Word/Semantic Relationships

Teaching vocabulary is about how words relate to other words. The most effective way to teach vocabulary is to show how new words relate to words that students already know. It is important to explicitly teach the relationships between words.

Here are the major types of semantic relationships:

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| *Semantic Relationship* | *Explanation* | *Examples* | *Teaching Ideas* |
| **Categories** | Words can be categorised into groups (fruits, emotions, buildings)  Some categories belong to larger categories (e.g. *fruit* is a subcategory of *food*), and some category members can be their own categories (subtypes of *apples* are *Granny Smith*, *Golden Delicious*) | Fruit —> Banana, Apple, Watermelon    Emotions —> Sadness Joy Anger    Anger —> furiousness angst | * Brainstorm members of categories (*who can think of types of vehicles?*) * Categorise vocabulary as they are learnt (*run skip glide prance are all ways of moving*) * Visualise how words belong to categories and how they can branch off into subcategories. For example: |
| **Antonyms** | A pair of words with opposite meanings    Antonyms can be **gradable** (on a continuum, e.g. hot/cold), **complementary** (one or the other, e.g. alive/dead) or **relational** (e.g. doctor/patient, predator/prey) | fast/slow  big/small  right/wrong  sleep/wake  wife/husband  parent/child | * Teach antonyms in pairs, to provide a reciprocal understanding of a concept * Encourage students to guess what the antonym of words are (e.g. go/come, do/undo, quietly/loudly) * When adding words to personal dictionaries, encourage students to make note of any antonyms |
| **Synonyms** | Words that have the same or similar meaning to each other.    Some words will have multiple meanings (homonyms) so they may have different sets of synonyms depending on the sense of the word | fair/just/objective/ impartial/unbiased    leap/spring/bound/hop/ bounce    debate/discuss/confer about/talk over/talk through/thrash out/argue/dispute/contend over/contest/controvert/ moot  peer/colleague/friend  &  peer/peek/look | * Brainstorm synonyms to explore how words are related to others * Replace repeated or overused words in writing. Ask students to identify overused words, and replace them with more interesting synonyms * Play word games like Taboo, or "synonym charades", where students need to use synonyms to rewrite movie or book titles |
| **Connotations** | Though synonyms have similar literal meanings they can differ in their inferred meaning or their **connotation**.    Teachers can help students draw distinctions between synonyms in terms of their appropriateness according to context and connotations | Compare connotations of:    young vs. childlike  customer vs. consumer  lovely vs. knockout  grab vs. snatch  economical vs. cheap  passionate vs. volatile  direct vs. command | * When analysing the meanings of synonyms, explicitly discuss the connotations of differing words (*what does the word*mandatory *give a sense of, that'd different to*necessary). * When adding words to personal dictionaries, encourage students to note down the connotations in brackets as a memory cue   e.g. scrawny (negative connotation) = thin  Slim (postive connotation) = thin  statesman (positive connotation) = politician |
| **Homophones** | Words that sound the same but are spelt differently   (have a different meaning) | * suite vs. sweet * throne vs. thrown * serial  vs. cereal | * Draw students' attention to homophones as they appear during reading and writing sessions. * Encourage students to keep an ongoing list of homophones in their personal dictionary. When reviewing spelling words, if a particular word has a homophone, tell your student about it and asked them to add it to their homophone list. * Model examples of word play, by using pairs of homophones in a sentences.   e.g. *The National Bank was beside the river bank.*   *The mail was delivered by a male*   * Highlight pairs of homophones, such as meet/meat, and ask identifying questions like *“Which is the meat that you eat?”* |
| **Homographs** | Words that are spelt the same but sound different   (have a different meaning) | * tear (drop) vs.   tear (the paper) | * Point out homographs as they appear during reading and writing sessions. * Model the correct pronunciation of homographs using exemplar sentences:   e.g. *I object your honour!*(verb)*vs.*  *This is a round object*(noun)  *I looked for all the minute detail*(adjective) *vs.*  *I checked my watch every minute*(noun)   * Encourage students to keep an ongoing list of homographs in their personal dictionary. |
| **Homonyms** | Words with multiple meanings, that are spelt and sound the same | * bear (animal) vs.   bear (withstand) * bank (of river) vs.   bank (of finance) | * Highlight homonyms as they appear during reading and writing sessions, encourage students to add them to their personal dictionary * Homonym Charades: On slips of paper, write the homonyms that have been targeted in class (e.g. bark, ring, bat, letter). Put the words in a box or hat and have a student volunteer pick one and act it out. * Ambiguous Sentences: Find sentences that have an ambigous meaning because of a homonym, and discuss the possible meanings.   e.g. *We saw her duck.*   1. We looked at a duck that belonged to her 2. We looked at her quickly squat down to avoid something.   e.g.*I need to find my match*   1. I need a match to light a candle/fire 2. I need to find someone to be my partner |

**The table below provides a matrix of pronunciation and spelling, and where homophones, homographs, and homonyms fit in.**

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| *WORDS WITH DIFFERENT MEANINGS* | *Same Pronunciation* | *Different Pronunciation* |
| *Same Spelling* | **Homonyms**   * bear (animal) vs. bear (withstand) * bank (of river) vs. bank (of finance) | **Homographs**   * tear (drop) vs. tear (the paper) * bow (tie) vs. bow (to the Queen) |
| *Different Spelling* | **Homophones**   * two vs. two vs. too * pair vs. pear * bare vs. bear * be vs. bee * jeans vs. genes * laps vs. lapse * vain vs. vein |  |