

Current Principles in Second Language Vocabulary Learning and Teaching

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เป็นที่ทราบกันดีว่าปัจจัยที่สำคัญในลำดับต้นๆ ในการที่จะเรียนภาษาที่สองคือ การที่ผู้เรียนต้องมีความรู้คำศัพท์ในภาษาที่สองจำนวนมากก่อนที่จะสามารถเข้าใจภาษาที่สองและสามารถพัฒนาความสามารถทางภาษาที่สองได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ และคำถามที่มักพบบ่อยๆ ด้านการเรียนการสอนคำศัพท์คือ การเรียนคำศัพท์ภาษาที่สองมีลักษณะอย่างไรและควรสอนคำศัพท์อย่างไร บทความนี้ได้ทบทวนเอกสารและวรรณคดีที่เกี่ยวข้องด้านการเรียนรู้และการสอนคำศัพท์ในยุคปัจจุบันเพื่อสรุปเป็นแนวทางในการเรียนการสอนคำศัพท์ในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างชาติในห้องเรียนให้มีประสิทธิภาพ

Abstract

It is well accepted that vocabulary is one factor, if not the first priority, to be developed before a second language makes sense to second language learners and for second language learners to develop their second language efficiently. Frequently asked questions are what vocabulary should be taught and how it should be taught. This paper aims to provide an inventive overview of current principles in second language vocabulary learning for second and foreign language classes.

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Introduction

Vocabulary is a crucial element for second language learning and second language development. It is often found that second language learners' failures to express themselves in a second language are due to their lack of vocabulary, not lack of grammatical knowledge. It was once believed that when exposed to the target language, vocabulary would take care of itself. In other words, it was once believed that there was no need to teach vocabulary in a language class. This belief, however, gradually disappeared since several research studies have shown that second language learners need vocabulary instruction to learn vocabulary effectively and improve their second language more efficiently. This paper, therefore, aims to provide an intensive overview of current second vocabulary instruction principles reviewed from previous literature on second language vocabulary learning and second language vocabulary research studies. This paper will first describe roles of vocabulary in second language acquisition, followed by types of vocabulary, aspects of word knowledge, and finally current vocabulary learning principles

Roles of Vocabulary in Second Language Acquisition

In recent years, vocabulary has received greater attention in the field of second language acquisition due to the fact that vocabulary is crucial and instrumental for language learners (Nation, 2001). Learners need a sufficient amount of vocabulary in order to efficiently develop their second language and to succeed in their academic lives (Coady, 1997; Donley & Reppen, 2001; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Nation, 2001). It is well documented that learners with a large vocabulary are more proficient in using a broader range of language skills than learners with a smaller vocabulary (Meara, 1996).

In regards to receptive skills, Koda (2005) and Laufer (1997) state that learners cannot comprehend a text without sufficient knowledge of vocabulary.

Other factors (e.g., background knowledge, reading strategies, and syntactic complexity) may also play a role in learning a second language. The roles of these factors, however, will be minimal if learners do not have enough words to draw upon. For example, background knowledge, even though useful for the interpretation of textual meaning, may sometimes lead learners, particularly beginning learners, to misunderstand textual information. This is because their background knowledge may not conform to the information presented in the text (Koda, 2005). As such, with sufficient vocabulary, learners will be able to understand information necessary for them to apply their background knowledge more effectively. Reading strategies also may have minimal positive impact on learners' comprehension. Without enough vocabulary, learners are not able to use strategies effectively (Koda, 2005; Laufer, 1997; Parry, 1991). Likewise, in productive skills, vocabulary plays a crucial role. Learners' ability to use appropriate vocabulary helps enrich content, improve sentence structure, and lead to better comprehension and interpretation on the receiver's part (Lee, 2003). Finally, vocabulary is a strong indicator of whether the writer or learners have adopted the conventions of the relevant discourse community (Corson, 1997).

