

**(Rerun) We Teach Languages Episode 29: Teaching Vocabulary for Acquisition with Joe Barcroft, Part II**

 [0:00] [background music]

**Stacey Margarita Johnson**:  [0:00] This is "We Teach Languages," a podcast about language teaching from the diverse perspectives of real teachers. I'm Stacey Margarita Johnson and today on episode 29, we get to hear from Joe Barcroft talking about teaching vocabulary for acquisition.

[0:22] Now, regular listeners of the podcast will know Joe Barcroft. On episode 25, I talked about some of his previous research on retrieval practice. Episode 28 was actually part one of this conversation. We talked about his book "Input‑Based Incremental Vocabulary," published in 2012 by TESOL International.

[0:49] We actually only got through principles one through five in the last episode. In this episode, we're going to jump right in to principal six, and start talking about ways that we can improve our students' acquisition of target vocabulary.

[1:05] Joe, how about you just jump right into principal six, and we'll get started?

**Joe Barcroft**:  [1:09] OK, great. Principal six recommends limiting forced output without access to meaning. This would mean to limit the types of tasks, like copying target words in a parroted manner, or even doing choral repetition.

[1:24] I think the jury is still out on choral repetition and what advantages it may have. I think the key point to be made here is that retrieving a target word is not the same as copying it, or just repeating it after someone says something.

[1:42] Retrieving a target word implies that you've had an opportunity to process it as input in the first place, and then you have an opportunity to try to retrieve it on your own, let's say, based on the cue of a picture or something else.

[1:55] That's very useful. That's very beneficial, that type of retrieval, but the parroting, copying‑type activities, that's not the case. Some research indicates that copying target words can actually decrease your learning of those words in question, without getting into the exact reasons as to why.

[2:14] Principal seven recommends limiting semantic elaboration during the initial stages. This is semantic elaboration of a redundant nature, that is typically going to be based on your knowledge from your first language only.

[2:30] If you're being asked to learn a new word, like the word imán, in Spanish for magnet, imán, and I ask you to elaborate on the meaning somehow, that's not going to necessarily help you encode that novel word form. We could even come up with...let's say, could you give me a lot longer word form? What would be a longer word form in Spanish?

[2:54] [laughter]

**Stacey**:  [2:54] Biblioteca?

**Joe**:  [2:54] Biblioteca. Yeah. Long words that you can imagine. One of the challenges that you have is encoding that novel word form. If you tell me, "Biblioteca," and you say, "Write the word biblioteca, in a [inaudible] sentence, or think about the last time you went to the biblioteca, or do some other type of semantic elaboration related to biblioteca..."

[3:20] If you're being exposed to that Spanish word for the first time, any kind of elaboration of that nature that you could do would be based on your knowledge of your first language, would be largely redundant and can actually get in your way of being able to encode that novel word form.

[3:37] That's not to say that you don't have to learn collocational properties for biblioteca in Spanish just like you would for the word imán, just like you would for any target word. You have to learn the L2‑specific meanings and usage over time and so forth, but that redundant semantic elaboration can actually get in your way and detract from your ability to learn the new word form.

[4:00] That's why, for example, the counterintuitive finding that writing a new word in a sentence...if you're looking at a target word and its picture and then I say, "Write it in a sentence," and you write it in a sentence, there's research that suggests that doing that, as compared to not doing that, can reduce your vocabulary learning by something of 100 percent.

[4:20] You learn half as many words doing that kind of a task. I mean that's not a small negative. In fact, it's a strong one. Those are two types of tasks that you would want to limit during the initial stages so that learners can focus on and attend to the novel word form.

[4:35] Retrieval is very useful during that initial stages they're all at. Principle eight is promote learning L2‑specific word meanings and usage over time. If you start off with a target word whatever it may be, all of your information about that word, and how it functions and all of its meanings are based on your exposure to‑date typically in your first language.

[5:02] If you're exposed to that word truly for the first time in a second language, some may overlap, some of the meaning may overlap, but a lot of that may be very different, as the usage may be very different as well.

[5:15] For example, if you want to say in English, "That's the pot," calling the kettle black, you've all of these worlds kettle, pot. We make these associations. In Spanish, depending on the variety of Spanish that you're learning, how you translate that, how you would say that in Spanish would be quite different.

