THE SEMANTIC FEATURE ANALYSIS ON TEACHING VOCABULARY FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: As vocabulary is a necessary mode of communication, it must be acquired first to be able to master the English language. It is a good idea to start vocabulary classes in elementary school. As their memory is still strong in remembering things, they are ready to learn anything new. However, since English is a second language, teachers will need to employ strategies to have students acquire and memorize new words. This study focuses on linguistic knowledge, that is, semantics, which the teacher uses in the classroom and the learning materials to encourage students' vocabulary. This is a content analysis of the teacher's approaches to teaching new words to young learners using semantic aspects. This research will be observed through two videos of English-language classrooms. The findings reveal that semantic features such as synonym and antonym pairs, polysemy, and applying in short sentences were used in the classroom when teaching vocabulary. During the class, photos, cassettes, music, and a variety of other learning resources are used. These strategies motivate and encourage students to learn the new vocabulary.

Keywords: vocabulary, instruction, young learner, semantics

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is extremely important for anyone learning a language, especially learning a second language. It will lead learners to master their language skills. Students will be able to speak fluently, read actively, grasp what others are saying, and compose words quickly if they have a large vocabulary. Enriching vocabulary can begin at a young age. At this age, learners have a strong capability for memorizing new words. To achieve the goal of this lesson, teachers need to be creative in delivering the new words. Teachers, according to Lelawati et al. (2018), play a significant role in developing children's vocabulary. They should be aware of teaching variables such as methods, tactics, techniques, and materials so that the teacher may effectively transfer the materials in accordance with the characteristics of the students.

There are numerous definitions of vocabulary based on different authors. According to Jack C. Richards and Willy A. Renandya (2002), vocabulary is an essential component of language ability and serves as the foundation for how well learners talk, listen, read, and write. Fajrah (2019) added vocabulary as one of the most important aspects of communication, especially in foreign languages, using words in a language with rules for combining them to make up a language. Hernawati (2015) also added that vocabulary is a set of words that people comprehend both in terms of meaning and application. Someone must have a significant vocabulary to comprehend what is read and heard, as well as speak and write in a way that others can understand. It can be concluded that the definition of vocabulary is a word that has a specific meaning, and it is one of the most important tools for communicating with others.

Vocabulary is part of semantics. The definition of semantics is the area of linguistics that analyzes the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences in language (O'Grady et al., 2016). Another similar definition of semantics comes from Curzan, A., & Adams, M., (2012), the study of meaning in language. So, semantics is the study of the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences.

As previously said, vocabulary is part of semantics, the learning vocabulary itself can begin with young students, whom teachers frequently struggle to teach. These young students range in age from five to six years old to eleven to twelve years old (Fajrah, 2019). At this age, it is expected of the teacher to use a variety of activities to keep the class engaged while teaching in the classroom. Young learners have unique characteristics. They are quickly bored, yet they need to improve their English competency, particularly in vocabulary, in order to communicate their own opinions. This skill is one of the competencies required to enter the globalization era. Therefore, innovation in the learning materials is needed in order to encourage the students to understand and master the lesson, such as using picture cards, photos, word games, songs, digital story-telling, and many more.

Previous studies have focused great concern on teaching vocabulary using various techniques and strategies to make students easily memorize the vocabulary and enjoy the lesson. One of the techniques was using the semantic features as the guidance. Study carried out by Won, H., Cynthia, A., Grover, I., Park, H. W., & Breazeal, C. (2019) concerning children's vocabulary, using semantic-based motivation, children's vocabulary knowledge and semantic understanding of words. Another study conducted by Duan, J., & Da, H. (2015) found that learning the appearance of different semantic theories has helped people learn words better than ever before and thus they are put forward for word acquisition and learning. However, Aitkuzhinova-arslan, A., Gün, S., & Üstünel, E. (2016) argued that students scored better at the semantically unrelated vocabulary teaching process than the semantically related vocabulary teaching process. Based on the previous studies mentioned, this study was conducted to analyse the semantic knowledge that the teacher applies during teaching vocabulary to young learners. Oktoberlina and Anggraini (2020) state that the learning model of vocabulary that is mostly used by some teachers is memorizing or translating word by word with the help of a dictionary. We must know that students, especially young learners, have a fresh brain to memorize something.

This study will discuss and analyze the linguistic knowledge used by the teacher in the classroom. To be specific, the linguistic knowledge of semantics. Semantics has many types of lexical relations. They are synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, meronymy, homophony, homonymy, metaphor, and collocation. Following is a definition of each lexical relation and its example, (Curzan and Adams, 2012):

> *Synonymy* is words that relate to the same thing, but their relative meanings differ greatly. For example: almost-nearly, small-tiny.
> *Antonymy* is a term that have opposite meanings. For example: tall-short.
> *Hyponymy* is used to describe a system of hierarchical semantic relationships. For example: Animal/Cat, Vegetable/Spinach.
> *Polysemy* can be defined as one form (spoken or written), which are all connected through inference. For example: Head can be as part of body/mind/person in charge.
> *Meronymy* words that contributes to how whole and portion are related. For example: tail, whiskers, paw, ears, and snout represents parts of a dog.
> *Homophony* is two or more different words that have the same pronunciation. For example: meet-meat, flour-flower.
> *Homonymy* have the same spelling, sound, or both yet having terms with drastically distinct meanings. For example: pupil (at school)-pupil (in the eye)

Metaphor is a phrase that doesn't employ the words' exact meanings but instead conveys a new meaning. For example: Time is money (meaning time is valuable).
Collocation is words that commonly appear together and it appears frequently. For example: brother and sister, hammer and nail.