Types of Vocabulary

Vocabulary is categorized differently depending upon fields of study. The widely cited work, which is considered practical and useful for vocabulary pedagogies, is by Nation (2001). According to Nation, vocabulary can be separated into four groups: high-frequency words, academic words, technical words, and low-frequency words. High frequency words include function words (e.g., *in, for, the, of, a*, etc.) and high frequency content words (e.g., *government, forest, production, present*, etc.). In an academic corpus, this word group covers approximately 76% of the running words in texts and occurs in all kinds of texts. The second group, academic words, covers around 10% of the academic corpus.

These words are common in different kinds of academic texts. The third and fourth groups are technical words (i.e., words closely related to the topic of the text and rarely found in other kinds of texts) and low frequency words (i.e., words rarely found in common use of language). These two groups together cover approximately 14% of the corpus.

According to Grabe (2009), the first group of words that second language learners must learn and should have them in their lexicon as fast as possible is high-frequency words, particularly the first 2,000 words because these are words that are mostly frequently used. Also, Nation asserts that for adult learners learning English for academic purposes, academic words are the second priority. This is due to four main reasons. First, academic words are commonly found in a wide range of academic texts. Second, academic vocabulary covers a large portion of words in academic texts. Third, academic words are often unknown to second language learners when compared to technical words. Finally, academic words are specialized words that language teachers can help learners with. Academic words are crucial for second language learners who want to be successful in an academic context (Donley & Reppen, 2001; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Zimmerman, 2009).

Aspects of Knowing a Word

The very first attempt to describe what it means to know a word was by Richard (1976). Richard mentioned that knowing a word entails eight aspects: 1) learning vocabulary as a long term process, 2) knowing the degree of probability of encountering that word in speech or print, 3) knowing the limitations on the use of the word according to variations of function and situation, 4) knowing the syntactic behavior associated with the word, 5) knowing the underlying form of a word and the derivations that can make from it, 6), knowing the network of associations between that word and other words in

the language, 7) knowing the semantic value of a word, and 8) knowing many different meanings associated with a word.

Subsequent works seem to agree with Richard's concept of aspects of lexical knowledge and try to extend and elaborate on them, particularly on the notion of reception and production (e.g., Carter, 1998; Nagy and Scott, 2000; Nation, 1990, 2001). Carter (1998) maintains that knowing a word involves knowing the likelihood of encountering the word in either spoken or written context or both, knowing its syntactic frames, underlying forms, derivations, related words, different meaning, and collocations. Furthermore, he includes the notion of production and reception into word knowledge (i.e., ability to use a word productively and to recall it for active use).

Similarly, Nagy and Scott (2000) mention that different kinds of words require different kind of knowledge (i.e., productive and receptive). This dimension of word knowledge is referred to as heterogeneity in their work. The four dimensions of word knowledge proposed by Nagy and Scott are polysemy (i.e., knowing that one word has many meanings), interrelatedness (i.e., knowing related words of a word), incrementality (i.e., being exposed to a word in different spoken and written contexts), and multidimensions (i.e., knowing that one word can serve different functions in different sentences, texts, and even conversations).

Likewise, Nation (1990) developed a framework to describe different aspects of lexical knowledge based on Richard's (1976) concept of knowing a word and included the notion of production and reception. According to Nation, knowing a word means to have four major categories of word knowledge (i.e., form, position, function, and meaning). The category of 'form' includes the spoken and written form of a word. The 'position' category entails knowledge of grammatical patterns and collocations. The category of 'function' involves frequency and appropriateness. The meaning category includes

knowledge of concept (i.e., meaning) and associations (related words such as synonym). Later, Nation (2001) recategorized his framework, and proposed that having knowledge of a word entails three major categories with three sub-categories under each, namely form (spoken form, written form, and word part), meaning (form and meaning, concepts and referents, and associations), and use (grammatical functions, collocations, constraints on use). Compared to the previous version, Nation's current framework included another dimension into the 'form' category, which was word part. He seems to have changed the name of the 'position' category and called it 'use' in his later version. In addition, frequency and appropriateness were combined and was called 'constraints on use' and was labeled as another component under the category of 'use' in his new version. Nation, however, did not provide rationale for these slight changes.