[5:39] All of those individual words in there are part of that idiomatic expression. They form collocations in varying degrees with those words in that idiomatic expression and with so many other words in the language.

[5:50] All of that information, that quality of vocabulary knowledge that we learn over time. First of all, you need lots of sentence‑level and discourse‑level input to get that information. You can't gain that type of knowledge by just studying a list of discreet items, because you have to see those items co‑occurring.

[6:13] We gain that knowledge from hours, and days, and years, being exposed to input in whatever the target language might be. For a second language, we have to refine when we learn a new word, we have to get all that same type of knowledge, but it has to be L2‑specific, both in terms of the meanings of words and in the usage of words.

[6:36] That's principle eight. Did you have any questions or comments about that?

**Stacey**:  [6:40] No, I'm really enjoying this, though. This is just clarifying so many things for me, maybe bits and pieces of research that I've read and put together, your principles are really systematizing it all.

**Joe**:  [6:52] That's great. Principle nine would be to progress from less demanding to more demanding activities over time. Paul Nation wrote about the learning burden that learner experiences when they're exposed to new vocabulary.

[7:12] The challenge that you have of learning, for example, the target word form and all of the things we just talked about, in terms of the quality of knowledge for that particular word.

[7:26] The recommendation here is to keep that in mind and to think about allowing during the initial stages, giving learners the space to be able to process target vocabulary as input. They need their space and their time to be able to do that.

[7:45] You don't want to overwhelm them with too many demanding activities during the initial stages, but you don't want to say, "OK, you know, class, open up to page 63. See? Here's all the fruits and vegetables, let's make a store," [laughs] in classroom.

[8:02] That's really overwhelming. From the IBI perspective, what you would want to do is consider how are all these items being presented as input. Is it good to present all those items, for example, together? Maybe we want to do it bit by bit, use a thematic presentation format as opposed to a semantic one, for example, whatever.

[8:25] You would think about how learners are going to be exposed to these items in the input first, and then the kind of task that you're going to engage them in over time. The recommendation is just simply to go from less demanding to more demanding over time in constructing these tasks. That would be principle nine.

[8:47] The last one is another one of these principles which I think is just a logical principle. It's something that I think can be very useful, and that we may forget to do otherwise, which is apply research findings with direct implications for vocabulary instruction.

[9:04] It's nice if you can understand the theoretical backdrop, you can understand the larger body of research behind particular research findings, and so forth. That's nice if you can do that, but there are some research findings that you can simply implement.

[9:18] I think what I mentioned about the uses of different sources of acoustic variability might be one of those. If someone wants to go off and look at the theoretical implications about what this means, about lexical development and why that may be the case, that's great, I would encourage that.

[9:35] Without knowing all that, you can say, "Well, this is an interesting research finding that I can incorporate in this way." There was a study by DeGroot, where they found presenting target words with a background of classical music, without words, just classical music, was beneficial. [laughs]

[9:54] I would encourage people, when they can, to read the studies and to learn about them, but if you just can have these different tasks and input‑based manipulations that can facilitate vocabulary learning, I think that's a nice thing to be able to do over time.

[10:11] Also, principle 10 helps you to stay up as the larger field of vocabulary research moves forward to stay abreast of recent findings and be able to incorporate those as well.

[10:23] For example, the idea of providing learners with the opportunities to retrieve target words, that's something that is very useful after learners have had an opportunity to process the words as input. That's something that should be beneficial and be more effective than not providing opportunities for them to retrieve target words on their own.

**Stacey**:  [10:49] That exact topic is actually something you have done research on and presented a paper on, right?

**Joe**:  [10:55] Yes, I've done that. I think what's really interesting about it, one of the reasons I like vocabulary research is because it really gets up the nuts and bolts at that very basic level of what is meaning, what is form, and how they relate. In this case, that's why I was talking about the idea of copying a target word versus retrieving a target word.

[11:17] The actual task may look similar. You're writing down the word on a piece of paper, for example, but in one case, you might just see a picture and the word below it and you're just copying it. That would be copying. That would be a form of output without access to meaning.

[11:35] In the other case, you will have seen the word to some extent beforehand and processed it as input to some extent beforehand, and then you will just see the cue only. You might just see a picture or you might just see a definition of the word and you're attempting to actually write the target word‑form based only on that cue, that's retrieval. That's retrieval.

