



VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES: RETENTION OF NEWLY-LEARNED VOCABULARY

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ABSTRACT Vocabulary learning is an essential one for ESL learners. The meanings of new words are very often accentuated, whether in books or in classrooms. It is also central to language teaching and is of paramount importance to a language learner. Recent research indicates that teaching vocabulary may be problematic because many teachers are not confident about best practice in vocabulary teaching. In this research paper, the strategies for retention of learned vocabulary are discussed and explained some techniques to retain ample of vocabulary when students acquire words from different sources.

KEYWORDS :

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1 The Definition of Vocabulary Vocabulary can be defined as " words we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)" (Neuman&Dwyer, 2009, p. 385). Hornby (1995) defines vocabulary as "the total number of International Journal of Teaching and Education Vol. III, No. 3 /2015 24 words in a language; vocabulary is a list of words with their meanings". While Ur (1998)states: "Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language. However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than just a single word: for example, post office, and mother-in-law, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea. A useful convention is to cover all such cases by talking about vocabulary "items"rather than "words."In addition, Burns (1972)defines vocabulary as" the stock of words which is used by a person, class or profession. According to Zimmerman cited in Coady and Huckin (1998)'vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learning. Furthermore, Diamond and Gutlohn (2006) in www.readingrockets.org/article state that vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings." From the definitions above, it can be concluded that vocabulary is the total number of words that are needed to communicate ideas and express the speakers' meaning. That is the reason why it is important to learn vocabulary.

1.2 Types of learning Vocabulary

Indirect vocabulary learning refers to students learning vocabulary when they hear and see words through conversations with adults, through being read to, and through reading on their own. Direct vocabulary learning refers to students learning vocabulary through explicit instruction in both individual words and word-learning strategies. Direct vocabulary instruction aids in reading comprehension. Two examples of direct vocabulary instruction include: specific word instruction and word learning instruction.

1.3 Common techniques of teaching vocabulary

Commonly, there are several techniques concerning the teaching of vocabulary. However, there are a few things that have to be remembered by most English teachers if they want to present a new vocabulary or lexical items to their students. It means that the English teachers want students to remember new vocabulary. Then, it needs to be learnt, practiced, and revised to prevent students from forgetting. Techniques employed by teachers depend on some factors, such as the content, time availability, and its value for the learners. This makes teachers have some reasons in employing certain strategies in presenting vocabulary. In presenting one planned vocabulary item, the teacher usually combined more than one technique, instead of employing one single technique. Teachers, furthermore, are suggested to employ planned vocabulary presentation as various as possible (Pinter, 2006).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The importance of learning vocabulary:

Vocabulary knowledge is often viewed as a critical tool for second language learners because a limited vocabulary in a second language

impedes successful communication. Underscoring the importance of vocabulary acquisition, Schmitt (2000) emphasizes that "lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language" p. 55) Nation (2001) further describes the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language use as complementary: knowledge of vocabulary enables language use and, conversely, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge. The importance of vocabulary is demonstrated daily in and out the school. In classroom, the achieving students possess the most sufficient vocabulary.

On the other hand, vocabulary has been acknowledged as L2 learners' greatest single source of problems (Meara, 1980). This remark may possibly reflect that the open-endedness of a vocabulary system is perceived to be a cause of difficulty by learners. Another possible reason is that, unlike syntax and phonology, vocabulary does not have rules the learners may follow to acquire and develop their knowledge. In other words, it is not clear in L2 vocabulary learning what rules apply or which vocabulary items should be learned first. Oxford (1990) also claims that vocabulary is "by far the most sizeable and unmanageable component in the learning of any language, whether a foreign or one's mother tongue, because of tens of thousands of different meanings" Despite these difficulties that language learners face in L2 vocabulary, they still have to deal with it in their examinations as "vocabulary has traditionally been one of the language components measured in language tests" (Schmitt, 1999, 189). Furthermore, many learners see second language acquisition (SLA) as essentially a matter of learning vocabulary and therefore they spend a great deal of time on memorising lists of L2 words and rely on their bilingual dictionary as a basic communicative resource. As a result, language teachers and applied linguists now generally recognise the importance of vocabulary learning and are exploring ways of promoting it more effectively. Some of this research takes the form of investigation of strategies learners use specifically for vocabulary (VLS), which is our focus of attention.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the present study is to examine the use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) by ESL students at college level to better understand the ways that they applied to learn new words in English.

It was decided that the best method for this investigation to better understand the use of VLSs by these particular students is to adopt the qualitative research design. Cresswell (2008) identified qualitative research as an investigative method for understanding a phenomenon based on separate methodological traditions of inquiry that elicit human conditions or social problem. In addition, the researcher is the main instrument of analyzing the data.

