BENEFITS AND SUGGESTIONS OF IMPLICIT VOCABULARY TEACHING

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Abstract: One of the language elements that the learners have to master is vocabulary. Vocabulary is one of the important element beside grammar and pronunciation. The learners need to acquire the vocabulary to improve their skills in learning English. However, teaching vocabulary for language learners is not easy. Teachers need appropriate methods and techniques to help their students to acquire vocabulary naturally. How vocabulary should be taught raises problematic issue for many teachers or researchers. In this case, we suggest to use implicit teaching vocabulary. Implicit teaching brings more benefits than explicit teaching vocabulary. Therefore, we provide the suggestions to teach the vocabulary implicitly, which will facilitates the teachers to help their students in acquiring the vocabulary. Instruction in vocabulary learning strategies can be effective in teaching-learning process.

Key words: vocabulary, implicit teaching, strategies

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of significant issues in language teaching. It becomes a necessary component of second or foreign language proficiency. Vocabulary knowledge covers the words which assist learners to deliver the overall meaning in the communication. Aside from its importance in second or foreign language learning, vocabulary has been problematic issue for language learners. Learners are required to acquire a large amount of vocabulary for the sake of successful communication. Dealing with vocabulary, it is unavoidable that learners need to be familiar with thousands of lexical items. Lexical items are considered the basis of all four language skills and a vital element that links those skills. As stated before, in order to communicate well in a second or foreign language, students should acquire an adequate number of words and should know how to use them accurately. With limited vocabulary size, learners will have difficulties in exchanging ideas.
PROBLEMS IN VOCABULARY TEACHING

Vocabulary mastery is crucial for the second/foreign language learners, because it will make them to be successful in the language skills. Similarly, language teachers also encounter the problem related to vocabulary teaching. They have to develop effective materials and techniques for their students mastering certain level of vocabulary. The quantity of technology in recent times does not apparently help teachers to develop such materials for vocabulary teaching (Ozturk&Tanyer, 2014:37). Although there have been many options to provide authentic materials for language learners to increase language exposure, the choice of appropriate materials is still burdensome. The recent popular movement is to turn the vocabulary teaching from teacher-centered to be more student-centered. While traditional language teaching method focuses on lists, definitions, drills, and flash cards, the recent methods highlight the advent of authentic classroom tasks and activities. Toward the end of the 21st century, attention to vocabulary teaching is directed to which vocabulary is included into communicative tasks.

How should vocabulary be taught?

How vocabulary should be taught has stimulated some controversies over time. Brown (2007:435) emphasizes that “one of the ‘hot topics’ of the last decade in vocabulary teaching whether learners are better served in the long run with incidental exposure to lexical items or with intentional, explicit focus on vocabulary”. Incidental exposure in this matter is related to the concept in which teachers provide ‘access to sufficient comprehensible input’ so that learners can acquire vocabularies independently (Read, 2004:147). However, as shown in the studies of Read (2004) and Hulstjin (2001), intentional vocabulary teaching may gain greater significance in acquisition. Therefore, Hultsjn (2001:275) argues that it is still “necessary to re-visit such unfashionable procedures as regular rehearsal of words, rote learning, and training in automatic word recognition… particularly for beginning and intermediate level learners”.

A study on English vocabulary teaching and learning conducted by Zheng (2012) revealed several thoughts and opinions of English learners and teachers in China about their understandings and performance in vocabulary mastery. The result may not be overgeneralized but it can be a slight glance to uncover the iceberg phenomenon of problematic vocabulary teaching and learning. The findings of the study showed that teachers still prefer to use the traditional method to teach vocabulary. As a matter of fact, it also inferred that most students favor the traditional methods such as learning vocabulary by reading repeatedly, writing automatically, analyzing affixes and roots, association, keeping word cards with pictures, photographs, objects, etc. It can be concluded that the traditional ways of teaching and learning vocabulary are still popular.

The previous study reflected the fact that vocabulary instruction was dominated by the Grammar-Translation Method. This method has been used as the primary method in foreign language teaching in China for a longtime since it was introduced into the country in the early 20th century. Prator and Celce-Muria (1979:3) characterize vocabulary teaching in Grammar-Translation Method to be in the form of lists of isolated words.

