) A little more generally, it can mean to “make a decision to be loyal” to a person or course of action: e.g. “Sony Corporation **committed itself** to a major investment program in its American subsidiary, Columbia Pictures.”

Other examples include *concern, deal, determine, develop, establish* and *function*.

(7) & (8) Two small categories comprise words which are specific to the MBA domain but are neglected by learners’ dictionaries and words which are subject to L1 interference. *Buyer’s market* is a noun phrase which appears in such a variety of MBA contexts that it deserves to be treated as sub-technical rather than as technical lexis.

buyer’s market (noun phrase) This idiomatic phrase means a market in which supply is greater than demand and, thus, is favorable to the buyer. See also **seller’s market**.

Know is a verb which causes many learners difficulties because it is stative rather than dynamic.

know (v.t.) The main difficulty with this word is its meaning. In many languages the equivalent word can mean both a condition and an action. In English, however, **know** can only represent a condition which is the result of other actions such as **find out, inform, learn, teach**. Also note that **can** cannot normally be used with **know**. Here are some examples of its use and non-use:

“I **know** a lot about the steel business because I studied it at university.”

“We can ~~know~~ [“learn”] a lot about the world by accessing information networks.”

"Through ~~knowing~~ ["learning"] about new data processing systems I will be in a better position to help my company modernize its operations."

Conclusion

The discussion of the local dictionary's compilation is conducted in the past tense, but in truth the process of compiling, reviewing and revising the dictionary continues in the present and will continue into the future. It is unlikely that the dictionary will ever reach a "final, definitive" form and it may indeed be undesirable to think in terms of a finished end product as the review and revision process to which it is subject should include in its agenda broad developments in ELT vocabulary theory and practice as well as the micro changes related to entry selection and editing. There may indeed come a time when new developments in our understanding of vocabulary acquisition and in the production and publication of lexical resource materials point to a solution which is quite different from this local dictionary solution. The true significance of the local dictionary presented in this paper, therefore, is the process which led to its creation, a process in which local ESP concerns are placed in the broader perspective of developments occurring in ELT as a whole. That said, however, this local dictionary may also have some material value as a concrete example of an approach to vocabulary teaching/learning which is, for now at least, worth considering in certain teaching contexts.

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