

### **Why is English Confusing to Rural Learners?**

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**“Words are pegs to hang ideas on”. H. W. Beecher.**

**Abstract:**

Any language is made up of words, and having a large vocabulary is necessary for the proper expression of thoughts in written and spoken form. No communication is possible without the use of meaningful language. This is because it is intended for the communication of concepts and ideas, which are implemented in words. Vocabulary holds an important place in teaching and learning. According to Robert Lado, reading requires a vocabulary of 7000 words. Vocabulary means the words used by a person in his daily life to express his feelings. If language structures make up the skeleton of a language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and flesh. Words in English may be divided into two broad categories such as structure words and content words. This paper focuses on teaching vocabulary in context to the rural learners.

**Keywords:** Vernacular, homonyms, synonyms, homographs, polysemous.

**Introduction:**

Vocabulary is one of the most important components of English language teaching. However, for rural students who have studied in the vernacular medium, building a strong vocabulary and speaking English fluently is often very challenging. Compared to English-medium students, rural students face greater difficulties in understanding and using English correctly.

Words cannot be learnt in isolation. Unfortunately in the present scenario, teaching vocabulary focuses on isolated lexical items. Usually, words get their meanings from the context in which they are used. That is how they should be taught and tested. The same word may have different meanings in different contexts. A rich vocabulary must be regarded as an important component of English language teaching, but this can happen only if we encourage the learners to guess the meanings of the words from the contexts in which they are used.

Expressions like ‘look out for’ and ‘hand over’ are interesting to teach, as the phrase ‘look out’ does not mean to look; it means to search. In the same way, students can guess the meanings of ‘handover’; if we teach different words in different context it is easy to make use of them in their daily conversations. To have a better hold over vocabulary, learners can be asked to give one word substitutes. Learning of vocabulary is not always a difficult process if it is in a context. Lack of word power in English, which accounts for the learners' dependence on the study materials of their syllabus.

According to Wallace ‘if vocabulary is learnt in context, there is a possibility for them to retrieve later’ (Wallace 51). Usually, a second language learner doesn't learn the vocabulary in context. Not being able to find the right word to express oneself leads to a frustrating experience for a speaker of another language. Harmer says, “the teaching .....means teaching of the language as it is used in real life”. The dearth of vocabulary in the students poses many problems; to overcome this, new words should be taught in context.

Little Wood says that “language learning pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language learning”. Usually, the ESL and EFL learners learn vocabulary in isolation. Often we find learner's notebooks filled with new words and their meanings. Learners note down new words that they come across while learning. Gradually, their interest disappears, so they tend to forget to show interest. In many cases, they don't even put any effort into recalling these new words later, but we get lost in some other work.

There are two basic divisions of words: content words and structure words. Content words are nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and in structural words, prepositions and articles are included. C.K Ogden and I. A Richards devised ‘Basic English’, according to them, anything can be expressed in English by using 850 content words. Words give meaning with certainty when used in a context. Sometimes words can denote several things. As the students improve, it is better to introduce straight words that have a wide range of denotative meaning in various contexts. Experts say that Michel West's General Service List is sufficient for the learners to speak English fluently. Especially the learners from the different rural areas have a fear of the English language. This is because they are first-generation learners. Many times, their parents are illiterate they don't have any access to other books, other than the textbooks. Hence, we, the teachers, have to extend a hand-holding support for them and help them to face the real life situations with confidence. Here are some examples ;

1. a) The dog ‘barks’ at strangers.
- b) The neem bark is used as medicine.

‘The dog barks at strangers’ – in this sentence, ‘bark’ refers to an action that the dog does when it looks at strangers. In the next sentence, the neem bark is used as

medicine; it is the outer layer of the tree. So ‘bark’ has the same spelling but conveys different meanings in different contexts.

2. a) We met the bank officer for a loan.

b) We went to the riverbank to relax.

