



Vocabulary Strategies : Building New Vocabulary

KEYWORDS

VLS, ESL, BNV

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ABSTRACT *One of the most important challenges that learners will face during the process of second language learning is learning vocabulary. Vocabulary has been recognized as crucial to language use in which insufficient vocabulary knowledge of the learners led to difficulties in second language learning. Thus, in the case of learning the vocabulary in second language, students need to be educated with vocabulary learning strategies. The present study examined the type of vocabulary learning strategies used by ESL students who are studying B.Tech in Engineering colleges. These students have been rarely included in any previous studies on vocabulary learning strategies. Based on the aim of this study, 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. Hence, the method of conducting is an open-ended interview that was conducted individually with 105 students. The concluded strategies such as the learning a word through reading, the use of monolingual dictionary, the use of various English language media, and applying new English word in their daily conversation were related to memory, determination, meta-cognitive strategies respectively are popular strategies and the learners are keen in using them.*

1. Introduction:

Acquiring a second language involves different areas such as motivation, learners' needs, learning environment, learning strategies and language awareness. It is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore second language learning strategies. In any event, learning strategies are, defined by Chamot and Kupper (1989) as "techniques which students use to comprehend, store, and remember information and skills".

However, learning strategies have been used for thousands of years as Oxford (1990) mentioned that mnemonic or memory tools used in ancient times to facilitate narrators remember their lines. Studies on language learning strategies started in the mid 1960. Subsequently, the past twenty years have seen increasingly rapid advances in the field of second language learning strategies. Nevertheless, Oxford (2003) defined language learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations".

While particular strategies are used by second language learners for the acquisition of new words in the second language are called 'vocabulary learning strategies' (Gu, 1994). Whereas, language learning strategies (LLSs) are sub category of general learning strategies and vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) are consider as a part of language learning strategies (Nation, 2001). The research to date has tended to focus on vocabulary learning strategies rather than language learning strategies.

Several studies have produced taxonomies of vocabulary learning strategies (Gu, 2003). First, Schmitt and Schmitt (1993) divided learning vocabulary in to remembering a word and learning a new word. Secondly, GU (2003) classified second language (L2) vocabulary learning strategies as cognitive, metacognitive, memory and activation strategies. Thirdly, Schmitt (1997) improved vocabulary learning strategies based on Oxford (1990) into determination (not seeking another person's expertise) strategies, social (seeking another person's expertise) and though the remembering category comprises social, memorization, cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Finally, Fan (2003) who refined Gu (2003)'s classification, categorized vocabulary learning strategies into a

"primary category" which contains dictionary strategies and guessing strategies as well as, "remembering category" which integrates repetition, association, grouping, analysis and known words strategies.

2. Literature Review

Vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) are steps taken by the language learners to acquire new English words. There are a wide range of different vocabulary learning strategies as demonstrated by the classifications of vocabulary learning strategies are proposed by different researchers (Stoffer, 1995; Nation, 2001; and Gu, 2003). In addition, there is a wide-ranging inventory of vocabulary learning strategies developed by Schmitt in 1997. While a variety of definitions of the vocabulary learning strategies have been suggested, this study has applied the definition that is suggested by Schmitt (1997) who saw it as two main groups of strategies:

- 1) Discovery strategies: Strategies that are used by learners to discover learning of words;
- 2) Consolidation strategies: a word is consolidated once it has been encountered.

He categorized vocabulary learning strategies into five sub-categories:

- 1) Determination strategies: they are individual learning strategies (Schmitt, 1997).
- 2) Social strategies: they are learners learn new words through interaction with others (Schmitt, 1997).
- 3) Memory strategies: they are strategies, whereby learners link their learning of new words to mental processing by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new words (Schmitt, 1997).
- 4) Cognitive strategies: they are strategies that do not engage learners in mental processing but is more mechanical means (Schmitt, 1997) and
- 5) Meta-cognitive strategies: they are strategies related to processes involved in monitoring, decision-making, and evaluation of one's progress (Schmitt, 1997).

After viewing these different classifications the prudent study used Schmitt's taxonomy as a basis of the study. It was developed based on Oxford (2003)'s classification of language learn-

ing strategies. The classification of strategies perhaps is before the most wide-ranging in vocabulary learning strategies usage. Although, Schmitt's five major strategies maintained their application in an ESL/EFL environment due to the fact that he established his taxonomy using Japanese L2 learners. Similarly, the present study has used for second language learners' samples of study. The use of VLSs counts on a number of factors such as proficiency, motivation, and culture (Schmitt, 2000). This is because culture and environment can influence their preference for exacting learning strategies (Schmitt, 2000).