Personally, the researcher is interested in this topic because he has been teaching in an EFL (English as a foreign language) context where it was very difficult to gain access to teaching and learning materials of the English language. The study is conducted in different engineering colleges.

As Merriam (1988) explained, interview utilization is one of the major sources to obtain qualitative data from subjects. Hence, the method of conducting an interview is one of the most popular means to investigate, research and to inquire data from the one phenomenon. The interviews were conducted individually with 105 students who are randomly selected to gain a deep understanding of the subjects' varied backgrounds in vocabulary learning, the strategies that they used to learn new words in English.

As a whole, the semi-structured interview was used in this phase for data collection. Everything was conducted as planned and scheduled, and thus most of the things worked quite smoothly. The next process was to analyse data obtained after translation in order to discover vocabulary learning behaviours reported to be employed by the students.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

4.1 Vocabulary Learning Strategies to Build New Vocabulary Items (BNV)

The vocabulary learning strategies under this main category are the strategies that 105 students reported employing in order to build new vocabulary items, especially when in class. However, some strategies were reported employing both when in or outside class so that one can achieve some particular goals of his/her vocabulary learning. Below are 10 individual strategies reported employing by the interviewees in order to Retain Newly-learned Vocabulary items (RNV) that include:

RNV 1: Repeating a single vocabulary

RNV 2: Discuss with classmates or friends

RNV 3: Discuss with teachers

RNV 4: Singing English songs

RNV 5: Making list

RNV 6: Grouping according to synonyms and antonyms

RNV 7: Grouping according to the similarity of meaning, pronunciation and spelling

RNV 8: Doing vocabulary exercises after class

RNV 9: Practising writing in own sentences

RNV 10: Connecting vocabulary to one's previous learning experience

4.2 Repeating a single vocabulary

For many language learners' repetition is highly valued in respect of vocabulary. This practice is so ingrained in many people's thinking and practices that they find it hard to see language learning without this practice as a core part of it. There are in fact different kinds of repetition. At one end of the spectrum, it is described as commonly understanding and practising. At the other end, it is defined as "mindful repetition".

4.3 Conversation or Discussion

The conversation or discussion of vocabulary plays high-priority in acquisition of vocabulary. Conversational English vocabulary lessons can give students a powerful voice with new skills to match. It promotes a **slew of student confidence**, because students will actually be holding a conversation with teacher or a peer. Having more speaking confidence will encourage students to speak up during any other lesson or activity, which is always a big goal for language teachers. It allows ESL students to **engage in guided discussion**. Students will see that they can use their new language with people in the real world, making the value of their English knowledge more apparent. By practising this strategy, student will be able to speak English fluently and confidently with others.

4.4 Grouping Vocabulary

Students can group their newly-learned vocabulary according to meaning, synonyms and antonyms. By that, they have ample of vocabulary in usage. Student can group the vocabulary with their knowledge. For example: **Criticizing or blaming words:** berate, calumny, castigate, decry, defamation, denounce, deride, derisive, diatribe, disparage, excoriate, gainsay, harangue, impugn, inveigh, lambaste, objurgate, obloquy, opprobrium, rebuke, remonstrate, reprove, revile, tirade, and vituperate. Likewise, a learner can group the vocabulary with different usage. For example, lying words, change-related words, uncaring words, weakening words, etc.

4.5 Practising in writing or doing exercises

Students can acquire newly-learned vocabulary by doing practice in writing or doing exercises. Students can practise words in writing their own sentences or stories. For this, some online courses are available to boost writing skills and using new words. Some assignments and quizzes are also helpful to students to acquire ample of vocabulary.

Some classes are aimed at creative writing also. Not only this, one can do exercises after class and use previous language experience to improve vocabulary.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study has discovered that the ESL students perceive the substance of vocabulary as a branch of language learning. However, some strategies such as repetition of single vocabulary, grouping the same words and antonyms, conversation with friends or teachers, practising the words in sentences, doing exercises and using previous learning experience.

Based on the results, some implications can be observed. First of all, an advantage of this study is that it will increase the public awareness on the importance of vocabulary learning strategies in second language learning and teaching. As Oxford (2003) mentioned Vocabulary is not explicitly taught in most language classes". The results of the current study can assist language teachers to improve their teaching methods. Second, teachers who are interested in their students' performance in learn the English vocabulary can introduce the vocabulary learning strategies and techniques to their students by designing useful tasks and giving relevant assignments. Future studies on vocabulary learning strategies can be carried out from two viewpoints. Studies on the individuals' differences of language learners from primary to university level can be conducted both in qualitative and quantitative approaches. In addition, studying the effect of culture, home environment, peer groups, effective teaching methods and classroom atmosphere on vocabulary learning strategies could be very helpful to get better understanding of the relevant strategies.

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