Teaching Vocabulary: It's only words
Robert McLarty

On May 20th OUP invited ELTAS members to listen to two well-known Business English authors.

The aim of the first speaker, Robert McLarty, was to "show teachers how to activate students' passive vocabulary and expand it."

He started out his lively talk by briefly showing us a list of words and asking us to remember them and how we did it. Some of us made up stories; others put the words into pairs.

The first question we need to ask ourselves is:

1. What do I need to know about a word or expression?

Say it	Analyse it
Recognise it	Link it
Spell it	Use it
Understand it	Rephrase it
Classify it	Judge it

Judging it means "how relevant is it to your learners' business needs?"
I usually ask my students to decide whether that particular word is useful for them and whether they want to record it.

Robert continued his presentation with a number of slides interspersed with high-paced and energising pair work activities.

2. How do I teach vocabulary?

Pre-teaching	Synonyms
Activating	Collocates
Showing	Associations
Contextualising	Word building
Modelling	Opposites
Drilling	Register
Add words	False friends

"Bad pronunciation and bad grammar are tolerated but not knowing a word isn't." He told us.

3. Put it in a set

Finance
HR
Security

Quality
Legal

4. Put it on a scale

Adore
Love
Be a big fan of
Be really into

Be fond of
Like
Quite like
Not mind

5. Vocabulary skills

Deduce from context
Define
Translate

Record

Drawing on nearly 40 years' experience, Robert is convinced that the most important task for our students is to record new words

6. How can I test vocabulary?

Match definition/phonemic
script/translation
Word-building
Write definition
Find synonyms/antonyms
Dictation

Gap fill /Cloze test
Games
Vocabulary bag
Flash cards
Activate

I love the idea of a vocabulary bag or box. Students are asked to decide which word they want to remember. They then write it on a piece of paper and put it in a bag (box). As you can imagine, there are many ways to use the bag in class.

7. Recording vocabulary

A sentence
A translation
A synonym
A visualisation
Mind map

Cards
Audio notes
Lists
Associated words/collocations/false
friends

8. How can we practise vocabulary?

Anagrams
Memory tests
Images

Associated words
Apps

Finally, Robert introduced us the new "Oxford English Vocabulary Trainer" app.

It supports learning of key words from well-known Oxford English textbooks including English File, Headway, Navigate, and many others. It also provides content packs to help improve general English vocabulary, including packs for the Academic Word, Business Keywords, Essential Vocabulary, and more.

The app makes use of spaced repetition: words are practised at the point when the

learner is likely to forget them. This reinforces learning and helps to put words into long-term memory. The app is free to download and the first unit of Business Result is available to try and is free to use. The price then varies depending on the amount of content one wants to download.

In conclusion, I could have done with fewer pair work activities and spent a little more time exploring the app. Robert's talk was very informative yet succinct and I especially liked his use of (self-deprecating) humour.

A big thankyou to Robert McLarty and Robert Plant from OUP.