

VOCABULARY LEARNING AND VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary learning is an important component in language learning and of critical importance to the typical language learner. It is a basic constituent of learning a language. If students lack vocabulary they will be unable to function in any particular communication. Also, the grammar or the structure of a language is also important. But if we wish to express ourselves effectively we need enough vocabulary. The more words we know, the better we understand what we read and listen to. Unfortunately, the importance of vocabulary teaching is being neglected by most of the language teachers. They assume that their students will learn words incidentally. It is thought that vocabulary expansion will happen through the practice of other language skills. Teachers need to be aware of and expand vocabulary teaching techniques. Furthermore, the language teacher needs to have a deep knowledge on Vocabulary Language Strategies, thus find systematic ways of helping learners in building vocabulary. This paper deals with some of the ways vocabulary is taught by pointing out the Vocabulary Learning, Learning Strategies and Vocabulary Learning Strategies.

Keywords: Vocabulary, Vocabulary Teaching, Vocabulary Learning Strategies

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Introduction

Concept of learning can be defined as permanent change in a behavioral tendency resulted with reinforced practice. Brown (1994:7) defines learning as “acquiring or getting of knowledge of a subject or a skill by study, experience or instruction”. However the concept ‘teaching’ can be defined as guiding and facilitating learning, enabling learners to learn, setting the conditions for learning. Brown (1994:7) defines teaching as “showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instructions, guiding in the study of something, providing with knowledge, causing to know or understand”. Learning is an active process and it is personal and individual. Dawson (1984:17) states that “students learn by actively involved in the lesson. They do not learn just by listening to you”. “People learn more by doing things themselves rather than by being told about them. Learners are intelligent, fully functioning humans, not simply receptacles for passed-on knowledge. Learning is not simply a one-dimensional activity, but involves the whole person” (Scrivener, 1994:4). However, Learning strategies and language learning strategies will be defined in the next section, because their definitions are the basis in understanding the Vocabulary Learning Strategies.

Learning Strategy and Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Learning Strategy can be defined as behaviours of a learner that are intended to influence how the learner process information. Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robins (1999:2) defines Learning Strategies as “procedures or techniques that learners can use to facilitate a learning task”. Learning Strategies are employed in all learning no matter what the content or the context is. Thus, learning strategies are used in learning and teaching math, science, history, languages and other subjects. “Learning Strategies instruction can help students of English become better learners. Students become more motivated as they begin to understand the relationship between their use of strategies and success in learning English”(Chamot,1999;1). “Familiarity with Learning Strategy can enhance understanding of what goes on in classrooms”(Nunan,1989;47).

Language Learning Strategies are any sets of operation, steps, plans, routines, techniques, specific actions used by the learner to facilitate the internalizing, storage, retrieval, and the use of the new

language. Learning is “the process by which information is obtained, stored, retrieved, and used”(Schmitt,1997;203). Characteristics of Language Learning Strategies are :

1. Language Learning Strategies are learner generated.
2. Language Learning Strategies enhance language learning and help to develop language competence.
3. Language Learning Strategies may be visible (behaviours, techniques) or invisible (thoughts, mental processes).
4. Language Learning Strategies involve information and memory.
5. Language Learning Strategies allow learners to be self directed.
6. Language Learning Strategies expand the role of language teachers.
7. Language Learning Strategies are problem-oriented.
8. Language Learning Strategies can be taught.
9. Language Learning Strategies are flexible.
10. Language Learning Strategies are influenced by a variety of factors.
11. Language Learning Strategies involve many aspects, not just cognitive.

Language Learning Strategies have been classified by many scholars and they have studied the use of strategies by learners. For Example O'Malley (in Brown,1994;115) classifies Language Learning Strategies into three main groups :

1. **Metacognitive Strategies** : These strategies are used to oversee, regulate or self direct language learning. It involves: planning for learning, thinking about the learning process as it is taking place, monitoring of one's production or comprehension and evaluating learning after an activity is completed.
2. **Cognitive Strategies**: are more limited to specific learning tasks and they involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself.

3. **Socio-affective Strategies** : It can be stated that socio-affective strategies are related with social–mediating activity and transacting with other.

Each of these major categories describes a large number of strategies, so more detailed taxonomies are possible .

Oxford (in Griffiths and Parr,2001;250) classifies Language Learning Strategies into six groups: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social affective strategies.

An important distinction exists between communication and Language Learning Strategies. Communication Strategies are used by speakers intentionally and consciously in order to cope with difficulties in communicating in a foreign language. The purpose is to participate in a conversation and getting meaning across or clarifying what the speaker intended. Being a broad concept, Language Learning Strategies are used to refer to all strategies foreign language learners use in learning the target language and communication strategies are one type of Language Learning Strategies.

2.3.1 A taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS)

Vocabulary Learning Strategies are a part of Language Learning Strategies which in turn are part of general learning strategies. Nation (2001:217) tries to define what a strategy is by listing the following requirements:

1. involve choice ,that is, there are several strategies to choose from.
2. be complex that is, there are several steps to learn.
3. require knowledge and benefit from training .
4. increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and vocabulary use.

There are numerous strategies which have these features. Learners should know all about these strategies and have skills in using them.

Schmitt developed an extensive taxonomy organized around Oxford's social, cognitive, metacognitive strategies. But he needed to create a new category for this taxonomy: Determination Strategy. Fowle

(2002:383) defines Determination strategy as “deducing the meaning of a new word by one’s self”.

