Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)
CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication
Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, 2016
ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4
Section: Language and Discourse

THE PERSONAL GLOSSARY – AN ESP VOCABULARY LEARNING INSTRUMENT FOCUSED ON PROMOTING LEARNER AUTONOMY

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Abstract: The present paper presents an ESP vocabulary learning instrument emerged from a larger research project developed at "Mircea cel Batran" Naval Academy. The key novelty element rests precisely in the co-constructed nature of such a learning tool. What it means is that each page of the glossary is pre-defined in format to ensure that the student covers all the possible aspects of vocabulary knowledge. Thus, the personal glossary includes pre-defined spaces (fields) for a variety of information about the target word such as: short definition(s), L1 translation, symbols, acronyms, formulae, simple drawings, synonyms, antonyms, pictures, contexts in which the word is used with some example sentences, lexical families and collocations, online links to supplementary information (videos, factsheets, etc.) The co-constructed nature of the glossary means that the students will have to fill-in more that 80% of the pre-defined fields with information received in the classroom or obtained through individual research. In this way, students develop learning strategies, which are bound to serve them well on the long-term in their future learning endeavors.

Keywords: : learner autonomy, ESP vocabulary, glossary

1. The context

The authors of this paper wish to report herein on one vocabulary learning tool which was designed and piloted within the research project "Contextualizing Naval Lexical Content: A Research into the Ways and Means of Facilitating the Acquisition of Specialized Terminology by Naval Students" conducted at "Mircea cel Batran" Naval Academy, Constanta, between 2015 and 2016.

The purpose of the project was to investigate the most efficient means and methods of teaching specialized English vocabulary to our Naval Academy students by designing and piloting a set of teaching materials which contextualized the target specialized terminology and facilitated the students' lexical acquisition and productive use in professional communicative contexts. The conducted research was expected to offer insights into the overall material design, the input format, the teaching methods and approaches, the types of language tasks and assignments that could be proven to enhance vocabulary acquisition and have an overall positive influence on the language learning process.

The envisaged utility of this scientific undertaking was that the findings and the conclusions drawn at the end of the research period could be utilized later on as the methodological and structural principles on which to design a complete set of ready-made supplementary teaching materials. These would be focused on teaching specialized vocabulary and would complement the existent lecture notes and the practical materials currently in use.

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The research steps included conducting a needs analysis in the current teaching and learning context, devising the surveying instruments (questionnaires, interview forms, feedback forms etc.), devising and piloting a set of teaching materials, interpreting the feedback data and drawing conclusions in view to utilizing them for later practical use.

The underlying research assumption of our project is that effective communication in English, either for general or professional purposes, cannot occur in the absence of a substantial and wide lexical range. This becomes even more poignant in an ESP context such as the one at the Naval Academy for two reasons: 1. English is *the global operational language at sea*, *the lingua franca* bringing together seafarers from across the globe. In today's globalized 21st century world, seafaring is performed by multinational, multilingual and multicultural crews who need to communicate correctly, clearly and efficiently in order to perform professional tasks and avoid mishaps, breakdowns, material damage and human casualties. 2. English is *the language of global defense.* It is the official language of NATO and the main channel of communication for the 28 member nations who work together to provide security against today's ever-growing global threats.

In order to respond to the need for training in the acquisition and productive use of specialized English, the project team designed and piloted a set of teaching materials, which were based on the principles listed below:

a. The integrated teaching of specialized vocabulary. ESP courses are not limited to the teaching of a set of specialized terms and concepts. On the contrary, vocabulary is taught as an inalienable component of an integrated network of language knowledge and skills because there can be no ESP communicative competence in the absence of general English competence.

b. Contextual input in English depicting the Romanian (L1) professional reality introduced in the presentation phase of the lesson. One key novelty element of the designed teaching materials is the use of adapted textual/video/audio input that contextualizes our learners' L1 professional linguistic reality right from the very presentation stage of the lesson *as a means of introducing target vocabulary*. The purpose is to equip the students with the lexical tools that would help them to express their own professional reality in English more easily and confidently. We have anticipated that the motivational value of adding such an input at the presentation stage of the lesson might be significant as students would discover early on in the lesson that *the materials speak to them and about them* and thus, they would be likely to respond more positively and constructively to them.

c. The ultimate goal is to enable learners to become professionals with solid language skills in their prospective occupational settings. Therefore, the materials aim at ensuring the students' ability to function adequately from a communicative standpoint in their target professional settings while using specialized terminology. This translates into an emphasis on communicative (productive) tasks, which allow the students to use actively the acquired vocabulary in contexts reflecting the real-life professional dimension.

d. Our learners need to develop their general language skills in addition to acquiring specialized terminology to be capable of pursuing their academic and professional development even after they have graduated from the Naval Academy. For instance, they will use their language skills and knowledge to attend in-service professional training events, to participate in conferences and specialty courses, to deliver speeches (e.g. briefings), to participate in planning meetings, etc, to write reports on professional issues, to write professional correspondence, to read and comprehend technical information, etc.

