Vocabulary Learning Sequences: Teacher notes

These teacher notes accompany the **Vocabulary Learning Sequence PowerPoint** resources in French, German and Spanish. In each case, the vocabulary selections are mixed word class (i.e. a mix of nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.), and are drawn from a recognisable semantic field (i.e. topic area).

The learning activities include four stages of learning:

1. **Introduction**
   (i.e. first encounters with new words, and initial memorisation routines)

2. **Consolidation**
   (e.g. speed of retrieval building, controlled production, sentence-building)

3. **Developing use**
   (e.g. revisiting across different contexts and modalities, synthesising with previously-learnt language)

4. **Assessment**

1. Introduction (first encounters)
There are many ways for learners to encounter new language, particularly once they are developing the ability to 'sound out' new words with relative accuracy. Here is a list of five different ways for learners to start the learning process, which are best used in combination:

1.1. Quizlet (or other pre-learning method)
Pupils are given a 30-minute pre-learning homework. They need some guidance and instruction about how to use Quizlet. For example:

- For pre-learning spend 30 minutes on LEARN.
- Your aim is to achieve 'Mastered' in all of the words.
- Have the audio audible (either headphones or out loud if you are working alone).
- Vocalise the words as well as looking at them. Don't just do this silently in your head – get into the habit of saying the words out loud when you learn.

1.2. Peer or self-introduction in class

- Pupils either work by themselves or in pairs, reading out the words and studying their English meaning (one minute).
- Then the English meanings are removed and they try to recall them, looking at the Spanish (one minute).
- Then the Spanish meaning are removed and they to recall them, looking at the English (one minute).
  NB: It is not expected that they will be able to do them all. However, in a mixed ability class, some pupils will come close to being able to do this, whilst others may just manage one or two. It is important to have open-ended routines (e.g. self-made flashcards or peer 'read aloud' tasks) for first encounters of new words, where learners are encountering new words independently, as it prevents the frustration that can be caused by a mismatched pace of presentation.
- Further rounds of learning can be facilitated by one pupil turning his/her chair around so s/he is facing away from the board, and his/her partner asking him/her the meanings. This activity can work from L2 → L1 or L1 → L2.

1.3. Teacher presentation in class

Here the teacher is the source of the input, and presents the written form of the word, says the spoken form and displays a picture. (An explicit, systematic approach to teaching phonics facilitates the simultaneous presentation of written and spoken forms of the word). When there is no English in the presentation, it's important to check that pupils are completely clear about the meanings of these new words. If they are unclear about the meaning, this may delay the learning.

1.4. Self-made flashcard routines

- Pupils create their own paper flashcards, L1/English on one side, L2 on the other.
- Beginning with the L2 side facing up, pupils read the word aloud and turn it over to see the meaning.
- They repeat 2-3 times with each word, then move to the next one. After the third word, learners re-visit the first and second words and try to recall their meanings.
- They build up until all words have been practised

Additional details:
Learners can work in pairs to do this routine. There are many uses for these paper flashcards, also in the consolidation phase:

- In pairs, pupils play pelmanism or 'Matching Pairs' (not guessing, but working from English to Spanish – they have to say the words correctly to claim the pair).
- In fours, learners play Happy Families – Tienes 'la iglesia?'
- Listening tasks – one partner calls out the words in Spanish, the other has to put his/her cards in the correct order (when viewing English or Spanish side up).
- Sentence-building tasks – take two at random and create a sentence (can be written or spoken). This could also be done with a greater number of cards, and could involve systematic recycling of previously-learnt language.

1.5. Text/Story presentation

This routine might be used either as the very first encounter or after one of the methods 1,2 or 4:

- Pupils read aloud (either for themselves or in pairs) as decoding task – teacher circulates to listen in
- Teacher reads aloud, emphasising meaning through intonation and, where appropriate, gestures to support meaning.
- Teacher elicits meaning of the key words from pupils (elicits meaning of the verb forms and relates them back to the infinitive – e.g. asks why not SER, why not ESTAR)
- One pupil reads aloud, partner puts his/her paper flashcards in order.
- Pupils read and draw their understanding of the text in a picture.