In order to give some impression of the range of possibilities of Vocabulary Learning Strategies, we should have a look at Schmitt’s list:

Strategy group	Strategy
Strategies for the discovery of a new word’s meaning	
DET	Analyze part of speech
DET	Analyze affixes and roots
DET	Check for L1 cognate
DET	Analyze any available pictures or gestures
DET	Guess meaning from textual context
DET	Use a dictionary (bilingual or monolingual)
SOC	Ask teacher for a synonym, paraphrase, or L1
translation	of new word
SOC	Ask classmates for meaning
Strategies for consolidating a word once it has been encountered	
SOC	Study and practice meaning in a group
SOC	Interact with native speakers
MEM	Connect word to a previous personal
experience	
MEM	Associate the word with its coordinates
MEM	Connect the word to its synonyms and
antonyms	
MEM	Use semantic maps
MEM	Image word form
MEM	Image word’s meaning
MEM	Use Keyword Method
MEM	Group words together to study them
MEM	Study the spelling of a word
MEM	Say new word aloud when studying
MEM	Use physical action when learning a word

COG	Verbal repetition
COG	Written repetition
COG	Word lists
COG	Put English on physical objects
COG	Keep a vocabulary notebook.
MET	Use English-language media(songs, movies, newscasts, etc)
MET	Use spaced word practice (expanding rehearsal)
MET	Test oneself with word tests
MET	Skip or pass new word
MET	Continue to study word over time
(Schmitt,2000;134)	

Schmitt (2000:133) categorized the list in two ways in order to make such a long list more understandable. First he divides the list into two major classes: (1) strategies that are useful for the initial discovery of a words' meaning, and (2) those useful for remembering that word once it has been introduced . This reflects the different processes necessary for working out a new word meaning and usage and consolidating it in memory for future use. Second , Schmitt (2000:135-136) ; Schmitt (1997:208-216) classifies strategies into five groups:

Determination Strategies (DET) : used by an individual when faced with discovering a new word's meaning without recourse to another person's expertise. If learners do not know a word, they must discover its meaning by guessing from their structural knowledge of the language, guessing from an L1 cognate, guessing from context, using reference materials.

Social Strategies (SOC) : use interaction with other people to improve language learning. One can ask teachers or classmates for information about a new word and they can answer in a variety of ways: giving the L1 translation if they know it, giving

a synonym, giving a definition by paraphrase, using the new word in a sentence or any combination of these.

Memory Strategies (MEM): involve relating the word to be retained with some previously learned knowledge, using some form of imagery, or grouping. A new word can be integrated into many kinds of existing knowledge. Fowle (2002:383) states that “the memory strategies utilized includes studying the word with a pictorial representation, connecting the word to synonyms and antonyms, using semantic maps, using clines for gradable adjectives, grouping words together, using new words in a sentence, studying the spelling of a word, underlying the initial letter of a word (words are recorded alphabetically), studying parts of a speech and paraphrasing the word’s meaning”.

Cognitive Strategies (COG) : are the mental strategies learners use to make sense of their learning. They are similar to memory strategies, but are not focused so specifically on manipulative mental processing; they include repetition and using mechanical means to study the vocabulary including the keeping of vocabulary notebooks.

Metacognitive Strategies (MET): are used by students to control and evaluate their own learning by having an overview of the learning process in general. This includes improving access to input, deciding on the most efficient methods of study and testing oneself. It also includes which words are worth studying and which are not .

Vocabulary Learning Strategies seem to be simple repetition and taking notes on vocabulary. Schmitt (2000:133) states that:

Rather than being used individually, multiple VLS are often used concurrently. This means that active management of strategy use is important. Good learners do things such as use a variety of strategies, structure their vocabulary learning, review and practice target words and they are aware of the semantic relationships between new and previously learned L2 words, that is

they are conscious of their learning and take steps to regulate it.

Ellis and Sinclair (1989:14-15) confirm this view as "...the most effective learners seem those who discover some kind of pattern, for example semantic groups, or those who make their own associations, for instance with a visual image in their mind". Teachers need to consider the overall learning context in order to consider which vocabulary learning strategies to recommend to his/her students. Schmitt (2000:133) points out that "the effectiveness with which learning strategies can be both taught and used will depend on a number of variables, including the proficiency level, L1 and culture of students, their motivation and purposes for learning the L2, the task and text being used and the nature of the L2 itself". Students need to take some responsibility for their own vocabulary learning. However, teachers should know the Language Learning Strategies and Vocabulary Learning Strategies so that will make teaching and learning of vocabulary more effective.

Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this paper was to point out the importance of using vocabulary teaching strategies and teaching vocabulary learning strategies to students in order to facilitate the increment of their English vocabulary.

Teachers need to be aware of and expand vocabulary teaching techniques. They need to consider the overall learning context in order to consider which vocabulary learning strategies to recommend to his/her students.

Students need to take some responsibility for their own vocabulary learning making it necessary to introduce them to vocabulary learning strategies so that they can do this more effectively.

After language learning strategies and vocabulary learning strategies have been mentioned, teachers should know all about Language Learning Strategies and Vocabulary Learning Strategies before teaching so that will make teaching and learning of vocabulary

more effective. If teachers take the importance of Vocabulary Learning Strategies on the surface level, they will be able to solve many problems that the students may face with in learning vocabulary .

The teachers also recommend employing a number of classroom activities or tasks such as vocabulary games, dictations, spoken and written repetition, and group work. They certainly believe that those tasks could provide their students with a great deal of practice time as well as constant exposure to the language.

It is important that teachers should treat the teaching of vocabulary not only at the level of teaching students vocabulary learning strategies and apply them as an isolated issue, but as an integral part of the group that will help them develop in learner's communicative skills

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