Previous literature on aspects of knowing a word have led to the conclusion that knowing a word refers to having different faceted knowledge of a word and the ability to use it receptively and productively. These descriptions of vocabulary knowledge yield insight for second language instruction. It implies that second language learners need to learn and know different aspects of vocabulary in order to be able to use words for comprehension and, particularly, production. Vocabulary instruction and research studies often focus on teaching one meaning of a word. It is not a surprise that improving definitional knowledge is the common practice in classroom activities and research agendas because learners need a great amount of receptive vocabulary to be able to comprehend a second language text. Knowing only one definition of a word, however, has limited impact on textual comprehension and production (see Koda, 2005 for comprehension; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000 for productive knowledge). In addition, though receptive knowledge is the early stage of productive knowledge, it takes a great amount of time for learners to convert receptive vocabulary to productive vocabulary. To transfer receptive vocabulary to

productive, learners need several exposures to the word and to be able to produce it requires sufficient and accumulated knowledge of other aspects of vocabulary (e.g., part of speech, collocation, word family) (Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Nation, 2001). An effective mean to help shorten the process is very much needed.

Learning Principles for Vocabulary Learning

It takes an extended period of time to learn and know words. Words must be encountered and reencountered numerous times in order to be acquired. According to Nation (1990), learners need to be exposed to a word five to sixteen or more times in order to acquire it. Rott (1999) and Ghadirian (2002) claimed that learners need twenty encounters of words before they can be acquired. The high number of exposure before vocabulary acquisition can occur makes it challenging to second language learners, particularly EFL learners. EFL learners such as Thai learners learning English in Thailand have minimal exposure to English. They study English in a formal classroom setting for only three hours a week; little English, if not none, is required outside of the classroom. In such setting, opportunities to encounter and reencounter the same words are limited, and it may take a year or several years before learners will eventually learn them (or may not acquire them at all). Schmitt (1998) investigated how advanced L2 Japanese learners acquired different aspects of word knowledge (spelling, meaning senses, grammatical behavior, and associated words) of eleven words over a course of one academic year. He found that learning words in such context is a long and incremental process. While the knowledge of written form and grammatical knowledge improved and learners seemed to have less trouble with (due to their high language ability), other aspects of word knowledge (i.e., definitional knowledge and association knowledge) seemed to stay at the same level after one academic year, indicating that they had partial knowledge

and “nowhere near full productive mastery” (p. 6). Similarly, Bahns and Eldaw (1993) suggested that EFL learners should be taught collocation because collocation knowledge did not go hand in hand with lexical knowledge. Learners would not notice and be able to acquire word collocations and how they were used in sentences, leading to poor performance in their language production (Nesselhauf, 2003, 2004). In addition, converting receptive knowledge to productive vocabulary knowledge takes a long time (Schmitt, 2000). In an EFL setting, after years of English learning, learners may not acquire words and may not be able to convert their receptive knowledge to productive knowledge at all. Effective vocabulary instruction that can help extend learners’ productive vocabulary knowledge is very much needed.

Learners need to be instructed under learning conditions that encourage vocabulary acquisition to occur. The following is the discussion of the principles found to be suggested to be followed if vocabulary acquisition is expected.

- Repeating and recycling
- Noticing
- Reflection
- Teaching different aspects of vocabulary knowledge
- Task-induced involvement

Repeating and Recycling

Repeating and recycling are vital for vocabulary acquisition to occur because learners do not learn new words by meeting them only once. Learners need to encounter words several times before they can acquire them (Folse, 2004; Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000, 2008). However, just merely seeing a word does not ensure learning. Learners need to actively retrieve a word in

a meaningful way in order to effectively learn it (DeCarrico, 2001; McCarten, 2007; Sokmen, 1997). Meaningful retrieval of words engages learners in a deep level of processes. Learners' learning words in a deep level of processing helps strengthen the transfer of their word knowledge from the short-term memory to the long-term memory (DeCarrico, 2001; Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001).