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e. It is important that our learners be taught not only the language *per se* but, even more importantly, those transversal key learning competences that sustain their life-long learning process. *Turning our learners into users* (Carter, 1987: 134) means deliberately making an effort to develop their learning autonomy and encourage them to become responsible for their own learning. The project team has envisaged the explicit teaching of learning strategies that could be individually applied even outside the language classroom and long after the instructional process has ended.

All these principles are reflected in the characteristics of the designed teaching materials. The set comprises the following components:

1. course book unit (paper-based) - contextualizing the target lexical items in reading and listening texts and facilitating the productive use of the target vocabulary through speaking and writing tasks. General English communicative language skills are also developed in dedicated sections with the help of tasks targeting language functions such as describing, narrating, giving directions, etc. The overall teaching process is student-centered, based on a collaborative learning approach while the format of the input is varied (text, pictorial graphical, audio, video) so as to ensure multiple exposures and facilitate better lexical retention.

2. student personal glossary - a separate paper-based learning instrument, aimed at helping students to develop autonomous learning skills. Since the glossary is the target of the present paper, it will be discussed in detail in a dedicated section.

3. the online component – the webquest – we have used *a blended-learning approach to teaching and learning* which means that we have also created *an online follow-up resource* that complements the course book materials and corresponds topically to each unit in the course book. Generally speaking, webquests, which are basically lessons built around online, mostly authentic, materials, allow students to work individually or in groups in order to perform tasks in group projects or simply do further individual research on the topics discussed in the course book. In our case, the online digital input is particularly relevant to the specificity of our ESP courses because it provides real-life, accurate and up-to-date input from the students' professional fields of interest, thus boosting their motivation and arousing their interest.

2. Teaching and learning ESP vocabulary: the various aspects of comprehending and using a lexical item

One of the key questions to be kept in mind when setting out to teach/learn vocabulary is: *What does it mean to know a word*? According to Scott Thornbury "at the most basic level, knowing a word involves knowing its **form** and its **meaning**." (Thornbury, 2007:15, author's emphasis) He goes on to explain that knowing a word includes knowing its grammatical function (i.e. a noun, a verb, both, etc.), its dictionary meaning(s) and the words commonly associated with it (i.e. collocations), connotations, register, etc. Thornbury also differentiates between *receptive* knowledge of the word and *productive* knowledge of the word. He points out that "receptive knowledge exceeds productive knowledge and generally- but not always- precedes it. (…) we understand more words than we utter, and we usually understand them *before* we are capable of uttering them." (Thornbury, 2007:15) One can easily make the logical connection between this sequence of learning and the typical sequence of the lesson stages starting with *the presentation stage* (leading to receptive knowledge), through *the practice phase* (moving from receptive to productive knowledge) and ending with *the production phase* (focused on productive use of knowledge).

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When discussing the way human mind stores and activates lexical content, Thornbury explains that words are acquired and arranged in our minds in a nonlinear, network-like pattern. He calls this network a "the mental lexicon" (Thornbury, 2007:16) Figure 1 below is an adaptation of the visual representation of Thornbury's mental lexicon in the form of a diagram. We have chosen to use a general English term with a high-frequency in Maritime English, namely "safety", to demonstrate how Thornbury's theory can be put into practice in an ESP (maritime) context such as ours. Thornbury describes the mental lexicon as "an overlapping system in which words are stored as 'double entries' – one entry containing information about meaning and the other about form. These individual word entries are linked to words that share similar characteristics, whether of meaning or of form – or both." (Thornbury, 2007:17) The point is that when we search for a word, several pathways across this network will be taken simultaneously, which is actually the basic justification for teaching vocabulary using a large variety of tasks and materials that target not only the form, but also the meaning. In this way, we facilitate the double storage and multiple activations upon each word usage instance.

Other kinds of knowledge entailed in the activation of a known word are world knowledge and personal experiences. These represent the context in which learners encounter a word and relate to it on an affective level. Thornbury concludes that "knowing a word, then, is the sum total of all these connections – semantic, syntactic, phonological, orthographic, morphological, cognitive, cultural and autobiographical" (Thornbury, 2007:17).

