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VOCABULARY ACQUISITION THROUGH READING

Reading is indispensable within the context of contemporary objectives of foreign language teaching due to its functionality. The article discusses the role of reading in the vocabulary acquisition process. Given the rational use, reading can help learners in their vocabulary development process, variegate the learning process, help learners enhance the proper motivation for the language learning.

Keywords: vocabulary, acquisition, extensive reading, incidental learning, communicative competence, communicative language teaching, skills, vocabulary development.

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ПРИОБРЕТЕНИЕ СЛОВАРНОГО ЗАПАСА ЧЕРЕЗ ЧТЕНИЕ

В процессе обучения английскому языку применяются различные методы для развития и активизации языковых навыков. Чтение, как средство обучения имеет особый вес, так как оно является специфической языковой средой, способствующей развитию других речевых навыков и умений, в частности расширению лексического запаса. В статье рассматривается роль чтения в процессе формирования словарного запаса, что одновременно способствует формированию коммуникативной компетенции.

Ключевые слова: чтение, экстенсивное чтение, интенсивное чтение, коммуникативная компетенция, навыки, развитие словарного запаса.

Հիա Ղարախանյան
 Անգլերեն լեզվի ամբիոն, ԱրՊՀ

ԲԱՌԱՊԱՇՇԱՐԻ ՁԵՆՔԲԵՐՈՒՄԸ՝ ԸՆՏԵՐՑԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՄԻՋՈՑՈՎ

Ընթերցանության օգտագործման գաղափարը օտար լեզուների ուսուցման համատեքստում պայմանավորված է իր ֆունկցիոնալ լինելով: Հողվածում քննարկվում է ընթերցանության դերը բառապաշարի ձևավորման գործընթացում: Ռացիոնալ օգտագործման պարագայում ընթերցանությունը նպաստում է բառապաշարի հարստացմանը, կարող է ակտիվացնել ուսանողների հաղորդակցային գործունեությունը, եւ ստեղծել ներքին մոտիվացիա ուսանողների մոտ:

Բանալի բառեր՝ ընթերցանություն, էկստենսիվ ընթերցանություն, հաղորդակցային կոմպետենցիա (իրազեկություն), բառապաշարի զարգացում, հմտություններ:

In the light of some limitations of communicative language teaching and the underlying assumption that foreign language vocabulary can be acquired and developed through natural, communicative exposure as in first language vocabulary development, some researchers started to notice that vocabulary acquisition is a central aspect of language learning and an enormous task.

The purpose of the article is to discuss the ways in which reading is conducive to vocabulary development. Vocabulary is a crucial component of overall communicative competence. Vocabulary is generically defined as the knowledge of words and word meanings. More specifically, vocabulary refers to the kind of words that students must know to read increasingly demanding text with comprehension¹. It is something that expands and deepens over time.

With the growth of classroom-centred research, it becomes evident that, “not only do the majority of students studying foreign languages cite vocabulary as their number one priority, but it is often considered a priority by teachers as well”².

Though, Paribakht and Wesche point out that there still remains an enormous amount of research to be done in the area, as “it is still far from clear how learners acquire vocabulary or how it can best be taught”¹. This is why the issue of how to better acquire foreign language vocabulary has increasingly drawn the attention of learners and teachers.

¹ Kamil, M., Hiebert, E. (2005). Teaching and learning vocabulary: Perspectives and persistent issues. In E.H. Hiebert and M.L. Kamil (Eds.), Teaching and learning vocabulary: Bringing research to practice (pp.1-23). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

² Knight, S. M. (1994). Dictionary use while reading: The effects on comprehension and vocabulary acquisition for students of different verbal abilities. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78, 285–299.

A number of studies during the last two decades have confirmed the common belief that second language learners can acquire vocabulary through reading.

Reading is a major source for language inputs among both foreign and native learners and speakers. Reading input provides the basis for most vocabulary learning², and to facilitate acquisition of vocabulary, reading inputs should be authentic and comprehensible³. Krashen conducted many studies supporting input theory, and pointed out that inputs are preconditions and prerequisites for learning English.⁴

To achieve the desired vocabulary learning outcomes, learners should be encouraged to read many authentic and comprehensible materials.

However, most EFL learners receive only limited language inputs, which inhibits their ability to read a wider variety of English material. Unfortunately, this is common in many EFL settings.