[11:58] What's interesting is that those two might look similar on the surface but they're really quite different in terms of the cognitive processes that are being engaged or not being engaged.

**Stacey**:  [12:11] I think after hearing your 10 principles, I'm particularly thinking about some of the listeners who might not have started implementing any of these principles yet. They're starting from a place of, "Here's the vocabulary list. I need students to learn these words." All 10 principles are too much to start with at once.

[12:34] If someone's thinking, "What is the first thing I should do to start working on my vocabulary instruction?" What would you recommend is the best first step?

**Joe**:  [12:41] I think my first recommendation would be to consider how the target words are being presented in the input. You just gave me an opportunity to mention something I wanted to mention.

[12:53] That not all presentation of the target words [inaudible] has a vocabulary in the input need the teacher‑fronted. There are ways that you can create situations where students or some are presenting target items to other students and they're providing the input as well. It doesn't always have to be teacher‑fronted.

[13:20] Sometimes, it can appear in the context of readings or videos. There are so many ways that target vocabulary can appear in the input. I would focus first on that and say, because the example that I gave you about, "Open up to page 63, here is the target vocabulary. Boom, let's do this activity."

[13:45] If they truly have not had a chance to process that target vocabulary as input to a sufficient degree, the place they're going to be getting it from are the pages or the translations or whatever it is in the text book and they're going to be walking around [laughs] with their text book trying to do the stuff or activity.

[14:03] We want to avoid that and I think the way to avoid that is by sitting back and thinking, "How is this vocabulary going to be presented in the input to the learners. Is it going to be presented repeatedly? Am I going to engage them in intentional activities or am I going to rely largely that they're going to pick them up incidentally? Are there ways that I can enhance the inputs?"

[14:28] I would say starting with that because within a larger program of communicative task‑based, content‑based instruction, you're already going to have, presumably, tasks that learners are going to be engaged in anyway. I think the thing that we can forget is how the target vocabulary is presented in the input. If I had to point out one area to focus on first, it would be that.

**Stacey**:  [14:59] Awesome. I'm definitely going to include a few links in this episode. You mentioned several studies and I'm going to be reaching out to you by email afterwards to get some citations from you for the different studies that you mentioned. A couple of them are yours but you also mention some other folk's work.

[15:17] I'm sure some of the listeners will want to follow up and read these studies themselves. I'm also going to encourage people to check out your book to get a really thorough treatment of these 10 principles and practical ways that they can start applying them in their class rooms.

[15:31] You've gone over all 10 principles. I have had so many aha moments. I know that a lot of listeners are probably going to run and check out your book after they hear this show. What else will they find in your book besides these 10 principles?

**Joe**:  [15:46] That's a great question. I think one of the things that they'll find in the book is a lot of sample lessons. There're actually a total of 14 sample lessons. There's one chapter where you have five sample lessons that are based on multiple sources of input and another chapter where you have five different lessons that are based on reading as a primary source of input.

[16:15] You have five very different types of reading in which target vocabulary appears and you have five different idea and lessons there. There's also another chapter that talks about...and I think this is important in practical terms how you can supplement your existing materials using the IBI approach, and there are examples given in there as well.

**Stacey**:  [16:40] Awesome. Well, the book sounds great. I don't know how I didn't know about your book before. I can't wait to read it though. This was such a fascinating conversation. Thank you for spending so much of your time with us.

[16:52] [background music]

**Joe**:  [16:53] Well, it was a pleasure, Stacey. Thank you very much for doing this. It's always a pleasure to talk about this and I appreciate you and what you're doing with the blog.

**Stacey**:  [17:02] Thank you so much.

**Joe**:  [17:03] Thanks very much.

**Stacey**:  [17:05] If you would like to comment or give feedback on the show or be a guest on the show yourself, let us know. You can find us on Twitter @weteachlang. You can comment on any of the episodes on our website, or you can send a text message or leave a voice mail on our Google voice number, which is (629)888‑3398.

[17:26] If you leave us a voice mail, we may even play your question or comment on the air. Don't forget to tell your friends and colleagues about the show. Thank you so much for listening. Bye‑bye.

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