In Indonesia, the teaching and learning vocabulary does not seem significantly different with the case in China. Although many recent methods have been acquainted, most teachers still use traditional one to teach vocabularies to their students. Taking as a case, an English teacher of a senior high-school asked each of her students to jot down 3000 English words, in alphabetically order, and their Indonesian translations on a vocabulary book. Those words are taken from any text sources with which students are feeling difficult or unfamiliar. In the end of
the semester, the students are asked to submit their vocabulary books without even being assessed whether they know the translation or not, or whether they understand what they were doing or not. Knowing that there are very little advantages from explicit vocabulary teaching, the appropriateness of this kind of teaching in 21st century is questioned. Therefore, we have to be able to convince ourselves that the old and explicit methods are no longer relevant in teaching vocabulary for students. From this reason, we suggest to use implicit vocabulary teaching.

Examining why implicit vocabulary teaching is more relevant

There are many reasons why teaching vocabulary implicitly to students is more relevant in this 21st century. First of all, the habit of teaching implicit vocabulary to students can guide the students to be independent learners. By teaching vocabulary implicitly, we can provide students with various materials without directing them to acquire the vocabulary forcefully. Accustoming students to find meanings of unfamiliar words using implicit method such as clues, guessing, and metaphors may be very helpful for them. In case students meet some difficult words in their reading, they can discover the meaning independently. It only happens if they use to relate the words to the context and not depend on their teachers’ instruction. Independent learners will want to find out more about the text they are reading. They seek out ways to explore. They learn from various techniques, not just traditional instruction. The students can also motivate themselves to acquire new vocabularies by their own, whether from reading or listening.

Second, using implicit vocabularies teaching will benefit teachers to use any media as long as the topic is interesting for the students. Accordingly, this method will ease teachers to use various media such as videos, newspaper, and short story. At this rate, students will acquire new vocabulary which is not provided in their textbook.

Third, implicit vocabulary teaching helps students to solve the questions in the National Examination (Ujian Nasional) related to the problems which ask them to understand certain words, synonyms, and the content of the text itself. By implicit teaching, students will be encouraged to use clues and guess to solve the problem.

Finally, implicit vocabulary teaching will not burden students with heavy load of vocabulary memorization. Students can allow themselves to create their own schemas for understanding the context. Acquiring new vocabulary through context will enable students’ long memory retention.

SUGGESTIONS IN TEACHING/LEARNING VOCABULARY (Zheng, 2012:131-132)

1. Better Awareness of Differences between Two Cultures.

Understanding the cultural differences is important in teaching vocabulary. “studying a language without knowing its culture is like knowing the shell without knowing its “content” (Hu W, 1988:1, cited in Zheng, 2012:132). Knowing the cultures of English will develop the learners’ awareness of native speakers’ way of thinking, to understand the meaning of words and use them appropriately. The metaphors in the language are very dynamic and creative, and usually colored by a certain culture, especially by the history, religious belief and so on. Such as, the literal meaning of “Godfather” is “a male who makes promises to help a Christian newly received into the church at the baptism ceremony” (longman Dictionary of English, 1987). Later, because of the popularity of the movie titled The Godfather the meaning has been
expanded: it now can refer to a person who is viewed as the most powerful or influential figure in an organization or community.

The teaching and learning of cultures can enhance learners’ metaphorical competence, upgrade their ability to comprehend metaphors, and will help them master the target language. The more we understand about the thinking, cognition of one culture, the more we understand its language, and its metaphors.

2. Improvement of Metaphorical Competence on the Part of Students.

Metaphoric competence is a kind of developmental cognitive mapping ability to find meaning in metaphor. It is largely an unconscious strategy to analogize one object from one domain to another object in another domain. When one faces incompatible concepts, the cognitive competence mechanism is present to figure out the analogous relationship or produce metaphoric expressions. The better the students’ metaphorical competence develops, the easier the students would feel in learning vocabulary and understanding lexical meanings.

3. More Autonomy in Learning Vocabulary on the Part of Students

Most of students fail to learn vocabulary independently because of the influences of the traditional teaching methods prevailing in China. In the traditional teacher-centered classroom, the teacher does too much of work and the students have less interest in learning vocabulary. The teacher is traditionally the knower, and the students are passive in learning.

According to the conceptual metaphor, humans can always make full use of the known knowledge to understand the new knowledge, which can release their burden of memory while they are learning. Therefore, the teachers should help students to refine their views about their role in learning and create an environment for them to learn vocabulary independently by applying conceptual metaphor.