It is widely agreed that much foreign language vocabulary learning occurs incidentally while the learner is engaged in extensive reading. Day and Bamford suggested that extensive reading helps students become more proficient in the English language⁵. One of the major focuses on reading in L2 learning is the extensive reading approach. According to Day and Bamford, this term was first applied in foreign language pedagogy in the early 20th century to distinguish it from intensive reading, which is reading word for word; whereas extensive reading is “real-world reading but for a pedagogical purpose”⁶. So we need to distinguish between intensive and extensive reading. Intensive reading refers to the detailed focus on the construction of reading texts which takes place usually in classroom. It is related to extracts from magazines or newspapers which may be found in coursebooks and their choice is determined by the specific purposes that students have in mind.

On the other hand, extensive reading refers to reading which students do often away from the classroom. It is related to newspapers, magazines, books or web pages and it is enhanced if the choice of reading material depends on students. The essential element of extensive reading is reading for pleasure. Krashen calls this kind of reading free voluntary reading and highly recommends it not only for native speakers of English, but also for foreign students of English.⁷

But if vocabulary is addressed at all in the ESL classroom, it is has traditionally been relegated to the secondary position of incidental learning. The controversy between incidental and intentional learning of vocabulary has existed for decades, and many studies have been conducted to distinguish between these two forms of learning.

Incidental learning, which is achieved in an implicit way, is a “byproduct” of any teaching activity.⁸ When learners try to understand the embedded meaning of a context, the acquisition of words occurs subconsciously⁹. Many studies have also explored the effects of extensive reading on incidental vocabulary learning have also been explored in many studies. Although these studies used different methodologies, they produced a similar result: incidental vocabulary learning does occur from reading.

Incidental vocabulary learning was viewed as an essential part of L2 vocabulary acquisition. Nation stressed the importance of incidental learning through “message-focused activities” as follows: “A well-balanced language learning program has an appropriate balance of opportunities to learn from message-focused activities and from direct study of language items, with direct study of language items occupying no more than 25% of the total learning program.”¹⁰

Incidental learning is the process of learning something without the intention of doing so. In other words it is a learning one thing while intending to learn another. In terms of language acquisition, incidental learning is said to be an effective way of learning vocabulary from context.¹¹ Incidental Vocabulary Learning motivates learners for extensive reading. It involves learners’ ability to guess the meaning of new words from the contextual clues. Incidental learning occurs more particularly through extensive reading in input-rich environments, albeit at a rather slow rate¹².

Incidental vocabulary promotes deeper mental processing and better retention. The learners get themselves fully involved in the process of decoding the meaning through the clues available in the text. They think and rethink about the new words involving cognitive process which helps the learners retain the words for a longer period of time. Cognitive process includes both receptive and productive aspects of vocabulary.

¹Paribakht, T. S., & Wesche, M. (1997). Vocabulary enhancement activities and reading for meaning in second language vocabulary development. In J. Coady & T. Huckin (Eds.). *Second language vocabulary acquisition: A rationale for pedagogy* (pp. 174-200). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Nation, I. S. P. (2008). *Teaching vocabulary: strategies and techniques*. Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning.

³ Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. New York, NY: Longman.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Day, R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Ibid., p 5.

⁷ Krashen, Stephen (2nd edition. 2004) *The Power of Reading: insights from the research*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

⁸ Hulstijn, J. H. (2001). Intentional and incidental second-language vocabulary learning: A reappraisal of elaboration, rehearsal and automaticity. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language instruction* (pp. 258-286). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

⁹Paribakht, T. S., & Wesche, M. (1997). Vocabulary enhancement activities and reading for meaning in second language vocabulary development. In J. Coady & T. Huckin (Eds.). *Second language vocabulary acquisition: A rationale for pedagogy* (pp. 174-200). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰ Nation, I.S.P. (2014) Designing reading tasks to maximise vocabulary learning. *Applied Research on English Language*, 3(5), 1-8.