Along the same line, Grabe (2009) and Nation (2001) assert that learners need to meet and use a word in different ways from the first encounter with the word to acquire it. Nation terms this learning condition generative use. According to Nation, generative use can be applied to improve both receptive and productive knowledge. In receptive skills, learners need multiple exposures to a word because meeting a word in new contexts can help learners reshape and extend their knowledge about it. When a word is used in new contexts, learners may learn about other meanings of the word, its derivational forms, collocation, and grammatical pattern. In productive skills, generative use involves the use of words to convey messages in learners' production. By producing and using vocabulary, learners will develop control over different aspects of vocabulary knowledge required by productive knowledge, which is different from those required by receptive knowledge. One way to provide generative use to improve receptive knowledge is to show learners how words are used in new contexts. Through the meeting of words in different contexts, learners are provided opportunities to receptively use the words in a generative way. For productive knowledge, learners should write about what they have already read/discussed. By referring back to and writing about the article they have read, students are provided opportunities to reencounter the words and to produce the words to convey their message in new contexts.

In the same line with repeating, words must be recycled to be learned. Recycling is crucial for vocabulary learning because if vocabulary is not recycled or used again, many partially learned words may be forgotten. When recycling is

neglected, it will waste all the effort already spent on learning and teaching them (Schmitt, 2007). One way to recycle words in explicit instruction is to integrate new words with old (Soken, 1997; Grabe, 2009). This can be done by introducing new words with partially learned words or by requiring using old words with new words in subsequent exercises. The more new words are associated with existing knowledge, the higher the chance the new words will be retained (Anderson, 1995).

Noticing

Noticing is considered to be facilitative to second language acquisition to occur. Learners need to be made aware of what they are learning in order to be able to convert input into intake (Ellis, 1991; Schmidt, 1990, 2001). In relation to vocabulary learning, learners' attention must be focused on the word learning. That is, learners must notice the word in order to learn. Learners are likely to notice a word when it is made salient to them. One way to make words more noticeable is through the method called input enhancement. Several research studies have shown great impact of enhanced input on language acquisition (e.g., Izumi, 2003; Kao, 2001; White, Spada, Lightbown, & Ranta, 1991). These studies have shown that saliency of target items or input enhancement could help raise learners' consciousness in learning. When their consciousness is high, it is likely that learners may focus on the main item of learning and perceive it as important and useful to learn. Under this condition, learners are likely to notice the word, and this may lead to vocabulary acquisition. In receptive skills, words can be made salient by such techniques as highlighting, putting words in bold, displaying words in a concordancing format (i.e., Key Word in Context). To improve productive skills, learners can be asked to use target items in their production.

Reflection

Reflection, also referred to as reflective learning and reflective practices, is one type of self assessment that help students to reflect on their learning experiences and monitor the process of their own learning. According to Moon (2004), reflection plays an important role in the process of good quality learning and the development of appropriate behavior. This is due to the fact that reflecting on their own experience of learning, learners are involved in the process of meaningful learning (i.e., making learning more meaning to them). Reflection also helps upgrade learning (i.e., making learning deepened) and helps learners generate new knowledge and understanding. Moon's concept of reflection is in line with what Nation (2001) calls self-assessment. Nation believes that reflection can help learners be aware of, and excited by, their progress of vocabulary learning. Reflecting on what they have achieved in language learning is important for learners because learning a second language is a long and challenging task. Trying to cope with this task, learners often experience frustration and disappointment; sometimes they may feel they will never succeed in language learning. Reflecting on what they have achieved will give learners some sense of achievement, which will help keep pushing them up. Previous studies have shown a positive effect of reflection on students' learning and learning habits over time (e.g., Kavaliauskiene, 2007; Griggs, 1997), except a study by Simard, French, and Fortier (2007). Simard, French, and Fortier found that metalinguistic reflection did not have specific relation to language gains. Their study, however, looked at elementary school students, who may not yet be cognitively ready to efficiently verbalize or reflect on their learning and experiences. Nation (2001) suggested three ways to keep track of one's own learning: These include keeping 1) a record of how many words they have learned, 2) a record of how quickly learning can occur, and 3) a record of examples of their language use at regular interval. Reflective learning can be performed after

each class or once a week, using journals or diaries either online or on paper (Moon, 2004).