**SUGGESTED MODEL FOR TEACHING-LEARNING VOCABULARY (Zheng, 2012:133-134)**

1. Expanding vocabulary by mapping between conceptual domains

Some psychologists hold that things in good order and meaningful groups have got greater chances to be memorized. Vocabulary is made up of a series of interrelated systems, not only just an arbitrary, there seems to be clear case for presenting words in a systematic way. The concept of one domain can be mapped onto another domain. So students can first memorize words in the same domain, and use them to express a wider variety of concepts. For example, **LOVE IS A JOURNEY**, the domain of JOURNEY can be mapped onto the domain of LOVE. Therefore, we can learn words and terms about JOURNEY like crossroad, dead-end street, bumpy road, on the rock, milestone, separate way, etc and put them into one meaning group. Then we map our understanding onto the target domain LOVE, and we will get the same group of words but with different metaphorically extended meanings.

Since concept metaphors have a unique place in the formation of languages, the awareness of concept metaphors can help students accelerate the learning process and expand their vocabulary systematically in English.

2. Acquiring vocabulary on the basis of similarity

Many words in language, their metaphorical referents have certain similarity with their original meaning referents in their shape, function, characteristic, etc. Such as, “crane” can refer to two different kinds of things: ”large bird with long legs and neck” and “machine with a long arm that can be swung round, used for lifting and moving heavy weights”. These kinds of bird and machine have similar shapes which have flexible long neck. The word “balance” not only
refers to the two ends of the scale, but also refers to “the mental balance”, “the balance of social
development” and “the balance of economic development”. “Cellular phone” is thus named
because people found its key board is similar to the shape of “cell”.

3. Learning internal relations between language and cognition.
   In a sense, cognition is the result that human beings have brought about in perceiving
   and experiencing the outside world, and is the inevitable outcome of the interaction between
   human beings and the outside world. This shows the importance of the language expression is
   not only decided by its conceptual content but also by how the conceptual content is observed,
   perceived, and understood. Different cognitive aspect leads to different metaphorical language.
   
   Here is an example of language affected by cognition: Dragons and tigers are very
   ferocious and terrible. Anyone who enters dragon’s pool or tiger’s den would face life-and-
   death danger. In general, most people fear death, which is people’s psychological reflection.
   Afterwards, a dangerous place of any kind is referred to as dragon’s pool and tiger’s den—a
   danger spot, and at the same time it is also taken as a psychological reflection.

4. Learning vocabulary based on embodied experiences
   The recent developments in cognitive linguistics have revealed how abstract meaning in
   language is shaped by bodily experience. We can understand and express such concepts as time,
   causation, direction or love through metaphors that are shaped out of our sense as embodied
   creatures.
   For example, the heart’s physical function of blood-pumping is strongly and noticeably
   affected by love, excitement, fear, and other strong emotions, therefore, the heart comes to
   symbolize some of those strong emotions, such as courage or passion. Likewise, emotional
   tension or feeling low can be linked to physical muscular states of tension or limpness which
   would accompany the relevant mental states.

5. Team work
   Team work will be suggested for it is a motivating factor which can give students the
   chances to share the information they have and learn vocabulary independently. In teams,
   students can have a discussion about all the information and stories related to the words they
   have known, and can make full use of the known to explore the unknown by mapping.

ANOTHER STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING-LEARNING VOCABULARY (Harmer, 2007:229-231)
   1. The teacher starts by showing or drawing pictures, or miming the action. The teacher may well
      conduct a rapid cue-response drill where she/he points to a picture or mimes the action and
      then nominates the student to say walk, climb, etc.
   2. They can do “class robot”, the students work in pairs, one student as a robot and the others
      give instructions, such as run to the window and the robot has to mime the activities.
   3. Giving the students a dialogue and see if they can guess the words that are missing in each of
      the blanks. Then they hear the spoken dialogue from an audio track so that they can see if
      their answer are right.

CONCLUSION
   Implementing the traditional approach such as Grammar-Translation Method in
   teaching vocabulary is apparently easier than the new approaches. When learners find some
   target language words are difficult, teachers would give the source language translation directly,
without considering probable ambiguity of the translation. In other case, especially in secondary school level, teachers would ask their students to look at the bilingual dictionary and find the translation. Seemingly, this kind of techniques is more doable for teachers to teach vocabulary. Unfortunately, this traditional approach will lead learners to be dependent on their language teachers. If it happens, who will take the wrong, the learners who depend so much on their teachers or the teachers who cannot make use of appropriate vocabulary teaching? Therefore, implicit language teaching should be implemented in teaching vocabulary. A best way to handle it, perhaps, is to make language teachers are aware of some fruitful strategies to help learners in acquiring vocabulary, so that learners will not depend too much on their teachers.

REFERENCES