Fajrah (2019) stated the lexical relations above, makes the meaning of words clearer by helping students see how they relate to and may be differentiated from other words in the set. Nation (2000) in Fajrah (2019) also points out the following reasons for teaching L2s semantically related words: It requires less effort to learn words in a set, and it is easier to retrieve related words from memory. It helps learners see how knowledge can be organized. It reflects the way such information is stored in the brain. It makes the meaning of words clearer by helping students see how they relate to and may be differentiated from other words in the set. These semantically related words are applied in learning materials so that they can be recalled easily and make the class atmosphere more attractive.

Based on the background study above, the researcher formulated the problem of the study:
1. How was the linguistic knowledge that the teacher applies in the teaching?
2. How have the learning materials encourage students' vocabulary?

Hopefully, the findings would inspire English teachers to teach vocabulary to young pupils. It is also supposed to help students improve their language proficiency. Finally, for the next researcher to come up with another good way for teaching vocabulary through different semantic areas.

METHOD
A qualitative study is being used to investigate the problem. As a qualitative study, a content analysis was used to describe the real case that occurs in the field, which means that all data in this study are collected in the form of an explanation, not a number, and described in narrative text (Octaberlina et al., 2020). In this context, the researcher describes the video from the start of the meeting to the end.

The data was obtained from a YouTube video of a teacher teaching vocabulary. There were two YouTubes that were being analyzed. The primary students of EFL were the focus of the teaching and learning.

The instrument used by the researcher is observation. There are two videos from National Geographic on teaching vocabulary. Then, observe the semantic features used in teaching vocabulary.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. YouTube Video Number 1

On, the first video, the teacher started the warming up with greetings and then asking the students questions whether they are happy or not. The teacher mimes the happy face to the students showing this is the meaning of happy, that is a smiling face. Then, the students responded 'Yes, I'm happy'. She also asks the students to show their happy face. We can tell that the students now understand the meaning of the term happy.

Picture 1. Showing a happy face

Next, the teacher asks students to open one of the pages in the book. She asks them to look at the photo, which shown in picture 2, and memorize what is in it. Then, she asks, *"what colour is the scarf?"* The teacher describes what a scarf is before the students' answers the question. She pointed to one of the students (picture 3) and she answered *"red."* The teacher drills the students by saying *"it's a red scarf"* a couple of times. The aim of drilling was to make students remember the words and pronounce it correctly. The teacher also tries to make students get used to answering in complete sentences to get students familiar with the words in the sentence. Then, she asks, *"How does the girl feel?"* They all answered *"happy"*. All the students answered the question correctly because they were introduced to the word at the beginning of the lesson. She also asks, *"How about the girl next to it?" and* they answer, "hmm*, no,"* since the picture does not show the smiling face. *'Is she sad or happy?"* the students replied," *sad."* The students understood that the words were not similar as a result of this lesson. The students notice that happy is the opposite to sad by looking at the picture. Not to mention, the teacher also telss the students that they are going to learn about feelings. Another practice to identify the opposites, the teacher asks the students whether the picture is inside or

outside. They answered *"outside."* She also gives another mime of a sun, showing it is outside.

Picture 2. The Photo

2. YouTube Video Number 2

In this section, the teacher gives more words related to feelings. In picture 3, the teacher asks the students to point at the picture when she says the word. First, she asks the students to point at a picture showing he or she is *"tired."* She made a sentence, *"This girl is working so hard, she is...."* Then the students answered, *"tired."* She also asks the students to repeat the word a couple of times so they will remember the word and also the meaning by looking at the picture. Then, moving on to the next word, she told the students to point out a picture of *"scared"* and asked the students to repeat it. The teacher made a sentence identifying the meaning of "scared." *She watched a scary movie. There were many ghosts and monsters."* Acting out the vocabulary words helps students associate them with action and makes learning more enjoyable
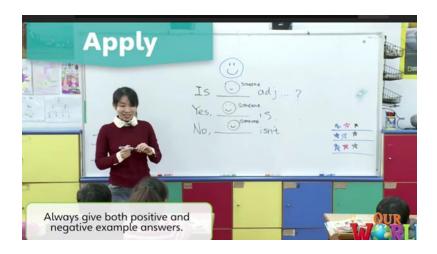
Picture 3. Expressions of Feelings

Picture 4. Students are pointing at the right pictures

mentioned by the teacher

Other picture of someone eating describes the feeling of "hungry." The teacher gives explanation of someone eating a hamburger means hungry. This shows a semantic feature of polysemy, which hamburger as a food relates to the closest meaning to hungry. Not to mention, she also acts out by scrubbing her stomach, showing hungry action. She also asks the students who were feeling the same.

