Teaching and Learning Financial English Vocabulary

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Abstract

English today is growingly based on English for Finance. Knowledge of new, specific terminology in English not only enriches the rhetoric and the written word, but also leads to the creation of successful diplomatic relations. This article is aimed at presenting some ways of teaching and learning Financial English at intermediate level. Our aim is to present the ways of teaching and throw some light on the new and compelling Business English terms, as well as their widespread use. Data was mostly found in Cambridge University Press – Professional English Online and many dictionaries, with occasional reference to newspaper headlines dealing with current socio-economic developments.

Key words: teaching, learning, Financial English, intermediate level, financial vocabulary

Apstrakt

Savremeni engleski jezik sve se više bazira na engleskom za finansije. Poznavanje nove, specifične terminologije na engleskom jeziku, ne samo da obogaćuje retoriku i pisanu reč, već i dovodi do stvaranja uspešnih diplomatskih odnosa. Ovaj članak ima za cilj predstavljanje nekih načina poučavanja i učenja engleskog za finansije na srednjem nivou znanja. Naš cilj je da predstavimo načine poučavanja i predstavimo novu i interesantnu terminologiju poslovnog engleskog jezika, kao i njenu široku primenu. Podaci su uglavnom prikupljeni iz: Cambridge University Press - Professional English Online i mnogih rečnika, s povremenim pozivanjem na novinske naslove koji se bave aktuelnim društveno-ekonomskim kretanjima.

Ključne reči: poučavanje, učenje, finansijski engleski, srednji nivo, finansijski vokabular.

1. Introduction

A language is a reflection of our times. Still, when it comes to the semantic development of the lexeme, it seems as if every epoch had something in common with the previous one. Thus, from Shakespeare's sonnets in which a 'mortgage' was used, as in: "and I my self am *mortgaged* to thy will" (Shakespeare 1609, In (eds.): R. Proudfoot et al. 1998: 40) to the present 'Harry Potter Stock Index,' lexemes convey meaning and link the old views with the new ones. A conscious language speaker should keep pace with changes that affected lexeme meanings and vocabulary of many languages. Business English is that

contemporary and sophisticated area in which the vocabulary develops by immense introduction of new words.

Teaching Business English is an umbrella term for English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP represents, as its name says, concrete purposes for learning, such as technical, professional, or academic studies (Hashimoto, 1994: 101). More precisely, "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (Hutchinson and Wafters, 1987: 19 as cited in Hashimoto, 1994: 101). Having this in mind, we need to create adequate materials and use different techniques with business (English) students, because "business English is not only about language, but about language use" (Robinson, 1990 as cited in Stan, 2013:102). Consequently, it becomes extremely important to present the techniques for teaching and learning vocabulary of English for Specific Purposes (Financial English, in particular), although, unfortunately, this topic is not present to that extent in scientific research. Vocabulary instruction is often neglected in classroom, as well, whereas grammar is an inevitable and significant part of foreign language learning and instruction.

This article is aimed at presenting some ways of teaching and learning Financial English at intermediate level. This paper will be recognized, hopefully, as a signpost to the teachers of Business English whenever they find themselves in need of a better technique for teaching vocabulary and learners of Business English searching for a better way to learn financial vocabulary. Techniques for vocabulary learning and instruction are classified into three groups (explicit, independent and incidental vocabulary learning). The vocabulary is, however, adapted to the students of Business English at intermediate level.

2. Different approaches to vocabulary learning and instruction

There are three different approaches to vocabulary learning and instruction:

1. Explicit vocabulary learning

2. Independent strategy development

3. Incidental vocabulary learning

A reader of this article will be able to link these approaches to some of the techniques for Financial English vocabulary learning and instruction mentioned further in this text.

Explicit vocabulary learning relies on the direct way of vocabulary learning. The learning aim is lexeme acquisition in the second language, L2. It includes some of the techniques for learning Financial English vocabulary, mentioned in this article: dictionary use, vocabulary lists and their translations, matching words with different definitions, semantic mapping… (Nation 2001 as cited in Trong Tuan 2011: 1689). The drawback of this vocabulary learning approach is that it is too teacher-oriented (Schmitt, 2000as cited in Trong Tuan 2011: 1689) and relies on the first language, L1, especially in translation. However, it is useful in teaching elementary learners (Coady, 1997as cited in Trong Tuan 2011: 1689).

Pictorial vocabulary teaching and learning, presented further in this article belongs to the independent vocabulary learning. In

this approach, the meaning is inferred from context or through "pictures, diagrams, charts…" (Nunan 1999 as cited in Trong Tuan 2011: 1689).