However, far too little attention has been paid to vocabulary learning strategies used by ESL undergraduate students who are studying in Engineering colleges under the affiliation of JNTUK, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh. The purpose of this study was to determine how to build new vocabulary.

3. Method & Materials:

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 15 individual strategies reported employing by the interviewees in order to build new vocabulary items (BNV) which include:

- BNV 1: Learning words from a published word list to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 2: Learning words from lessons to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 3: Trying to learn directly from a dictionary to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 4: Studying the English affixation system to build new vocabulary items

- BNV 5: Watching TV channels to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 6: Listening to radio programmes to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 7: Reading newspapers to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 8: Surfing the internet to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 9: Making use of on screen Telugu - English translation to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 10: Learning vocabulary through graded reading to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 11: Learning vocabulary through controlled reading to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 12: Learning vocabulary through free reading to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 13: Ignoring new words to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 14: Discussing vocabulary learning problems and requirements with a teacher to build new vocabulary items
- BNV 15: Co-operating with classmates to improve vocabulary to build new vocabulary items

4.2 Learning New Words through Reading

The first common strategies which have been used by participants was guessing from textual context is under the determination category. This is determination strategy where one makes guesses from the textual context.

One possible explanation for the findings is related to the present education system whereby in most of the

English language classrooms, teachers have used the same teaching method such as using English newspapers to

improve and assist the learning and acquiring of new vocabulary process. The findings are consistent with Haggan (1990) who has found the use of newspapers in EFL classes to be a successful method. However, the most acceptable explanation for using this strategy which is also true for the current study has been provided by Oxford and Scarcellat (1994) as "by far the most useful strategy is guessing from various given contexts".

4.3 Use of Dictionaries

Another common strategy was using a monolingual dictionary (e.g. English to English dictionary) which is under categorization of determination strategies and has been mentioned by students as one of the common strategies that have been used by them. The popularity of this strategy is expected simply because the use of a monolingual dictionary is a common practice among second language learners. These dictionaries give detailed guidance on pronunciation, grammar, and usage with explanations written in a controlled, simplified vocabulary. Other than that, the dictionaries also provide examples of words used in various contexts (Carter, 1987).

The monolingual dictionaries are designed for native users but publishers have later on developed this type of dictionary for L2 students as well (Oxford and Scarcellat, 1994). An explanation for the common use of a monolingual dictionary among these students is that the new curriculum is focusing on independent learners. This method is widely performed in the English language classes. However, this finding is in agreement with the findings of Noor and Amir (2009) which showed the commonly used dictionary strategies among students.

In addition, in language classrooms, most of the time, the teachers encourage the students to refer to the dictionary and the students are expected to learn new words on their own. Another reason that can be accounted for the result is related to the process of learning language as the participants become mature, the more advanced they become.

4.4 Applying New English Words in Their Daily Speaking

Hence, one of the more significant findings to emerge from this study was that the respondents applied new English words in their daily speaking. It can be considered as a social strategy. They practice new words among friends in the college, ask questions in the classrooms, and interact with teachers. A possible explanation for this might be that these students benefitted from the receptive and productive knowledge of vocabulary learning in second language.

These findings are consistent with those of Nation (2001) and Webb (2005) who found the receptive and productive role of vocabulary learning in second language. However, Monderia and Wiersma (2004) explained the receptive vocabulary learning as learning the meaning of a second language word to target language, and productive vocabulary learning makes the learner able to translate a word from L1 to L2. Another possible explanation for this issue have been identified by Webb (2005) who indicated that the greater part of vocabulary is learned receptively through reading or listening and production through writing and speaking.

4.5 Use of Media

Another important finding of this investigation showed that, using the English-language media (songs, movies, internet, computer games, TV programs, etc.) is also among the high frequency strategies are used by the students.

Besides, using materials which involve authentic language use is also listed among the frequency strategies used. A possible explanation is that the popularity of this metacognitive strategy may relate to the accessibility of the materials.

Moreover, authentic materials are good in terms of learning new words in their contexts. As mentioned in the literature review strategies involving authentic language use are demonstrated by Stoffer (1995). This category was the first category of Stoffer (1995) classification and later Schmitt (2000) included this strategy in his taxonomy as sub category of metacognitive strategies. This result may be explained by the fact that the highly developed technology is becoming a major part of vocabulary learning and second language learning process.

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 the learning a word through reading, the use of monolingual dictionary, the use of various English-language media, and applying new English word in their daily speaking where are related to memory, determination, metacognitive strategies respectively are popular strategies and the learners are keen in using them. On the other hand, strategies which require cognitively deeper processing such as putting English labels on physical objects, listening to tapes of word lists and writing down the new words and their meanings on cards is not mentioned by participants of this study.

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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