Picture 5. Applying the words into a sentence

One of the way to memorize a word is to use it in a sentence, so the students know well how to use the word. Whether it is a positif, negative or interrogative sentence. Picture 5, shows that the teacher is encouraging the leaners to use the words in a sentence. It is also shown since the beginning of the lesson, the teachers uses complete sentences to have students' get used to it in this part of excersise.

The findings above lead the writer to answer the research question on semantic knowledge used in the study. Based on the analysis, the students learn the vocabulary of feelings through synonym and antonym pairs, polysemy, and sentences. There were also unrelated semantic features that the teacher applied, such as mimes or body gestures, photos, and audio. For example, the word "happy," for example, the teacher uses semantically unrelated and semantically related words. As a semantic unrelated, the teacher demonstrates an expression of feeling happy with a smiley face and asks the student to follow her. On the other hand, it is also a semantic knowledge or semantic related, since "happy" and "smile" are related to each other. These are considered polysemies. Another word related to semantics related is the word "hungry." The teacher relates the word to a picture of someone eating a hamburger. Not to mention, she also touches her stomach to show the act of hunger. Another semantic feature used by the teacher was antonym pairs. It was shown on the picture above when she used a picture to compare two girls with a happy face and a sad face. Learning the antonym and synonym pairs will make the students familiar with two different words at the same time.

The teacher also utilizes the words in a sentence to create positive and negative sentences. For example, the teacher asks "Is the boy angry?", the students answers "No, he isn't. He is happy," and "Is the boy tired?", "Yes, he is" replied the class, then teacher added "he is sick and tired because he was studying all night". In this video, she also employs antonym and synonym pairs as one of the semantic features.

The second research question, concerning the learning materials used by the teacher in the classroom to encourage students' vocabulary, was addressed by having the students participate in the activities, the use of picture cards, using a song, working in pairs, and playing games. The teacher also walks around the classroom to make sure students are using English with their partners and gives feedback to the students. This is also considered as an unrelated semantic feature.

The students were motivated to learn the new vocabulary. They participated in the class actively. They showed their enthusiasm for learning by acting out the new vocabulary. Not to mention, some of them do have critical thinking in describing the photo. For example, one of the students answered that the photo was taken outdoors because you could see the sky. The teacher also helps the students to complete their answers. In this way, students are not afraid of making mistakes.

One of the activities to avoid boredom is also applying to an activity that allows students to get up and move. The students are divided into partners or small groups to practice the new language together. To manage the classroom, the teacher walks around the room to ensure that students are speaking in English only and correctly.

CONCLUSION

In concluding the study above, the most crucial aspect of language is vocabulary. It is one of the strategies used to encourage students to express themselves. As a result, one of the competencies seen in pupils studying English in elementary schools is difficulty in memorizing vocabulary. Learning vocabulary for young learners requires an approach that improves efficiency while also pleasing and motivating students to participate actively in the learning process. Using semantic types of lexical relations, such as antonyms and synonym pairs, polysemy, and making short sentences, will help them memorize words as well as be able to use them in a sentence or daily communication with others. This is aligned with Fajrah's (2019) and Duan, J., & Da, H. (2015) statement. Fajrah (2019) stated that using the semantic features makes the meaning of words clearer and easier to memorize by helping students see how they relate to and may be differentiated from other words in the set. Duan, J., & Da, H. (2015) also added semantic theories has helped people learn words better than ever before.

Based on the two videos, the semantic featured used in the classroom were antonym and synonym pairs and polysemy. For example, one of the antonym pairs used by the teacher to describe feelings were happy and sad. Meanwhile the synonym pairs were

hungry and starving. The polysemy used by the teacher were someone eating a hamburger indicating the person is hungry.

Besides the lexical linkages employed, there were non-sematic featured related found in the video to improve students' vocabulary. It was the teaching and learning instructional material. This was also one of the critical elements to encourage students' motivation in learning vocabulary. Word games, body movements, flashcards, and many other activities are suggested. Not to mention, approaching students individually or during group work to help them give clues to complete a sentence will also motivate them and make them feel more secure and confident when speaking with others. This was also aligned with Fajrah's (2019) statements, that is, it is expected of the teacher to use a variety of activities to keep the class engaged while teaching in the classroom. Young learners have unique characteristics.

Hopefully, this research is that for the students, it makes them more eager in learning vocabulary. For the teachers, it is a challenge to be more creative, open-minded, and flexible in giving feedback and learn more new supporting materials to encourage their students. For the researcher, to find more English learning materials that improve young learners' English skills.

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Appendix:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAQGIrMyb38

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tGIhr8fvBo