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СУЧАСНІ ВИКЛИКИ І АКТУАЛЬНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ НАУКИ, ОСВІТИ ТА ВИРОБНИЦТВА: МІЖГАЛУЗЕВІ ДИСПУТИ



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BENEFITS OF TECHNOLOGY IN VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

András Petrusinec

M.A. Student, English Philology

Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education

andras.petrusinec@gmail.com

Abstract. The paper is aimed to provide a theoretical background related to effective vocabulary learning. The main aim of the research was to give a comprehensive overview on vocabulary learning strategies.

Based on academic literature, vocabulary is proved to be a dominant factor that determines the success of acquiring a language. This factor may be explained by the fact that it has a high influence on all the four language skills. Vocabulary itself is subdivided into two types: active and passive. Active vocabulary includes words that are used usually by the speaker, while passive vocabulary includes words that one knows, but rarely uses. To achieve the main aim of the study and obtain sufficient data, an empirical research was designed and carried out. The main hypothesis was that the majority of learners today prefer to learn by using the benefits of technology (YouTube videos, music, films, etc) more than by traditional methods (cramming, reading, word cards, etc.).

Key words: vocabulary knowledge, receptive vocabulary knowledge, productive vocabulary knowledge, vocabulary learning strategies.

1. Introduction.

Language learning can be a challenging and exciting task, especially for those who learn it as a foreign language. Every single language consists of sounds, words, and grammar. Grammar provides the overall patterns, and words are the basic materials to put into these patterns. Based on this fact, it becomes clear that

vocabulary learning is an inevitable part of language acquisition since without words verbal communication cannot be established. Learners' ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating is all influenced by vocabulary. Hence, vocabulary is a key to understanding a foreign language. David Wilkins, who is a famous English linguist, claims that "without grammar very little can be conveyed, but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" [2, pp. 111-112]. According to Jeremy Harmer "If the language structure is compared to the skeleton of language, then the words are important organs, flesh, and blood" [4, p.154]. Therefore, to acquire a language, a large number of vocabulary accumulation is crucial. Thus, learners who want to be able to communicate effectively have to use different methods and strategies. According to Rebecca Oxford, learning strategies are conscious specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that used by learners to enhance their own learning. These strategies can be such as seeking out conversation partners, giving oneself encouragement to accomplish a difficult language task, or simply watching special TV programmes in the target language [8].

The main purpose of the paper is to present a theoretical background related to effective vocabulary learning and to identify widely used vocabulary learning strategies.

2. The Importance of Vocabulary and its Types.

Language acquisition is an active procedure that requires, on the part of the learners, to regularly acquire vocabulary of the target language. Acquiring appropriate words to build one's mental library of lexicon is essential in order to use the language properly. A number of linguists defined vocabulary in a similar way. According to Philip Hubbard [7], vocabulary can be defined as a powerful carrier of meaning. The Cambridge Dictionary defines vocabulary as "all the words known and used by a particular person" or "all the words that exist in a particular language or subject" [3]. Additionally, Linda Diamond and Linda Gutlohn [5] suggest that vocabulary is the knowledge of words and their meanings. This means that without

establishing a developed vocabulary base first, comprehension and use of a language will not be achieved. Accordingly, learners should be able to recognise words and know their meanings as well. Thus, when a learner is effectively able to recognise and use a word in different contexts, speak, write, pronounce the word well, he/she has the knowledge and meaning of that word [1].

From the definitions above, it can be concluded that in general, vocabulary is the total number of words that are needed to communicate and express the speakers' ideas, feelings and thoughts. Besides, vocabulary is indispensable in order to acquire a particular language and to be able to express your inner thoughts. This idea is supported by Philip Hubbard [7] who states that the more words a learner knows, the more precisely that learner can express the exact meaning he/she wants to. This is one of the most important reason why it is necessary to learn and broaden vocabulary.

The most prominent researchers in this field such as Nation [6] and Laufer [1] or Harmer [4] has come to a conclusion that there are two main types of vocabulary: active/productive and passive/receptive vocabulary. The first type of vocabulary refers to the one that the learners have been taught and that they are expected to be able to use. Meanwhile, the second one refers to the words which learners will probably recognize when they see them, but which they will perhaps not be able to pronounce or use correctly. Productive knowledge is usually associated with speaking and writing while receptive knowledge is associated with listening and reading. Based on Webb's studies, very often it has been observed that there is no flawless division made between productive knowledge and receptive knowledge. In other words, during listening and reading, he claims that the learner also displays productive knowledge [10].