The incidental vocabulary learning could be defined as learning a foreign language by accident, or unintentionally. Nation (2001) defined it as "the fact that a person can expand his or her vocabulary knowledge while being involved in any language activities without any specific intention to focus on vocabulary" (Nation 2001 as cited in Trong Tuan 2011: 1689). This includes: "learning from joining conversations; listening to radio, stories, music; watching movies, television; especially extensive reading; or any other exposure of input and output both in and out of the classrooms" (Ibid.). This article presents reading specialized journals and case studies as shining examples of incidental vocabulary learning. Furthermore, since incidental vocabulary learning requires a context from which we deduce meaning, Financial English vocabulary can be contextualized in a sentence.

3. Contextualizing Financial English vocabulary in sentence / case studies

Teaching Financial English vocabulary is a challenge that teachers face. First, lexeme meaning found in Financial English is specific, often context-dependent. Students at intermediate level, in general, find it difficult to understand the meaning and make nouns or compounds memorable. The form (pronunciation, spelling) of lexemes is another problematic aspect when it comes to students' output.

However, there are many effective ways to teach new lexemes. For example, first, as it was suggested in Cambridge University Press – Professional English Online, we tried to play hangman and see if students could guess the missing letters. Then, we provided them with the definition of 'cash cow' as "a very profitable business or part of a business" (Longman Business English Dictionary 2000: 66). This was quite a successful technique, as well as the translation of 'cash cow' into Serbian. Students readily offered their translations of 'cash cow' into Serbian, although they improvised to some extent: *krava muzara, zlatna koka*…

A learning technique to make novel lexemes memorable is to *use them in a sentence*. The students mentioned above did not know how to use 'cash cow' in a sentence. Thus, teacher provided them with example sentences (input): 'Souvenirs sold at The Royal wedding were the cash cow' (Cambridge University Press – Professional English Online, n.d.); "GM and Ford have used luxury cars as cash cows; giving those up could have a terrible impact on profitability" (Longman Business English Dictionary 2000: 66). The former sentence can provoke further discussion on the topic of the Royal Wedding, for example. This is an excellent way to incorporate culture in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom.

Also, *case studies* represent a valuable teaching technique. Unlike using lexemes in a sentence, case studies provide a wider context in which students can eventually learn some new nouns or compounds that appear in the text.

There are some characteristics of an effective case study: "a good case presents an interest provoking issue and promotes empathy with the central

characters" (Boehrer and Linsky1990: 45 as cited in Stanford University Newsletter on Teaching 1994: 1).The author of this paper remembers the reactions of Business English students at intermediate level after they read the case study entitled: "Florida father battles to save his home" (Connolly 2010, *bbc.co.uk*). The case study is completely dedicated to the dangers of sub-prime mortgages. This case study provides a good context for understanding the meaning of this noun and it promotes critical thinking in classroom. Sub-prime mortgages entered Financial English vocabulary in 2007 when "loans to sub-prime borrowers, which had previously registered high profits, turned sour as millions of borrowers were unable to keep up repayments on their loans and defaulted on their debts" (General Secretariat of the Council 2012: 4).

4. Fill-in task and matching exercise

It is believed that fill-in tasks increase the second language acquisition. Fill-in task is an excellent way to learn novel nouns (compounds) or other parts of speech. Below is an example of this effective technique for learning Financial English. Students are satisfied with this technique, primarily because it is an excellent way to use new lexemes in contexts. Later, a translation of key words into Serbian is offered to them.

COMPLETE THE SPACES WITH WORDS OR PHRASES FROM THE BOX.

consumer spending building societies balance of payments exchange rates interest rates

When banks and _____ offer credit, or cheap loans at low _____, consumer spending rises and _____ go up. High _____ creates pressure to increase wages. High consumer spending also creates more demand for imports. This causes problems for the _____.

Figure 1. Example of fill-in the gaps exercise

(Data source: Sweeney, S. *Test your Professional English – Finance*, England: PENGUIN English, 2007: 73)

Teacher can also translate some additional unknown lexemes that appear in the text (loans, wages). For instance, there is a significant distinction between loan and mortgage, or wage and salary. 'Loan' is "money that an organization such as a bank lends and somebody borrows" (Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary of Business English, 2006: 279). On the other hand, 'mortgage' is defined as "a legal agreement by which a bank or similar organization lends you money to buy a house […] and you pay the money back over a number of years" (Ibid. 307). Wage is "a regular amount of money that you earn, every week, for work or

services" (Ibid. 523), whereas salary is paid on a monthly basis. These differences in meaning should be highlighted and lexemes should be translated into the first language, L1.