Teaching Different Aspects of Vocabulary Knowledge

Previous studies on vocabulary instruction mainly focused on the improvement of receptive vocabulary knowledge (i.e., definitional knowledge). This is not surprising because learners need a large amount of receptive vocabulary to comprehend second language texts. Knowing a word, however, does not merely mean knowing the definition of a word (Folse, 2004). Learners need also to know words in order to express themselves in a second language. Knowing a word and being able to use it productively involves knowing different aspects of word knowledge (e.g., word parts, meaning, grammatical functions, and collocations) (Carroll & Mordant, 1991; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Folse, 2004; Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000). The more aspects of word knowledge learners possess about a word, the more likely learners will be able to use it in the right contexts in an appropriate manner (Schmitt, 2007).

Task-induced Involvement

Simply teaching words to learners does not mean learners will learn and retain them for their future use. Teaching method and tasks should be carefully selected and designed in order to provide optimal learning conditions and chances for word to retain. Task-induced involvement is a method to design language tasks for incidental vocabulary learning proposed by Laufer and Hulstijn (2001). Based on their review of previous literature on motivation and cognition, Laufer and Hulstijn concluded that main components of vocabulary learning that can lead to retention of words include *Need*, *Search*, and *Evaluate*. *Need* refers to “need to achieve” (p. 14). For example, when reading a text, learners encounter unknown words; therefore, they have the need to know the words in order to

comprehend the text. Similarly, in productive skills, the need arises when learners want to refer to something, but are not familiar with the word used to express that concept. *Need* can be either external (i.e., the need to use words in sentences which learners are asked to produce by the teacher) or internal (i.e., need from students themselves). *Need* in this model is close to the concept of motivation in second language learning, which has been well documented in the field of second language learning (see e.g., Dornyei, 1994; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003 for roles of motivation on second language acquisition). The second component of task-induced involvement is *Search*. *Search* is the attempt to find the meaning of the unknown words (e.g., from a dictionary or other tools) to comprehend or produce language. The last component is *Evaluation*. *Evaluation* occurs when learners assess whether a word does or does not fit the context. For example, in writing, learners are to make decision about appropriate collocations and syntactic features to use to convey their ideas. Laufer and Hulstijn believed that tasks which induce a high involvement load from learners' part will lead to higher retention of words than tasks with low involvement load. This theory has been empirically tested, and the results have shown to confirm the theory (see e.g., Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001; Kim, 2008; Laufer, 2001; Newton, 1995).

In sum, to encourage vocabulary acquisition to occur, learners need to be engaged in appropriate learning conditions. Learners must be provided opportunities to repeatedly see, use, and reuse the word in different contexts, in a meaningful way, and in a deep level of processing. Target words must be made noticeable to learners. Learners need to know different facets of words to enhance productive knowledge. Finally, learners need to be provided with opportunities to reflect on what they learn for self-assessment and language development.

Conclusion

Vocabulary is the most important factor for a second language to develop. During the first stage of language learning, learners need to be given opportunities to increase their vocabulary as much and as fast as possible. The faster and the larger vocabulary they obtain, the greater the opportunity for them to develop their second language more efficiently. Incidental learning of vocabulary is a slow and gradual process and takes quite a long period of time, and learners do not have that much time to improve their vocabulary. As such, learners need direct instruction and the direct instruction must be grounded on sound principles of vocabulary teaching, which are repeating and recycling, noticing, reflection, teaching and learning different aspects of vocabulary knowledge, and task-induced involvement.

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