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Suggestions for vocabulary building I: working with word fields and expanded language tools

Goal

For many students in the migration, the vocabulary in the mother-tongue is very much limited to informal, family-related aspects and dialect. The challenge, therefore, for heritage language education, is to build and develop the vocabulary competence of students and adolescents (to also include school-related and differentiated facets) in the standard form. In so doing, it is important to decide which words and phrases the students should actively master (active or productive vocabulary) and the vocabulary which they should be able to understand but not necessarily use themselves (receptive or understanding vocabulary). The former must be practiced intensively, whereas it suffices if the latter is understood. The following suggestions and exercises support vocabulary building and working with expanded tools for this purpose on various levels.

1. Working with topic-based vocabulary and word fields

1st – 9th grade

20 minutes

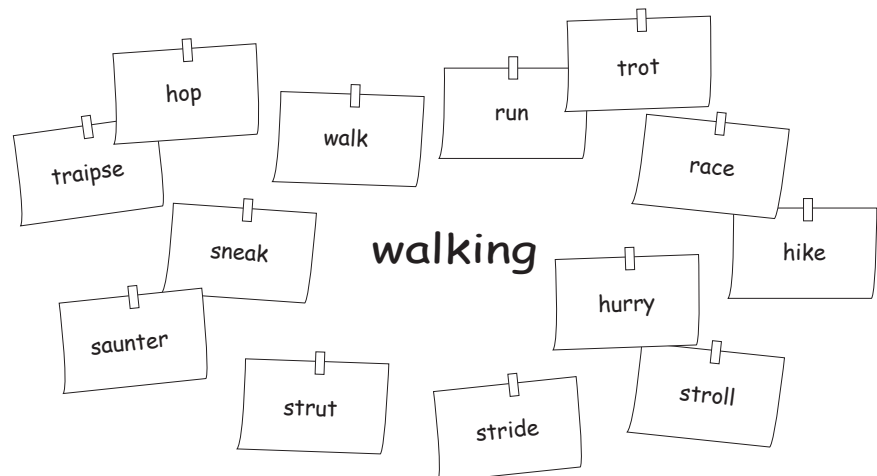


Materials:
Possibly A2 paper
and small post-it stickers.

Collecting and writing down words concerning a theme or topic is a good method for utilizing the collective knowledge and resources of students and instructors. The process is appropriate for all age groups and for different methods. It offers the ideal opportunity for highlighting and explaining the differences in vocabulary between dialect and standard/written form. The most commonly used words in conjunction with a theme can also be used for spelling exercises and improvement. A further stage in this development would involve collecting other language tools, such as sentence beginnings or text-specific phrases (see also #15).

Important: If students know a word only in the school language, but not in the mother-tongue, they may naturally say or write it down in this form. This provides an authentic learning opportunity to involve other students for help with the translation, or to consult a dictionary.

Example:



- **Vocabulary collections (“What I know already”)**
(kindergarten and above):

Under the guidance of the instructor, the students collect and record all the words they know in their mother tongue for topics like animals, plants, homes, school, etc. The instructor provides the correct standard form of the word and/or writes the most important words on the board. It is important to include not just nouns, but also verbs and adjectives.

Extension activity: a) using these words, create short sentences, and possibly write them down. b) write a text comprising at least 5 or more words from this collection. Mark the words in red (this is a variation of the skeleton stories in #4).

- **Word collections related to a picture**

(kindergarten – upper level):

As a starting point, the picture must have many details. It could relate to a theme which is currently dealt with in class, i. e. a poster about the country of origin or a picture of a playground. For middle and advanced levels, it could involve a picture or photograph which requires specific vocabulary. As a class or in groups, the students describe the picture (using nouns, verbs, adjectives), writing them on post-it strips which are attached to the picture or board. Variant: first, students label and write down individually what they know, and then compare and exchange their labels with others. In order to assimilate the new terms, a writing assignment should follow. Example: describe the picture in as much detail as possible/ write a story to accompany the picture/ put yourself into the role of someone in the picture and describe the picture from their perspective (“I am the woman in the yellow sweater. I am standing in the centre. Behind me is...”).

- **Word field connected to the topic of a writing assignment**

(middle – upper level):

When students have writing assignments with a clearly defined theme, such as “If I were a farmer”, “the political system of our country” etc.), it is a good idea to work previously (in class or in groups) and apply in practice the collected important vocabulary, phrases and expressions (nouns, verbs, adjectives) before they actually begin to write. This collection of relevant words and phrases for the topic also reduces the pressure on students in terms of content and orthography. Students can create and then compare these word fields individually, in pairs or groups. Clusters and mind-maps are ideal for this assignment. See #8.

2. Expanded language tools (sentence beginnings, text-specific phrases, etc.)

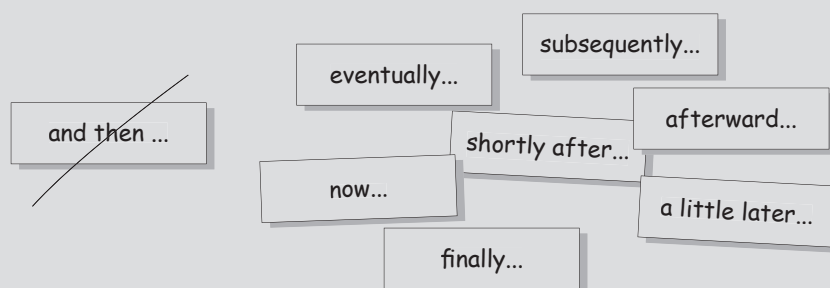
2nd–9th grade

20 minutes



The method of collecting with the students not only words, but also expanded language elements orally and in writing in preparation for certain writing assignments is a valuable contribution for the expansion of their expressive competence. The establishment of such a list is mainly known from speaking assignments (i. e. useful phrases for discussions) , but is equally useful in connection with writing tasks. The selection of language elements depends on the actual writing assignment, as seen in the following examples:

- Before reporting about an experience (vacation, trip, adventure, etc.): find various beginnings of sentences, in order to avoid the common overuse of “and then” ...:



Before writing the text, it is a good idea to orally practice concrete examples. In the writing assignments, students are then instructed to use at least three of the sentence beginnings from the list.