After clarifying the notion of vocabulary and its types, it is time to move to another point of the study where we are going to deal with the strategies through which learners can broaden their vocabulary.

3. Vocabulary Learning Strategies

The reason why some foreign language learners are able to learn faster and can achieve better results in their attempts while others are unsuccessful has been one of the main questions asked many language researchers. To answer the question, many of them have introduced several international second and foreign language learning strategy classifications. The differences between them are primarily due to different research methods or measuring strategies at different language tasks and in different contexts. Rebecca Oxford, who is a prominent scholar in this field, claims that learning strategies represent one of the key determinants of language acquisition and educational achievement. Language learning styles and strategies are among the main factors that help determine how and how well learners learn a second or foreign language. According to her, learning styles are the general approaches – for instance, auditory or visual – that learners use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject. In contrast, learning strategies are conscious specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that used by learners to enhance their own learning [8]. Oxford distinguished two main group of strategies (direct and indirect). Oxford's strategy comprised of six other groups further divided into additional subgroups. Oxford's detailed taxonomy originates in the attempt to integrate all known strategies into a single taxonomy. She linked her taxonomy of strategies to four language skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Some strategies in her taxonomy (especially memory and metacognitive strategies) reflect various learning styles and good learner's strategies [9]. Nevertheless, besides traditional vocabulary learning strategies, there are more modern strategies to learn new words. These new methods imply using modern gadgets and the Internet. Using YouTube videos, films, different video games (for example “Duolingo”) and the Internet as resources for studying provides students with opportunities to gather information through stimulation that will improve their imaginations and increase their interest towards the target language and its culture. The Internet provides easy and fast access to use up-to-date information and authentic materials in the language being learned. Such authentic

materials include, for instance, online newspapers, webcasts, podcasts, self-assessment tests or even video sharing websites such as YouTube, where learners, for instance, can find tons of explanations for different grammatical topics.

4. Research.

For this study two secondary schools in Berehove were selected. Sixty participants took part in the research, from which twenty-five were boys and thirty-five were girls. Each of them were aged between 13 and 14. The 9th grade was selected because they are supposed to be aware of different vocabulary learning strategies and the usage of technology devices such as smartphone, laptop, etc. In order to conduct this research a quantitative survey was carried out. Therefore, a questionnaire was developed as a measurement to obtain necessary data. This type of method was used because questionnaires provide a relatively cheap and quick way of obtaining reliable information from a number of participants.

The hypothesis was that the majority of learners today prefer to learn by using the benefits of technology (YouTube videos, music, films, etc) more than by traditional methods (cramming, reading, word cards, etc.).

After carrying out the research, the results showed that this hypothesis proved to be true. The results are shown in Diagram 4.1. Based on the outcomes the following important conclusions can be drawn. Watching films or listening to music in English are more popular techniques than, for instance, reading books or simple cramming. This may be explained by the fact that the development of technology affects our everyday lives so much that it is commonplace today even in learning. However, it is worth mentioning that reading and simple cramming, although not arbitrary for everyone, are still used by relatively many learners. One possible explanation for this is that most teachers still pay attention to ensuring that students learn words in the traditional way. Therefore, for example, they give homework assignments where the student has to learn words that are foreign to him/her and the most popular method for this is cramming. And reading always remains reading.

There will be those who will always love to read and there will be those who will hate it.