In the first sentence, ‘we met the bank officer for a loan’, here it refers to an organisation where we take money or deposit money. In the second sentence, ‘we went to the river bank to relax’, here it refers to the river bank; it is a relaxing place.

3. a) It is an honour to have a bat signed by Dhoni.

b) A bat is a nocturnal mammal.

‘It is an honour to have a bat signed by Dhoni.’ In this sentence, it is a bat which is used to play cricket, and in the next sentence, ‘bat’ is a nocturnal mammal, which lives in dark caves.

4. a) Chinese bow to greet.

b) Bow elevates the suit of the bridegroom.

‘Chinese bow to greet’ – here it is an action to greet people; they bend their bodies. In the next sentence, ‘Bow elevates the suit of the bridegroom’, here it is a piece of cloth that is attached to a suit.

5. a) I have to pay the fine because I had violated the traffic rules.

b) He said that he is fine.

‘I have to pay the fine because I had violated the traffic rules’ –here in the sentence, fine is literally paying some money because he has violated the rules. In the next sentence, he said that he is fine – it means that he is okay.

6. a) The leader is supposed to lead.

b) Lead is a metal used in making batteries.

The leader is supposed to lead – it means to guide some people. In the next sentence, lead is a metal used to prepare batteries, in the next sentence, it is a metal.

7. a) I am a big fan of Abdul Kalam.

b) Due to a power cut, the fan is not functioning.

I am a big fan of Dr Abdul Kalam, here ‘fan’ refers to admiring a person. In the next sentence, ‘due to a power cut, the fan is not functioning’ – here literally it is an instrument that helps to blow air.

8. a) Many people gathered to watch the match.

b) I need a match to light a lamp.

‘Many people gathered to watch the match’ – it may be a cricket match or a football match. In the next sentence, I need a match to light the lamp – here it is literally the matchstick which we use.

9. a) He said I am well.

b) The cat jumped into the well.

He said that 'I am well' – here in this sentence, 'well' refers to his state of condition. In the next sentence, the cat jumped into the well – in this sentence, it is literally a place where we have water.

10. a) I love the spring season.

b) In some places, hot water springs are medicated.

I love the spring season – here, spring refers to a season when we find all the trees blossoming. In the next sentence, in some places hot water springs are medicated – here the spring refers to the water oozing out from the ground level, it has two meanings.

11. a) A lieutenant came to our college to train the NCC cadets.

b) He missed the train.

A lieutenant came to our college trains our NCC cadets – here 'train' means providing some training to them. In the next sentence, he missed the train – it literally means the train that we use to travel.

12. a) We went to the park to play.

b) We are not supposed to park the car here.

'We went to a park to play' – here it refers to a garden. In the next sentence, we are not supposed to park the car here, in this sentence, park means not to stop in that place.

13. a) The sun rose bright in the east.

b) Rose is a colourful flower with fragrance.

The sun rose bright in the east – here, rose is the past tense of rise. In the next sentence, 'rose' is a beautiful flower with fragrance – here it refers to a flower.

14. a) This fly is very distracting.

b) The aeroplane cannot fly if the weather is not suitable.

This fly is very distracting me – here the 'fly' refers to an insect. In the next sentence, the aeroplane can't fly if the weather is not suitable, it is an action where it flies into the sky.

15. a) Just now I have received a letter from my father.

b) There are twenty-six letters in the English language.

'Just now I have received a letter from my father' – here 'letter' refers to the envelope which is written or sent by somebody. In the next sentence, there are twenty-six letters in the English language – here the 'letter' refers to the alphabets.

16. a) I asked for the principal's seal to get our bus pass.

b) Seal is a water creature.

‘I asked for the seal of the principal to get our bus pass’ – here in this sentence, seal is literally the stamp which we use to attest. In the next sentence, ‘seal’ is a water creature which refers to an animal that lives in water.

17. a) Nikhila gets irritated by the second’s needle.

b) I got second prize in the competition.

