

Vocabulary Learning Strategies for Thai Learners : Research to Practice

กลวิธีการเรียนคำศัพท์สำหรับผู้เรียนชาวไทย : จากงานวิจัยสู่การปฏิบัติ

จงรักษ์ เลี้ยงพานิชย์¹
Chongrak Liangpanit

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อที่จะอธิบายถึงกลวิธีการเรียนคำศัพท์ในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษสำหรับผู้เรียนคนไทย ในส่วนแรกของบทความนี้ อธิบายความสำคัญของกลวิธีการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ ความหมายของกลวิธีการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ ประเภทของกลวิธีการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ ส่วนที่สองแสดงถึงงานวิจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องกับกลวิธีการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์และการนำไปใช้ บทความนี้จะเสนอแนะแก่ผู้เรียนชาวไทยในด้านการพัฒนาการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ที่สามารถนำไปใช้ศึกษาได้ด้วยตนเองและเป็นแนวทางในการช่วยให้ครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษสามารถนำกลวิธีเหล่านี้ไปใช้ในการสอนคำศัพท์ ให้มีประสิทธิภาพยิ่งขึ้น

คำสำคัญ : การใช้กลวิธีการเรียนคำศัพท์

¹ อาจารย์ ดร.ประจำมหาวิทยาลัยขอนแก่น

Abstract

This article aims to present a focus on the information of vocabulary learning strategy in English learning for Thai learners. The first part of this article draws the overall picture of vocabulary learning strategy in terms of importance of vocabulary learning strategy, definition, and classification of vocabulary learning strategy. The second part of this article devotes to the related research studies and its implications. This article will be greatly beneficial for Thai learners, can facilitate them to learn vocabulary learning strategy by themselves. It also helps the teachers to understand this issue better to teach vocabulary for students effectively.

Keyword : vocabulary learning strategy

INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, inadequate English vocabulary is a problem obstructing students to acquire the four skills of language, listening, speaking, reading and writing, especially an inadequate English vocabulary. Vocabulary learning is claimed by many Thai researchers to be a major problem in English language learning (Liangpanit. 2002; Nomsiri. 2005 ; Duadsuntia. 2008; Mongkol. 2008). To address the problems of vocabulary learning, Thai students need certain methods to facilitate their vocabulary learning. Therefore, to understand vocabulary learning strategies can be one of the ways to solve the problems of vocabulary learning as strategies are useful to students when learning vocabulary.

The main discussion of this paper will attempt to present the following issues:

1. Importance of vocabulary learning strategy
2. Definition of vocabulary learning strategies
3. Classification of vocabulary learning strategies

4. Related research studies on vocabulary learning strategy
5. Vocabulary learning strategy and their implications

Importance of vocabulary learning strategy

To know vocabulary learning strategies can be one of the ways to solve the problems of vocabulary learning as strategies are useful to students when learning vocabulary. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary learning strategies facilitate learners to decide what vocabulary to pay attention to, to find information about vocabulary, and to increase their vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary learning strategies are also used for discovering the meaning of a new word, and for memorizing words (Schmitt. 1997). Using effectively vocabulary strategy could assist in teaching and learning, once this ability is gained, students can transfer them to other language skills. Throughout the development of vocabulary, students are allowed to one more way of communication and can gain from one more important source of input. (Biggs. 1999). If vocabulary is enhanced, it may provide practical data in improving language skills and can gather speed language learning. To be self-sufficient, students must know how to learn, so knowing vocabulary learning strategy can help the students to recognize situation where they can use these vocabulary learning strategies and become aware of these strategies that are suitable for them and use them effectively.

Definition of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

There are many scholars providing definitions of vocabulary learning strategy. Nation (2001) mentioned that vocabulary learning strategies are a subset of language learning strategies. Moreover, he further proposed that vocabulary learning strategies are used to

facilitate learners to decide what vocabulary to pay attention to, to find information about vocabulary, and to increase vocabulary knowledge. Ellis (1994) stated that vocabulary learning strategies are the strategies that learners employ to memorize isolated vocabulary and to learn new vocabulary from context. According to Schmitt (1997), vocabulary learning strategies are used to discover the meaning of a new word and to consolidate the word that has been newly encountered. Cameron (2001) defined that vocabulary learning strategies are the actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary items.

To sum up, Ellis (1994), Schmitt (1997) and Cameron (2001) defined vocabulary learning strategies in a similar way as the strategies used to discover meaning of new vocabulary and to memorize vocabulary. However, Nation (2001) defined vocabulary learning strategies in a different way. He claimed that vocabulary learning strategies are used as plans to learn vocabulary, sources to find information of vocabulary, and processes to create knowledge of vocabulary.