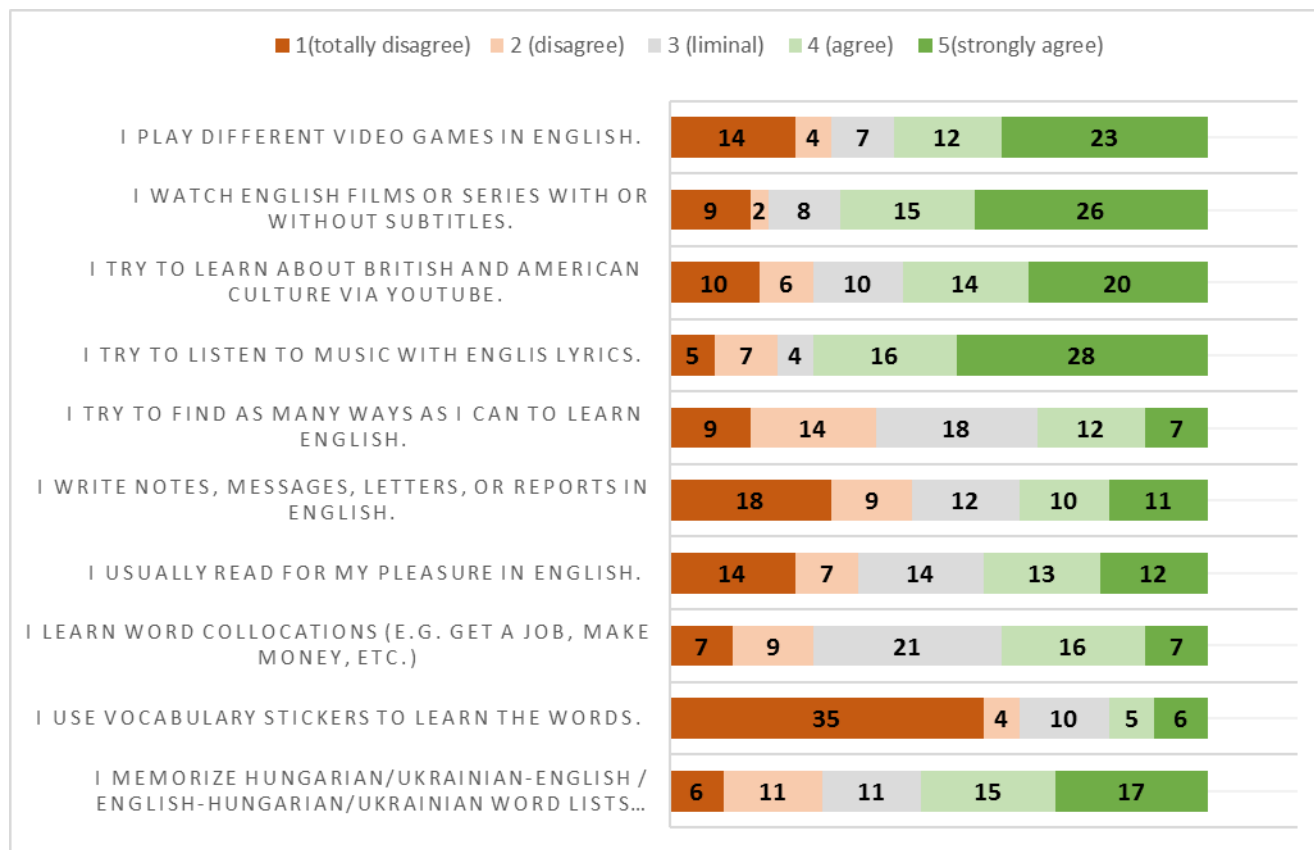


Diagram 4.1 The Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

In general, as one can see learners tend to use the advantage of technology to a much greater extent, which is perhaps not an issue until it has positive effects on the learner, rather than using traditional methods for vocabulary learning. Most of the learners showed positive attitude towards using technology in learning. This positive attitude of the learners is clearly visible throughout their learning process as they are more committed to learn via technology.

5. Summary

In conclusion, language learners today are more likely to learn using technology and the Internet than using traditional methods. Of course, this does not mean that methods that have been already well-used, such as cramming or reading, are completely neglected, but rather viewed as secondary or less up-to-date than, say, 30 years ago. This could be explained by the fact that nowadays learning with

technology can be much more exciting and interactive in some cases than with traditional methods. As a language learner and a novice researcher, I think it would be worthy for teachers to focus on getting as many students as possible familiar with the useful side of technology. By this we mean to show them web pages where learners can enrich their knowledge. This can be the case with many YouTube channels that deal with grammatical topics or try to introduce natural conversations. But they can also be audiobooks where the student can see and hear the text at the same time. Besides, learners can test their knowledge with self-assessing test on web pages such as Agendaweb.org. The range of possibilities that the technology and Internet provides is almost limitless, learners just have to know and use them correctly.

As many studies have shown (for example, Krashen 1982), the more learners interact with the target language, the more quickly they will master it. Surely with all of the material in English on the Internet, any learner can find sufficient input for his/her own taste. This does not only make it easier for them to learn the language, but in some cases they might also learn more about the culture of the target language, which is a significant part of language proficiency. By combining new methods and traditional ones, teachers achieve greater success in language teaching, while students achieve greater success in language acquisition which is good for both parties.

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