Nikhila gets irritated by the second's needle – here, seconds means the needle that is present in the watch indicating seconds. In the next sentence, ‘I got second prize in the competition’ usually we get first and second prizes in any competition; it refers to the order of the prize.

18. a) When the stranger asked for directions, I told him to take the left.

b) When I reached the station, the train had already left.

‘When a stranger asked for the direction, I told him to take left’ – here ‘left’ is showing some direction. In the next sentence, when I reached the station, the train had already left – it means it had departed; here it conveys two different meanings.

19. a) Teachers are there to direct the students on what is right or wrong.

b) A passenger directed me to take the right side to reach the post office.

‘Teachers are there to direct the students on what is right and wrong’ – here, in this sentence, it is something that is guiding what is correct. In the second sentence, ‘the passenger directed me to take the right side to reach the post office’ – here, in the sentence, it is the direction that he received.

20. a) Water changes its state to evaporate.

b) We belong to the Andhra Pradesh state.

‘Water changes its state to evaporate’ – here state refers to the condition of the water. In the next sentence, ‘we belong to Andhra Pradesh state’ – here it conveys another meaning.

21. a) A bear is a wild animal that lives in a forest.

b) My neighbour left his child with me today; he is very talkative. I have to bear him today.

‘A Bear is a wild animal which lives in the forest’ – here, ‘bear’ means a wild animal. In the next sentence, my neighbour left the child with me; I have to bear him till the evening – here it refers to tolerate.

22. a) The coin we throw into the river sinks.

b) The sink is not clean.

‘The coin we throw into the river sinks’ – here, sinking means it goes down into the water. In the next sentence, ‘the sink is not clean’ – it refers to the place where we clean our utensils.

23. a) Raju is a kind person.

b) There are many kinds of pollution.

‘Raju is a kind person’ – it refers to his personality. In another sentence, ‘there are many kinds of pollution’ – and it refers to the variety.

24. a) The feather is very light.

b) I asked him to turn on the light.

‘The feather is very light’ – in this sentence, it refers to the weight. In the next sentence, ‘I asked him to turn on the light’ – here it refers to the tube light.

25. a) Her nails are very sharp.

b) With the help of the nail, he hung the portrait.

‘Her nails are very sharp’ – in the sentence ‘nails’ literally means the extended part of the fingers. In the next sentence, ‘with the help of the nail, he hung the portrait’ – here it is the iron metal which we use to hang the portrait.

26. a) The watch is not working because the battery is exhausted.

b) My teacher asked me to keep a watch on Ravi.

‘The watch is not working because the battery is exhausted’ – here in the sentence watch is the instrument that we use to know the time. In the next sentence, my teacher asked me to keep a watch on Ravi – here, in this sentence, watch means to observe.

27. a) The tie adds elegance to the suit.

b) The match was a tie.

‘The tie adds elegance to the suit’ – here tie means a small piece of cloth that is added to the suit. In the next sentence, ‘the match was a tie’ – it means both parties have secured the same score since it was declared as a tie.

28. a) The bridegroom presented a ring to the bride.

b) The circus man brought the tiger into the ring.

‘The bridegroom presented a ring to the bride’ – here, in the sentence, ‘ring’ means the ornament which we present on the occasion of marriage. In the next sentence, the circus man brought the tiger into the ring – here, in this sentence ring means it is a particular place where the circus man brings the animal to perform the tricks.

29. a) I felt too tired to row the boat in the river.

b) The teacher asked the students to stand in a row.

I felt too tired to row the boat in the river – here ‘row’ means literally using a small wooden piece to move the boat. The teacher asked the students to stand in a row – here in this sentence, the teacher is instructing the students to stand in a line.

30. a) The detective was stalking him unnoticed.

b) I used scissors to cut the stalk of the flower (the green part below the flowers).

The detective was stalking him – here ‘stalking’ means observing without getting noticed. In the next sentence, I used scissors to cut the stalk of the flower – here, stalk means the extended part below the flowers.

