ĐIỂM SÁCH/BOOK REVIEW
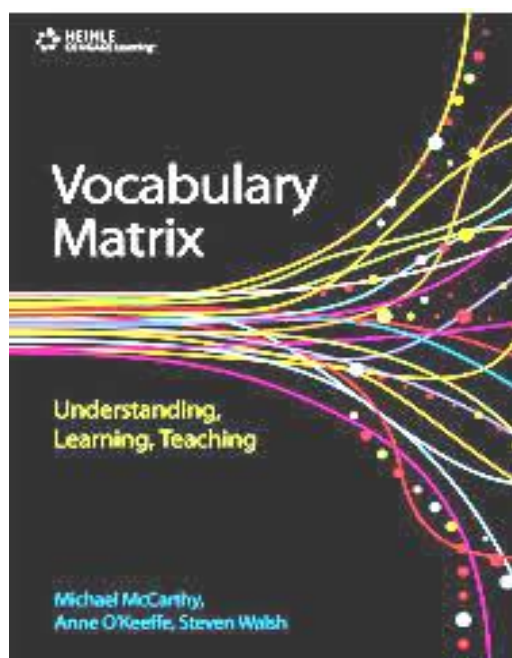
Vocabulary Matrix: Understanding, Learning, Teaching
Authors: Michael McCarthy, Anne O'Keeffe & Steven Walsh,
Publisher: Heinle Cengage Learning, UK, 2010, 165 pages

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This volume is one of the few best works on vocabulary and vocabulary learning and teaching. It is comprehensive, readable and accessible to both pre-service and in-service English language teachers, be they native or non-native speakers of English. The most striking feature of the book is its clearly-written theories and a compelling focus on practical applications of those theories. The authors base themselves on a rich corpus and authentic classroom data to present the *how* of words and word teaching, e.g., how meanings of words are created and changed over time, how words are related to each other, how words are related to grammar, how words should be learned and taught, etc…

The ten chapters of the book discuss ten different topics that coherently form the vocabulary matrix within which words exist. Each chapter is consistently structured in three distinct parts covering existing knowledge, problems for learners and classroom practice: (A) What do we know about this?; (B) What are the problems for learners?; and (C) How do we teach it? Also, each chapter concludes with a full 10-question review to help readers deepen and internalise their understanding of the theoretical and pedagogical concepts provided in the chapter.

Chapter 1 discusses how words are defined, formed and pronounced as well as the vocabulary size of the English language. This is followed by issues related to teaching about words and the number and types of words that should be taught.

Chapter 2 presents different types of meanings a word may have as well as challenges that are resulted from this semantic complexity, and how to cope with those challenges in learning and teaching words.

Chapter 3 looks at collocation and various approaches to the teaching of collocations to learners of different levels of proficiency. I find the distinction between weak and strong collocations really helpful to teachers in deciding how collocations should be presented and practised in the language classroom.

Chapter 4 – *The Grammar of Words* – is a very interesting chapter. Readers will find useful information about how vocabulary and grammar are related in this chapter. Regarding this relationship, the authors point out that, "Words collocate with certain other words but they colligate with certain grammatical patterns." (p. 42). Then the authors suggest activities that can be used to help learners acquire the colligational patterns, i.e., the grammar patterns of words.

Multi-words are really threatening to learners because the meanings of multi-word items are not always straightforward and predictable even where contextual clues are adequate. These challenges as well as ways in which combinations of words such as compounds, prepositional phrases and lexical chunks function to produce specific meanings are presented in Chapter 5.

Idioms, which "present learners with an impossible mountain to climb" (p. 69), and how to teach them are discussed in Chapter 6. According to the authors, "Teachers can encourage students to be creative with idioms in class, to have fun with them." (p. 72)

Chapter 7 looks at word relations. In this chapter, the challenges of teaching meaning through synonyms, antonyms and cognates, which tend to be ignored in second language teaching discourse, are presented.

Chapter 8 explores words in text and discourse with a focus on lexical cohesion, lexical chains, stance and register. This is really

a useful chapter to classroom teachers in that it discusses the benefits of teaching words in texts so that learners can both process and produce new language strategically.

Chapter 9 deals with words in the mind, or the mental lexicon. The chapter also discusses the complex cognitive processes involved in vocabulary acquisition and vocabulary use. Various theoretical perspectives on vocabulary learning and teaching are also reviewed briefly in this chapter.

Chapter 10 - *Words in Society* - looks at the sociolinguistic dynamics of words, including the influences of the Internet and popular culture on English words and the spread of new words and patterns. I agree with the authors that vocabulary teaching should concern "how much learners need to know *about* words, not just how many words they need to know" (p. 122, original emphasis) as well as how words are used in different social contexts.

Throughout the book, well-designed *Tasks* that contextualise the input are provided, and answers to these *Tasks* can be found either within the chapter or in the *Task Commentaries* at the end of the book. Added to these features is a glossary of all key terms to help those who are not familiar with the metalanguage of vocabulary pedagogy.

In conclusion, I believe that vocabulary learning involves complex cognitive processes and second language learners' vocabulary deficiency is the root of their failure in learning the target language. Therefore, teachers should ceaselessly find ways of making the painful process of vocabulary learning less painful to their students. For that purpose, both novice and experienced teachers cannot help reading this book thoroughly. It is quite a good source for teachers' reflection.