ENGLISH	SERBIAN
consumer spending	potrošnja potrošača
building societies	građevinska društva
balance of payments	platni bilans
interest rates	kamatne stope
exchange rates	kursna lista

Table 1. Example of a translation technique

Matching exercise purpose is twofold: to benefit teachers by providing them with a reliable input for teaching quite abstract Financial English vocabulary and to benefit learners by providing them with a list of new lexemes and their definitions/synonyms, or sometimes, translations into L1. Furthermore, it is proved that we can enhance vocabulary learning by accompanying text-based vocabulary exercises, such as, e.g. matching exercise or crossword puzzle (Wesche & Paribakht, 2000 as cited in Nam, 2010: 133).

Figure 2. Matching exercise (new key words-definitions)

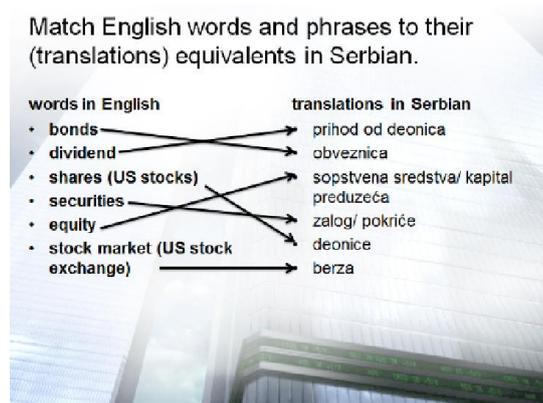Data source: Tonya Trappe, T. and Tullis, G. *New Insights into Business*, LONGMAN, 2004

Figure 3. Matching exercise (new key words-translations into L1)

Data source: Tonya Trappe, T. and Tullis, G. *New Insights into Business*, LONGMAN, 2004

5. Semantic mapping

Semantic mapping is similar to the keyword method to some extent. However, the difference is in the fact that with semantic mapping, we rely on the links between the lexemes. As can be seen in *Figure 4*, a keyword (i.e. finance) is connected with other related concepts (banks, money etc.) by using arrows on the basis of their related meaning.
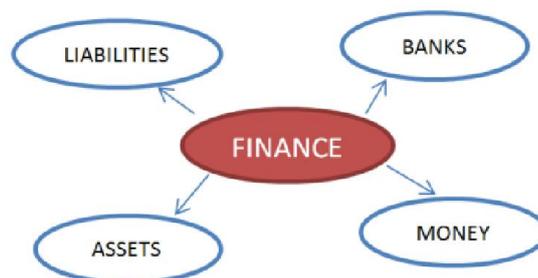

Figure 4. Simple semantic map for "FINANCE"

Semantic mapping is a technique that can be used successfully with beginner, intermediate or advanced students. New lexemes require semantic networks of related terms so that we can understand their meaning.

Many authors describe semantic mapping as an effective learning technique. Semantic maps can be used successfully in Business English, since many concepts that are abstract (money, assets) can be related to a solid term (finance). Novak and Gowin (1984) based the technique of semantic mapping on "learning how to learn" (Novak and Gowin, 1984 as cited in Oxford and Crookall, 1990: 22). Brown-Azarowicz, Stannard, and Goldin (1986) referred to the technique of semantic mapping, as "a concept tree, for memorizing foreign language vocabulary" (Brown-Azarowicz, *et al*. 1986 as cited in Oxford and Crookall, 1990: 22).

Memorizing foreign language vocabulary through visual aids (charts, maps, pictures…) is always a good option since learners are able to observe and find semantic similarities between lexemes.

6. Teaching Financial English vocabulary through pictures

Pictorial vocabulary teaching is presenting "target vocabulary items […] with their equivalent pictures and written annotations" (Nam, 2010: 130). The L1 intervention can be helpful in learning the vocabulary of the second (foreign) language, L2. Jiang (2004) claimed that "adult L2 learners could draw on the mature conceptual and lexical systems of their native languages (L1s); in part becausetarget vocabulary items usually have corresponding words in L1s" (Jiang, 2004: 416-432as cited in Nam, 2010: 130). Furthermore, we are accustomed to the linkage between verbal and visual symbols: no-smoking signs on airplanes and stop signs (Oxford and Crookall, 1990:17), or warning signs. As for presenting new lexemes through pictures, "a large number of learners in our culture are primarily visual learners" (Dunn & Dunn, 1972 as cited in Oxford and Crookall, 1990:17), and "94% of all people are at least moderately good at using visual imagery" (Goleman, 1986as cited in Oxford and Crookall, 1990:17).