¹¹ Ibid. 10

¹² Coady, J. (1997). L2 vocabulary acquisition through extensive reading. In J. Coady & T. Huckin (Eds.), *Second language vocabulary acquisition: A rationale for pedagogy* (pp. 225-237). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Learners understand not only the meanings in the given text but the related grammatical patterns, common lexical sets and typical association of the word with the context. Learning vocabulary through extensive reading also improves learners' fluency. Learners look at group of words rather than each individual word while reading. Hulstijn and Laufer were of view that the words that learners encounter in incidental vocabulary learning will be retained in the long term memory and could be used more confidently in different situations.¹

According to Coady, many studies seem to indicate “except for the first few thousand most common words, vocabulary learning dominantly occurs through extensive reading, with the learner guessing at the meaning of unknown words.”² There are, however, disadvantages for incidental vocabulary learning compared to more direct learning. Incidental vocabulary learning is not always effective because as the researcher point out that contextual information is often ambiguous and not sufficiently reliable for L1 and L2 learners to be able to make the correct inference and learners run the risk, therefore, of failing to verify the correctness of inferences and can learn words incorrectly.³

After a decade of intensive research, however, the incidental learning of vocabulary is still not fully understood, and many questions remain unsettled. Key unresolved issues include the actual mechanism of incidental acquisition, the type and size of vocabulary needed for accurate guessing, the degree of exposure to a word needed for successful acquisition, the efficacy of different word-guessing strategies, the value of teaching explicit guessing strategies, the influence of different kinds of reading texts, the effects of input modification, and, more generally, the problems with incidental learning.

Even when vocabulary is taught more directly in the classroom, it tends to be via supplementary workbooks containing word manipulation exercises, rather than as a main element of the curriculum. Schmitt points out that these types of “approaches to vocabulary have unsurprisingly focused on activities for the explicit study of vocabulary”⁴.

It has become apparent, on the basis of the above-mentioned arguments, to all subjects involved in the processes of language teaching and learning, that vocabulary acquisition cannot rely on implicit incidental learning but needs to be controlled. The advocates of this view not disputing the significance of acquiring grammatical syntactical structures or the role of the context have begun to insist on more intensive, explicit vocabulary teaching from the very beginning of any language learning programme⁵. Explicit vocabulary teaching would ensure that lexical development in the target language follows a systematic and logical path, thus avoiding uncontrolled accumulation of sporadic lexical items. However, the contribution and effect of explicit vocabulary teaching on vocabulary acquisition is still under dispute. Learners do not learn everything that teachers teach. The contemporary approach to vocabulary teaching recognises the importance of both implicit and explicit teaching, taking into account the results of scientific research, with the aim to increase the efficiency of teaching and learning of target language vocabulary.

On the contrary, intentional vocabulary learning based on synonyms, antonyms, word substitution, multiple choice, scrambled words and crossword puzzles, regardless of context, seems to be not so effective, because learners are more prone to rote learning. They cram the meaning of the new words without undergoing cognitive process. A very few words learned through this method get transformed into active process. Whereas reading new words and inferring the meaning through context will be more productive because it sharpens the ability for guessing. By practicing guessing the students can infer the general import and begin to understand the meaning gradually. Hence the process of guessing is of prime importance for vocabulary learning. Guessing is useful for both the proficient learners and low proficiency- level learners. While guessing, the learners' focus gets increased, and after guessing when the new words are learned by consulting dictionaries, they could be retained for a longer period of time. Hence the guess should be tried out in the context first, then to see whether it makes.

Learning vocabulary through instruction is a complex process influenced by a number of factors: the teacher's approach to vocabulary teaching (i.e. vocabulary teaching strategies) and his or her understanding of the key notions in vocabulary acquisition, the effort invested by learners in vocabulary learning (i.e. vocabulary learning strategies) as well as their readiness to take responsibility for their own learning. This seems to justify the suggestion of many researchers that incidental learning should be followed up with intentional learning.⁶

Since reading can be the main source of vocabulary growth in foreign language contexts, an important implication would be inclusion of comprehensive reading component which can greatly contribute to vocabulary learning as many aspects of word knowledge can be learned only in context.

¹ Hulstijn, J. H., & Laufer, B. (2001). Some empirical evidence for the involvement load hypothesis in vocabulary acquisition. *Language Learning*, 51, 539-558.

² Ibid. 11.

³ Nation, I.S.P. (1982) Beginning to learn foreign vocabulary: a review of the research *RELC Journal* 13: 14-36.

⁴ Schmitt, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in language teaching*, p.146. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Judd, E. L. (1978). Vocabulary teaching and TESOL: A need for reevaluation of existing assumptions. *TESOL Quarterly*, 11 (1), 71-75.

⁶ Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.