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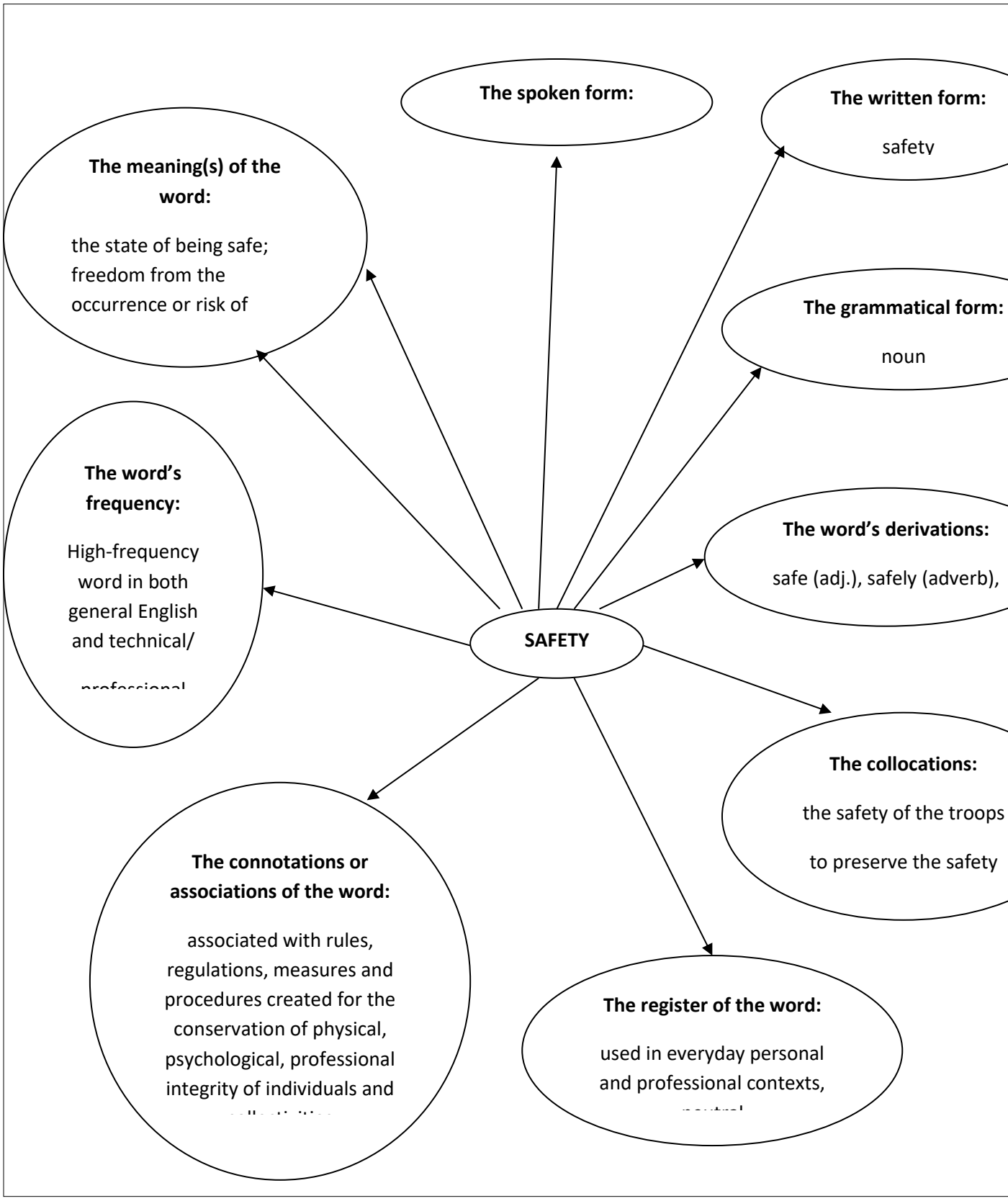


Figure 1 Diagram for the word "safety", adapted (Thornbury, 2007: 16)

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In his 1998 article "Helping Learners Take Control of Their Vocabulary Learning" Paul Nation, a leading theorist of vocabulary acquisition, explicitly includes "*use"* to the two aspects (*meaning* and *form*) as discussed by Thornbury. Nation also distinguishes between R (receptive) knowledge of the word and P (productive) knowledge of the word as seen in column 3 of the table in Figure 2.

Form	spoken	R	What does the word sound like?
		P	How is the word pronounced?
	written	R	What does the word look like?
		P	How is the word written and spelled?
	word parts	R	What parts are recognizable in this word?
		P	What word parts are needed to express the meaning?
Meaning	referents	R	What does the word refer to?
		P	What word can refer to this?
	underlying concepts	R	What does this word mean?
		P	What word can express this meaning?
	associations	R	What other words does this make us think of?
		P	What other words could we use instead of this one?
Use	grammatical functions	R	In what patters does the word occur?
		P	In what patterns must we use this word?
	collocations	R	What words or types of words occur with this one?
		P	What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	constrains on use (register, frequency…)	R	Where, when and how often would we expect to meet this word?
		P	Where and when can we use this word?