Classification of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

The classifications of vocabulary learning strategies are proposed by several experts. The following taxonomies of vocabulary learning strategies are based on the work of several scholars namely Gu and Johnson (1996) ; Lawson and Hogben (1996) ; Schmitt (1997) ; Hedge (2000) and Nation (2001) Gu and Johnson (1996) divided vocabulary learning strategies into six main groups including guessing strategies, dictionary strategies, note-taking strategies, rehearsal strategies, encoding strategies, and activation strategies. These vocabulary learning strategies were reported employing Chinese university students. According to Lawson and Hogben (1996), four categories of vocabulary learning strategies including repetition, word feature analysis, simple

elaboration, and complex elaboration were elicited from the participants in the study and classified. However, the data obtained in the study was only a report of strategies used by the participants in order to learn new words.

The taxonomy was divided into two main classes: 1) strategies used for discovering a new word's meaning, and 2) strategies used for consolidating a word that has been already encountered. His taxonomy includes determination, social, memory, cognitive, and meta-cognitive categories. Determination strategies are used in order to gain initial knowledge of vocabulary by word part analysis, guessing from context, and consulting dictionaries. Social strategies were when learners ask other people such as an instructor, a peer, or a native speaker for word meanings or translations. Memory strategies are applications that help retain and recall vocabulary by connecting to existing knowledge such as mnemonic techniques, semantic features, and associations. Cognitive strategies include rehearsal and repetition learning, such as verbal or written repetition. Metacognitive strategies are used to control and assess one's learning process; for example, learners study through English media, or they evaluate their own performance.

Hedge (2000) proposed strategies for learning vocabulary items. These vocabulary learning strategies were divided into two main categories as follows, namely, Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies involve strategies for using the vocabulary and for understanding how vocabulary works. Metacognitive strategies concern preparing, planning for learning, selecting, and using learning strategies, monitoring strategy use, orchestrating various kinds of strategies, and evaluating the effectiveness of strategy use and learning.

In Nation's (2001) taxonomy, aspects of vocabulary knowledge are separated into three major categories: planning, sources, and

processes. The planning category is divided into three strategies which help learners determine what aspects of vocabulary knowledge are worthwhile to concentrate on. The sources category is comprised of four strategies, which facilitate learning a word through determining useful information about it. The processes category consists of three strategies which involve retaining the word in the student's memory and enhancing word use. In addition, these strategies range widely in complexity.

It can be seen that most of vocabulary learning strategies seem overlapped and share common strategies. Mostly, categories of vocabulary learning strategies are based on two main purposes introduced by Schmitt (1997), which are strategies to discover the meaning of new vocabulary and strategies to memorize new vocabulary. The vocabulary learning strategies used to discover the meaning of new vocabulary include word feature analysis strategies, dictionary strategies, guessing strategies, determination strategies and social strategies. The vocabulary learning strategies used to memorize new vocabulary include repetition strategies, simple elaboration strategies, complex elaboration strategies, and rehearsal strategies, elaboration strategies, encoding strategies, social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies and meta-cognitive strategies.

Related Studies on Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Over the past two decades, there have been various studies focusing on EFL / ESL learners' utilizing of vocabulary learning strategy. Mostly, the studies were conducted in order to identify types and frequency use of vocabulary learning strategy employed by students and to find relationships between factors and strategy use such as level of proficiency, gender, academic field, learner characteristics ,

background knowledge, level of vocabulary proficiency (Wei. 2007; Kudo.1999; Schmitt. 1997; Lawson. and Hogben. 1996; Gu and Johnson. 1996 ; Siriwan.2007; Intaraprasert. 2004 ; KohThong Chiang . 2006; Chansin. 2007; Kongthong, 2007) The participants of those study conducted were chosen with the various educational levels, namely in primary, secondary, and university levels including their different major fields. The consensus results revealed that frequency of students' overall reported use of vocabulary learning strategy varied significantly according to these examined variables. The results show that these factors were found strongly related to variables, including gender of the students, major field of study, previous language learning experience and level of vocabulary proficiency. No factors were found to be related to type of academic program of study.

Furthermore, some researchers tried to investigate and define different vocabulary learning strategies used by foreign language learners; it can be showed as followings below.

Lütfiye Cengizhan (2010) represented different vocabulary learning strategies applied by foreign language learners. The general objective of the study was to investigate and find out the frequency of using vocabulary learning strategies among foreign language learners according to their gender and classes. The results indicated that the meta-cognitive strategies were the most frequently used vocabulary learning strategies among the foreign language learners. In contrast it was seen that cognitive strategies were the least commonly applied vocabulary learning strategies among the students.