31. a) He said you are too mean.

b) He said that he didn’t mean it.

He said you are too mean – it means you are very cruel. In the next sentence, they said that he didn’t mean it – here mean indicates opinion.

32. a) My knowledge of physics is a single drop in an ocean.

b) A bomb was dropped in Japan.

‘My physics knowledge is a single drop in an ocean’ – in this sentence drop means very minute. In the next sentence, a bomb was dropped in Japan – it means they have thrown a bomb.

33. a) We bought a present to give her.

b) Everyone should live in the present but not ponder over the past.

We bought a present to give her – here, present means the gift which we are going to give her. In the next sentence, everyone should live in the present but not ponder over the past – it means the current time.

34. a) He went to the bar to have hot beverages.

b) The lawyer went to the bar to argue a case.

He went to the bar to have hot beverages – here the bar refers to the place where drinks are served. In the next sentence, the lawyer went to the bar to argue the case – in this sentence, the ‘bar’ refers to the place where the arguments take place, or it is the court.

35. a) He has filed a case against him.

b) I have kept the bottles in the case safely.

‘He has filed a case against him’ – here the ‘case’ refers to the case which they have filed in the court. In the next one, ‘I have kept the bottles in the case safely’ – here, the case is something that holds the bottles.

36. a) The box is too heavy to carry.

b) Raju left the place with a heavy heart.

‘The box is too heavy to carry’ – here, heavy refers to the weight. In the next sentence, Raju left the place with a heavy heart – here ‘heavy’ is referring to the emotion.

37. a) We are going to lodge a complaint.

b) We are staying in a lodge at present.

‘We are going to lodge a complaint’ – here lodge refers to filing a complaint. In the next sentence, we are staying in a lodge – it means a place where we take temporary shelter.

38. a) The train always moves on the track.

b) I have to track my online order.

The train always moves on the track – here the track refers to the railway line. In the next sentence, I have to track my online order – it means we are watching where our order has reached.

**Same is different:**

- **The bandage was wound around the wound.**

Here in the sentence, wound has two different meanings: the first wound means to wrap or to coil something around a wound (action word); the second wound is a noun, which is an injury or a cut on the body. This sentence highlights how context and pronunciation are key to understanding English.

- **The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.**

In the sentence, the dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse – here the first refuse is used as a verb, which means decline and the second refuse is used as a noun, which means the garbage.

- **The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.**

The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert – in this sentence, it is used as a clever pun; the first desert is a verb which means to abandon, the second dessert means sweet food, and the last desert is a noun which is a dry land.

- **When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.**

When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes – here in this sentence, when shot at, the dove ran into the bushes; the first dove means the bird, and the second dove means the past tense of dive, which is used to form an action.

- **The insurance was invalid for the invalid.**

The insurance was invalid for the invalid – in the sentence, which means an insurance policy was declared invalid; it means null and void due to the policy holder's actions, maybe misrepresentations; the insurance wasn't valid for this particular situation.

- **They were too close to the door to close it.**

The first close means they are very near to each other, and the second close means that it is used as a verb; it is something like shutting the door.

- **There is no time like the present to present the present.**

The last sentence, there is no time like the present to present the present – here in this sentence, the first present is referring to the current time, and the second one is the gift which we give to others. So in this way, English is always tricky, which confuses rural learners.

### **Conclusion :**

English can be tough for rural Telugu-medium students because many words look or sound the same but mean different things (homonyms and polysemous words). The examples in this paper show clearly that the right meaning comes only from the sentence around the word, not from the word alone.

Learning words in long, boring lists usually leads to forgetting. But when words appear inside real sentences, short stories, or everyday phrases, students understand them better, remember them longer, and feel more confident to speak. Learners in lower classes are often first-generation learners with little exposure to English. Context-based teaching method is simple and powerful. Teachers can use everyday words like *bark, bank, fine, lead, present, ring*, to show how the words have different meanings in different context.

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