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Vocabulary Learning Strategies: What Language Teachers Must Help Students to Learn

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Introduction

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in English language acquisition, particularly for college students (He, 2010). Acquiring a deep and rich vocabulary knowledge-base can help these students to convey their message more efficiently. However, learning vocabulary is not an easy job. New words run fast out of mind if they are stored without any use. Practitioners and applied linguists have always been trying to not only emphasize the importance of vocabulary learning but also propose a way for efficient learning of new vocabulary items. Recently, learning strategies have been considered as influential tools for accelerating learning, especially language learning. Oxford (1994) mentions the critical role of learning language learning strategies and defines language learning strategies as behaviors, actions, and techniques that students apply to ameliorate their progress in producing and comprehending L2. Learning the strategies, she believes, makes learning faster and better. Reckoning the issue, researchers like Gu (1994) and Schmitt (1997) applied their knowledge of language learning strategies into vocabulary learning and they provided a sub category of language learning strategies called “Vocabulary Learning Strategies” (VLS). Language learners must learn VLS for better learning of vocabularies because this knowledge improves their process of acquisition. Making students aware of vocabulary learning strategies can be an influential method for teaching vocabularies. Many researchers emphasized the importance of vocabulary learning strategy use from different perspectives. For example, Oxford (1990) suggests that language learners must be encouraged to use strategies in their process of learning. She adds that knowing vocabulary learning strategies makes learners autonomous and helps them in taking responsibility of their own learning. Benson (2001) also believes that explicit teaching of vocabulary learning strategies grows the level of independency in EFL/ESL learners. Nation (1990) believes that knowing and using vocabulary learning strategies is the most important way

for learning language. Schmitt and Schmitt (1995) put that vocabulary learning strategies knowledge is very important. The knowledge of vocabulary learning strategies must be in educational programs and syllabuses. Holding the importance of strategies of learning for language learning and the importance of learning enriching vocabulary items and enriching vocabulary knowledge base, it is tried in this article to introduce most important vocabulary learning strategies that have been found as the most effective ones.

1. Key Word Method:

Of the most influential strategies of vocabulary learning, there is keyword method (Nation, 2001). "It is a two-step mnemonic technique for learning foreign vocabulary items and their English equivalents" (Atkinson & Rough, 1975; as cited in Crutcher, 1990). In this method, learners must find a part of the word which is similar for them in the sound, shape, or meaning to something in their mind or language, and use it as a keyword. Then, they must imagine a picture in their mind which relates both the word and the keyword together. For example, **Transient** When used as an adjective, transient describes something that exists for a short period of time then is gone. Transient is pronounced "tran see ent". A brief definition of transient is "short-lived, ephemeral". To create a strong mental link for this definition, we can encode the sounds of word "transient" and its meaning as mental images. We do this by thinking of images to represent the phonetic sounds of the word and definition. To me, the word transient sounds very much like "train sees ant (Retrieved from memory-improvement-tips.com). It is believed that when this link is provided, the word will be retained for a long time.

2. Vocabulary Flash Cards:

Nation and Webb (2010) consider learning vocabulary from flash needs highest level of involvement. Based on Lockhart and Craik's (1972, as cited in Schmitt, 2008) level of processing, if an activity has the highest level of involvement and deeper processing is needed, the outcome of that activity is retained and learned better. Holding the level of involvement, language learners must learn to use and to create their own flash cards if they want to be successful in retaining vocabularies for a longer period of time. Nation (2001),

in his comprehensive seminal book, namely, *Learning Vocabulary in Another language*, guides how to create and teach vocabulary items with flash cards.

3. Guessing From the Context:

Incidental vocabulary learning is one of the methods of teaching vocabulary that if it is done with intentional or instructed vocabulary learning, it will have very positive results. Guessing from the context is the most famous strategy of incidental vocabulary learning. Helping students on how to guess from the context and using clues in the text can not only increase their speed in reading but also helps them to learn vocabularies in association with the related contexts.

4. Word Parts

Learning word parts like affixes, prefixes, infixes, circumfixes, and roots of the words is an important strategy that learners can use to guess the meaning of the words fast. Scholars like Nation (1990) and Schmitt (1997) believe that teaching word parts to students is essential. Students who learn the word parts can analyze the unknown words and not only guess the meaning faster but also increase their speed in reading or whatever task they are doing that contains new vocabulary items for them. Thus, it is strongly recommended that teachers teach word parts to students to help them expand their vocabulary knowledge base quickly.

5. Repetition

The last important strategy that is mostly teacher-oriented is repetition. The scholars mostly believe that there must be at least seven times of exposure to take place for every word to be learned efficiently. Nation (2001) believes that Pimsleur's model of repetition is very applicable for vocabulary learning. Based on Pimsleur's graduated-interval recall, intervals must be 5 seconds, 25 seconds, 2 minutes, 10 minutes, 1 hour, 5 hours, 1 day, 5 days, 25 days, 4 months, and 2 years. Teachers must aware students of this spaced repetition schedule to help them in their vocabulary retention. Moreover, nation (2001), in his book, has also provided different methods of repetition that can take place in classroom in details.

Conclusion

In this article, most important vocabulary learning strategies were enlisted. These five strategies are found to be the most influential vocabulary learning strategies. Language teachers are recommended to consider teaching at least these five strategies because without vocabularies no one can convey meaning. For more information and deeper study of vocabulary learning strategies, you can refer to Schmitt and McCarthy's (1997) *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition, and pedagogy*.

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