Serkan Çelik (2010) examined vocabulary learning strategies adopted by Turkish EFL students, specifically the frequencies. The results indicated here was a positive relation between the frequency of the learners' use of strategies and the rank of their language levels. Here,

the exceptional category is the social strategies because the data showed that the low level learners preferred to use the social strategies more than the other level learners.

In Thailand, Siriwan (2007) who investigated vocabulary learning strategy employed by university students revealed that students with high proficiency level employed a great number of strategies while they handling difficult words. Moreover, the types of strategies in these studies ranked by frequency use are using an English-Thai dictionary, guessing the meaning from contexts, and using a Thai - English dictionary. The research also reported the top three strategies including English - Thai dictionary, Thai - English dictionary, and guessing meaning from contexts, respectively. It is also indicated that most of the students at the university level rely heavily on a bilingual dictionary.

Sarnthong (2010) also investigated vocabulary learning strategy employed by business English majors. The results indicated that for the discovery strategies, the good language learners used English-Thai dictionaries and Thai-English dictionaries as well as guessing the meaning from context clues. They looked at other features in a dictionary including parts of speech, the phonetic alphabet, multiple meanings, and example sentences. Moreover, they utilized context clues of sentences and paragraphs to discover the meaning of new words. For the retention strategies, the good language learners retained new words by listening to English songs and the English conversation of other people. They also studied pronunciation and spelling. In addition, they reported listing words in a notebook and then reviewed the words often. Moreover, they used sentences to recall and memorize new words. For the expansion strategies, the good language learners expanded the word knowledge by taking notes in class and using English media.

Another challenge examples of research studies related to this issue are attempted to discover how the successful learners use vocabulary learning strategy. Some related studies have attempted to identify the ways in which 'good' and 'poor' learners learning of vocabulary learning strategies.

Ahmed (1989) and Sanaoui (1995) revealed that successful vocabulary learners were found to be active strategy users who were conscious of their learning and took steps to adjust it, but poor learners displayed slight awareness of how to learn new words or how to connect new words to old knowledge. Gu and Johnson (2003) mentioned that successful learners purposely select, consciously monitor and evaluate the strategy they use for the accomplishment of their aim. The unsuccessful learners, on the other hand, employ learning behaviors similar to their peers without being conscious but also without having an aim. Thus, a learner needs to be able to consciously apply a strategy to a cognitive process to strengthen the link between the strategy and the achievement of vocabulary learning (Macaro, 2005). In this regard,

Cohen (1996.) indicated that many students do not develop sufficient mastery of a strategy repertoire that will allow them to make progress in language learning on their own. Thus, they need to be given explicit instruction to become more aware of and proficient with the broad range of strategies that can be used through the learning process (Cohen, Weaver and Li, 1998; Oxford, 1996 ; Wenden, 1991).

Vocabulary learning strategy and their implications

Understanding vocabulary learning strategy use in English learning context would provide insights to facilitate vocabulary pedagogical implications for instructors and course designers in English teaching development. First, learners as a non native speaker of English and

foreign language learners should learn to recognize the vocabulary learning strategy they used and be trained to select the most appropriate techniques for the instructional Thai context. Successful good language learners may serve as informants for other students experiencing less successful learners regarding using strategies.

Second, instructors should become more aware of the learners use the vocabulary strategy in acquiring the words learning. They can develop their teaching technique and use these strategies to serve their students' learning. If language teachers want to improve the vocabulary of their students, they should be careful about the method or technique that is to be applied. Many other effective methods and techniques can be used with semantic mapping as a modern and effective method that can be applied in foreign language teaching process for improving or forming vocabulary competence.

Third, semantic mapping strategy should be promoted to use as an alternative way to teach vocabulary items for students. In this technique, the students had an active role in learning process. As semantic maps were believed to assist the learner in recalling information and relating new information to prior knowledge, the learners were supposed to use of their prior knowledge the categorical arrangement of word concepts, affect substantially and positively general vocabulary knowledge.

Fourth, in learning a foreign language, it is necessary to remind for the teachers that different learners use different methods at different times and in different circumstances. To perform a certain method cannot give proper result as all learners have different comprehension leaning.

CONCLUSION

This paper describes the extent to vocabulary learning strategies, importance, definition, classification of vocabulary learning strategies, related studies on vocabulary learning strategies and its implication.