Figure 2 "What is involved in knowing a word" (Nation, 1998: 11)

As it can be seen above, Nation clarifies the three key aspects of a lexical item (*form*, *meaning* and *use*) by asking illustrative questions for each. These questions are instrumental in designing a variety materials, activities and tasks that are used to facilitate the acquisition of the word. They are also a useful tool for learners who can thus systematize their individual approach to learning vocabulary by trying to answer them whenever they encounter and deal with a new word.

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3. The personal glossary: a sample page

The rationale behind including Paul Nation's chart (Figure 2) together with Thornbury's mental lexicon diagram (Figure 1 above) in the present paper is that they both represent the theoretical basis for an essential component of the designed teaching materials investigated within our research project, namely the *personal glossary*.

The personal glossary is a paper-based companion of the course book unit in that it focuses on the target lexical items first presented and practiced in the course book unit. The glossary entries are not alphabetically organized but rather topically as they correspond to each lesson in the course book unit. More precisely, each glossary page is dedicated to one lexical item and includes pre-defined spaces (fields) for a variety of information about the target word such as: short definition(s), L1 translation, symbols, acronyms, formulae, simple drawings, synonyms, antonyms, pictures, contexts in which the word is used with some example sentences, lexical families and collocations, online links to supplementary information (videos, factsheets, etc.).

Depending on the specific features of each lexical item, the design team has made a substantial and relevant selection of info fields, from all the possible entries listed above, in order to create individual glossary pages. Consequently, format variations only occur in the case of lexical content naturally lacking elements such as acronyms, formulae, symbols, etc. Nevertheless, a high degree of standardization can be achieved with the help of such essential features as definitions, L1 translations, collocations, lexical families, and visual input. The glossary is by no means intended as an exhaustive vocabulary reference source, it is in fact only meant to support our learners in committing key course book lexical items to the long-term memory in a non-linear, network-like manner (inspired by Scott Thornbury's mental lexicon proposition). A sample page has been included in Annex 1.

We have insisted on including (whenever possible) visual input of any kind (picture, diagram, symbol, etc.) since, according to Thornbury, "easily visualized words are more memorable than words that don't immediately evoke a picture. (…) even for abstract words – it might help if learners associate them with some mental image" (Thornbury, 2007:25).This is especially poignant for our ESP learners of naval terminology because they already posses a visual mental database of such terms in L1 and associating them with naval terminology in L2 will be conducive to better retention of the latter.

The reason why each page of the glossary is pre-defined in format is to ensure that the students are *compelled* to cover as many aspects of vocabulary knowledge as possible. Our view is that pre-defined fields, which need to be completed by the students, help them become more aware of the intricate web of knowledge surrounding a lexical item. For instance, if students have to write down the word family for the lexical item "safety" they are likely to acquire more than just the single word "safety". The idea is supported by Norbert Schmitt who suggests that "we can also maximize vocabulary learning by teaching word families instead of individual word forms. Teachers can make it a habit when introducing a new word to mention the other members of its word family. In this way, learners form the habit of considering a word's derivations as a matter of course." (Schmitt, 2000: 148). The collocations field has been introduced for the same purpose. From our experience, students generally manifest a tendency of putting down just minimal L1 translations with the unfortunate result of a superficial/incorrect understanding of how the word actually behaves in the language.

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The personal glossary reflects several principles of vocabulary acquisition and productive use as detailed by Scott Thornbury. One of principles that Thorbury mentions is *repetition*, nevertheless, what he is actually referring to is "*the repetition of encounters with a word*" (Thornbury, 2007:24, emphasis ours) not the memorizing through rehearsal. He points out that "when reading, words stand a good chance of being remembered if they have been met *at least seven times* over spaced intervals." (Thornbury, 2007:24, emphasis ours) In other words, to enhance the acquisition process of the target vocabulary, students need to be repeatedly exposed to the items studied. In our case, after the students have been introduced to the target lexical items and have practiced with them in class, they are offered yet another chance to interact with the lesson key vocabulary by working on their personal glossary. This brings us to another aspect of the vocabulary learning process, namely "affective depth" (Thornbury, 2007:26). When students conduct research and fill in their glossary pages, they filter information through their own schemata, personal values and beliefs. Thus, the affective response created in the process is a strong motivational factor and a booster of long-term lexical internalization and retention.

The benefits of such a vocabulary-learning tool are multifold. Its *co-constructed* nature prompts students to take control of their own learning process and consequently, develop lifelong learning strategies and skills. The tool can be used in the classroom alongside course book materials and can, therefore, function as a student notebook with the bias that it is exclusively focused on vocabulary. The glossary can also be used outside the classroom, for individual research (the teacher can assign a number of pages to be worked on as homework). What is more, while constituting a lexical repository for the content learned during the classroom, the personal glossary can also be employed as an excellent instrument for revising in view to exams.

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