2. Consolidation
Aural input is also very important in the initial stages of learning vocabulary. Learners needs repeated opportunities to connect the sound of the word to its form and meaning. The connection with meaning needs to be maintained in the learning activities.

2.1. Individual words listening

Use these listening tasks in conjunction with the self-made flashcards, in several ways:

- First, pupils look at the cards with the target language side facing up, and when they hear the word, they just turn it over to the English side (simple recognition). Then they turn it back.

- Second, pupils look at the cards with the English side facing up and select the correct card in response to what they hear in the target language [individual words]. Then turn it back.

2.2. Sentence level listening

- With the Spanish side of their self-made flashcards facing up, pupils hear sentences with 2-3-4 of the items in them. They select the words they hear and place them in order – this might sound easy for some pupils, but they will be seeing the infinitive, yet hearing the short form of the verb.
- A bingo game. Pupils place 6 of their cards English side up in a 3 x 2 formation and they turn them to Spanish when they hear the word called. Winner is i) a complete row then ii) a full house.
- With English side up, pupils listen to a set of sentences containing 2-4 of the items and have to put them in order. E.g. El teatro es grande: they would need to place 'theatre', then 'to be (description)' then 'big'. This is challenging (sentences will be slow and careful). When the teacher does this with his/her voice, s/he can respond to the pupils' by slowing or increasing the pace of delivery. Depending on the class, pupils could also be encouraged to be interactive, request in the target language, for example, 'Please can you say that again' or 'Slower, please'.

These sorts of listening task offer many possibilities for different activities. Pupils can listen to identify questions and statements, complete sentences with the correct choice of two verbs, and so forth.

2.3. Written consolidation

At word level, these controlled practice tasks include table completion L1 to L2 or *Look-Say-Cover-Write-Check*. At sentence level, pupils can initially complete sentences with a missing word. As the set of vocabulary contains words from different parts of speech, many sentences are possible, using only the new words. In the early stages, it is likely that the verbs will be recycled high-frequency verbs. This reduces the cognitive load in the initial stages of practice. Subsequent learning would bring in both prior learning and add more new words.

2.4. Spoken consolidation

Many of the pair and individual spoken activities used in first encounters with new words can be repeated to stimulate recall and speed up the retrieval of the new vocabulary, as individual words or short sentences.

In short interactions, pupils can engage in controlled question and answer tasks, where there is nevertheless a real exchange of information. Many other tasks or games also give pupils the opportunity to compose sentences independently from the words they have learnt.

3. Developing use

Time to forget and then remember are important stages in establishing secure, long-term memories. Therefore, planning needs to systematically revisit previous learning, and also recycle language in new contexts, which deepens word knowledge.

This list of activities develop breadth, depth and/or fluency of word knowledge:

3.1. Information gap tasks

These involve learners needing to draw language from their long-term memories, and create questions and statements independently, with a communicative purpose, without reference to a sample sentence structure or framework, which they adapt. These could be spot the difference, map tasks, or decision-making tasks.

3.2 Dictogloss

Pupils listen to a passage (several times) and make notes in English. They then work in pairs or small groups to re-create the text in the target language. This task ensures that learners make a connection between form and meaning, and forces them to use their grammatical knowledge. Integrating spoken and written language at each stage also deepens knowledge, reinforces the SSC (Symbol-Sound Correspondence) and develops literacy in the new language.

3.3 Rich texts
Working with texts which include previously learnt vocabulary either in a different semantic field (or topic), use different meanings of the words, or different forms of the base word (i.e. different part of speech) deepens pupils' knowledge of the words. These can be authentic, literary or other texts.

4. Assessment

4.1 Pupil self-assessment
It is important that pupils know what it means to know a word, and can assess their own word knowledge, routinely and quickly. A simple proforma which asks them key questions about what they can remember and do with the target words can help them to develop their awareness.

4.2 Teacher assessment
Teachers need quick and reliable methods for knowing what pupils know every lesson, every week, every month. There is a role for short, tightly focused assessment tasks that isolate specific language or grammatical structures as these enable teachers to gauge pupils' knowledge continuously. Short, sentence level translation tasks that force recall are also learning activities that contribute to the embedding of knowledge in long-term memory.