The use of vocabulary learning strategies will be beneficial to students who have difficulty of learning vocabulary. The students might use vocabulary learning strategies from those previous research findings to learn vocabulary by themselves inside and outside the classroom. Teachers may also use these strategies guideline to develop their teaching plans and materials in vocabulary teaching and to help design English courses. Therefore, it may help teachers develop the English courses and teaching approaches appropriately.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, M. O. (1989). "Vocabulary learning strategies," In P. Meara (ed.), **Beyond words** (pp. 3-14). London : British Association for Applied Linguistics, in association with Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research.
- Cameron, L. (2001). **Teaching languages to young learners**. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Chansin, W. (2007). **A study of English vocabulary learning strategies of good and poor learners of English at the university level**. Master of Arts Thesis in English, Graduate School. Khon Kaen : Khon Kaen University.
- Cohen, A. D., Weaver, S. J., and Li, Tao-yuan. (1995.). **The impact of strategies-based instruction on speaking a foreign language**. Research Report. Minneapolis : Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition. University of Minnesota
- Cohen, A. D. and Scott, K. (1996). " **A synthesis of approaches to assessing language learning Strategies**," In Oxford, R. L. (ed.), **Language learning strategies around the world : Crosscultural perspectives (Series ed)**. Richard Schmidt, National Foreign Language Resource Center. Manoa : University of Hawaii Press.
- Duadsuntia, T. (2008). **Using a keyword method to enhance learners' vocabulary recall and retention**. Master of Arts Thesis in English, Graduate School. Khon Kaen : Khon Kaen University.
- Ellis, M. and Johnson, C. (1994). **Teaching Business English**. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1994). **The study of second language acquisition**. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Gu, Y. and Johnson, R. (1996). "Vocabulary learning strategies and language learning outcomes," **Language Learning**. 46, 643-679.

- Hedge, T. (2000). **Teaching and learning in the language classroom.** Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Intaraprasert, C. (2004). **EST students and vocabulary learning strategies : A preliminary investigation.** Unpublished research, School of English Institute of Social Technology, Nakornratchaseema : Suranaree University of Technology.
- Koh Thong Chiang, A. (2006). **Vocabulary learning strategies in English reading in a natural setting of students.** Master of Arts Thesis in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Graduate School, Chaing Mai : Chaing Mai University.
- Kongthong, J. (2007). **A survey study of L2 vocabulary learning strategies of 4th year students, the Faculty of Fine Arts, at Rjamangala University of Technology Tawan-Ok Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth Campus.** Master of Arts, Language Institute. Bangkok : Thammasat University.
- Kudo, Y. (1999). **"L2 vocabulary learning strategies. Honolulu : University of Hawaii,"** Secodnd Language Teaching and Curriculum Center. Retrieved December 28, 2009, from [http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/nflrc/NetWorks/ NW14/](http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/nflrc/NetWorks/NW14/)
- Lawson, M. J, and Hogben, D. (1996). "The vocabulary-learning strategies of foreign-language Students," **Language Learning**, 46(1), 101-135.
- Liangpanit, C. (2002). **Supplementary exercises of vocabulary in news section in student weekly.** Master of Arts Independent Study in English, Graduate School. Khon Kaen : Khon Kaen University.
- Louhiala-Salminen, L. (1996). "The business communication classroom vs reality : What should we teach today?," **English for Specific Purposes**, 15(1), 37-51.

- Macaro, E. (2005). "Code-switching in the L2 classroom : A communication and learning strategy," In E. Llurda (ed.), **Non-native language teachers : Perceptions, challenges, and contributions to the profession.** (pp. 63-84). Boston, MA : Springer.
- Mongkol, N. (2008). **A study of vocabulary learning strategies of the first and second year students from English Department at Phetchaburi Rajabhat University.** Master of Arts Thesis. Bangkok : Kasetsart University.
- Nation, I.S.P. (2001). **Learning vocabulary in another language.** Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Nomsiri, W. (2005). **Needs of business administration students for business english reading course.** Master of Arts Independent Study . Khon Kaen : Khon Kaen University.
- Oxford, R. F. (2002). "Language learning strategies in a nutshell : Update and ESL suggestions," In J. C Richards and W.A. Renandya (eds.), **Methodology in Language Teaching : An Anthology of Current Practice.** Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Sanaoui, R. (1995). "Adult learner's approaches learning vocabulary in second languages," **The Modern Language Journal**, 79 (1), 15 - 28.
- Sarnthong. (2010). **Vocabulary learning strategy employed by good language learners, business English.** Majors.independent study. Khon kaen : Khon kaen University.
- Schmitt, N. (1997). "Vocabulary learning strategies," In N. Schmitt and M. McCarthy (Eds.), **Vocabulary Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy.** Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Siriwan, M. (2007). **English vocabulary learning strategies employed by Rajabhat University students.** Dissertation in English Language Studies. Suranaree University of Technology.

- Wei, M. (2007). "An examination of vocabulary learning of college-level learners of English in China," **The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly**, 9(2).
- Wenden, A. (1991). **Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy**. Englewood Cliffs, NJ : Prentice-Hall.