Figure 5. True/false type of exercise with pictorial vocabulary teaching

(Data source: Sweeney, S. Test your Professional English – Finance, England: PENGUIN English, 2007: 73)

In Financial English, though, it becomes difficult to use pictorial vocabulary teaching to present new lexemes. Financial English vocabulary is abstract. For instance, it is difficult to present/explain by using pictures the lexemes such as *budget*, *interest rates*, *cash flow plan*, (*toxic*) *assets*, *liquidity*. However, *Figure 5* given above is an attempt of pictorial vocabulary teaching combined with true/false type of exercise. It leads students to the conclusion on the meaning of *interest rates* (true/false): "Stable and low inflation and interest rates are an economic 'good thing'" (answer: true). In the second part of the task students need to circle the correct answers: Low interest rates/high interest rates help to control inflation/small banks; answer: "High interest rates help to control inflation".

Alternatively, teachers can present new vocabulary in Financial English, by using the keyword method. Teachers can use PowerPoint presentation to provide students with a review of the key vocabulary, as in Figure 6 (data source: Tonya Trappe, T. and Tullis, G. *New Insights into Business*, LONGMAN, 2004). This is a good way to present abstract

vocabulary. In Figure 6, *Stock market (*or, *stock exchange)* is a key lexeme surrounded by related lexemes.

Figure 6. The key vocabulary review by using PowerPoint presentation

Data source: Tonya Trappe, T. and Tullis, G. *New Insights into Business*, LONGMAN, 2004

7. Teaching Financial English through specialized journals

Another interesting and quite novel aspect of teaching Financial English vocabulary is through specialized journals (*The Economist, The Financial Times*, etc.) that offer current and relevant terminology. Content-based teaching is an important part of languages for specific purposes. With this technique, "language becomes a vehicle to convey the goals of content" (Stan, 2013: 102).

Financial English vocabulary is unique, since it contains the lexemes which are found in determined contexts (economic, financial, social…). Thus, it becomes important to provide students with an input which contains up-to-date, relevant data on financial, economic, or social development.

An article written by Michael White, entitled "Turbulence and turmoil in the market or the language of a financial crisis" illustrates the usage of finance-related lexemes ('turbulence,' 'turmoil') by many examples from the eminent newspapers (*The Times*, *The Financial Times*, September 1992).

For instance, "Foreign exchange markets were *heading for turmoil* this morning after the shock announcement of the devaluation of the lira...," as well as: "[…] but if post-war history is any guide the likely outcome is months of *turbulence*, followed by capitulation to political and market pressure" (White 2004: 73). 'Turmoil' is usually related to chaos and disorder. 'Turbulence' is associated with "weather phenomena, especially related to problems in air travel or extreme meteorological phenomena such as hurricanes or tornados" (Ibid. p. 74).

Further exploration of these finance-related lexemes leads us to the fact that both 'turbulence' and 'turmoil' can refer to the currency crisis: "... the plan will protect the pound from any *market turbulence* [...]" and "in the third successive day of *currency turmoil* [...]" (White 2004: 75). Still, there are some differences between 'turbulence' and 'turmoil'. The former refers to the fluid dynamics, natural phenomena and weather phenomena, while the latter refers to the 'social upheaval' (Ibid.). The following sentence puts 'turmoil' into an appropriate context of the currency crisis:

"Given the *turmoil* in the currency markets, Mr. Helmut Kohl's meeting with Mr. Mitterand ... looks like a case of *rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic*"(White 2004: 78).

In addition to this, it is interesting to observe the dynamics of lexemes, since they always appear in different contexts. Sometimes, teachers can even make reference to the famous books or novels so as to connect the "old" and "new" views. For instance, in Shakespeare's times, 'turmoil' was used in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (II, vii) as follows: "And there I'll rest, as after *much turmoil,*" where 'turmoil' had its usual uncountable form and meaning – chaos, disorder.

By using specialized journals technique teachers can widen the scope of contexts in which a certain phrase or term can be used. Also, students will get a relevant and appropriate input. Successful output will be in the form of well-developed written communication skills, since "extensive reading can improve not only learners' reading comprehension but also learners' writing skills […] and can also enhance learners' autonomy, independence, and reading interest" (Stan, 2013: 102). Research conducted by Vanda Stan, PhD, the University "Vasile Goldis" showed that,

after the provided input in the form of content-based teaching, "77% students claimed they would continue reading to keep up with the changing world outside their country's borders, 68% students considered that reading business articles in English was no longer hard to them" (Ibid: 103-104).

8. Conclusion

This article attempted to present different techniques for teaching and learning Financial English vocabulary. Techniques for vocabulary learning and instruction were classified into three groups (explicit, independent and incidental vocabulary learning). These techniques are applicable to many foreign language learning situations. The choice and usage of an adequate teaching/learning technique should be wisely crafted and well-planned.

We relied on theory and practical examples in our presentation of teaching/learning techniques. Our focus in this article was primarily Financial English at intermediate level. Further research should be undertaken to observe the relation between the choice of vocabulary techniques and learning and teaching styles.

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