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Conceptual Framework of Second Language Vocabulary Learning

Abstract

The process of second language learning is a challenging component for learners due to its limited exposure and opportunities to practice the language. In that situation, learning second language vocabulary is not simply a matter of memorising the words but how to use appropriate words according to the context. Learners encounter new words in classroom through the teacher's language, through the learners, or through the materials. Therefore, they must employ various strategies to know a word and to use a word in a context (Ellis, 1994). In this regard, this paper discusses the importance of vocabulary in second language acquisition and further, it concentrates on the size of vocabulary a learner need to know for his daily communication. Finally, it investigates the strategies that the learner should be aware of in the process of second language vocabulary learning.

Key Words: vocabulary acquisition, learning strategies, vocabulary size

Introduction

Vocabulary learning is central to language acquisition and it is an essential factor in language competence. Lack of vocabulary knowledge leads to difficulties in communication situations (Marley 1986). At the same time, acquisition of large number of vocabulary items is one of the most difficult task for second language learners (Meara 1980 and Read 2000). Hedge (2000) reveals that there is a lack of attention to vocabulary learning among the students and the teachers. Language teachers have been told a great deal about new discoveries in English grammar but they fail to help students learn new words. While learning vocabulary, it is mandatory to learn the vocabulary learning strategies in order to know how to discover the meaning of new words, how to store them in their memory, and how to use them by practising and easy task for all language learners as recalling and using involves cognitive process.

The Importance of Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is the key to understanding both spoken and written language. “Nation (1994) claims that a rich vocabulary makes the skills of listening, reading and writing easier to perform. Bowen et al (1985) and McCarthy (1990) indicates that the biggest component of any language is vocabulary. Learners also feel that, failure in language production result from the lack of vocabulary knowledge. Kitanjima (2001) explains without words one cannot express concept and intended meaning. Nandy (1994) also accepts that the more words one is able to use correctly, the better one will be able to express oneself easy with self-confidence. In relation to that Lewis (1993) also says that language consists of ‘grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar and grammar as structure is subordinate to

lexis. Wilkins (1972) also conveys that without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. In addition, Ellis (1994) asserts that lexical errors hinder comprehension more than grammatical errors. Garner (1991) also proclaims that choosing right words in certain context is more important than choosing grammatical structures. From the above discussion, it is apparent that vocabulary is more important than grammar and it is crucial for comprehension.

Vocabulary Size

Language learners need to know sufficient vocabulary to be successful in the language learning process. It is vital to know how much vocabulary students should be aware of to listen, speak, read and write (Nation 1990).

Schmitt (2000) indicates that around 2,000 word families should be the threshold for daily basic conversation. Nation and Waring (1997) propose around 2,000- 3,000 word families for productive speaking and writing. Laufer (1998) also recommends 3,000, Word families for better comprehension. Hazenberg and Hulstijn(1996) states that 10000 word families are necessary to comprehend challenging academic texts.

Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Vocabulary has been found as a significant component in second language classroom and one cannot learn a language without learning vocabulary (Cameron, 2001).

1. Choosing the most useful words
2. Deciding what to learn from words selected
3. Deep processing
4. Repeating and reviewing
5. Analyzing and rehearsing new words and it's meaning

6. Elaborating on word meaning complex
7. Established new word within a suitable network of meaning.
8. Guessing from context
9. Using mnemonic techniques
10. Dictionaries
11. Memorization

In an academic sitting, learners expose to new vocabulary through teachers, peers and learning materials. They learn new words in two stages. At first, they hear or read a new word, then they know and recognize it in another situation. In the second stage, they start to use the word in a context then it becomes their active vocabulary (Baker and Westrup, 2000). According to Schmitt (1997) learners apply the following process to learn the vocabulary

- a) To find out the meaning of unknown words,
- b) To retain them in long-term memory
- c) To recall them at will
- d) To use them in oral or written mode.
- e)

Conclusion

Learning strategy is the vital one for learning second language. When the learner start to learn another language they must use some strategy for easily learn that language. These strategies based on their task, and it's situation. The learner then goes on to select, deploy, minister, and evaluate the effectiveness of this action. In relation to that, Lewis (1993) stresses "Lexis is the core or heart of language (p.89). Schmitt (2010) also noted "Learners carry around dictionaries and not grammar books".

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