Vocabulary Learning Strategies :
How Many Words? Which Words? How Can Students Learn Them?

Brien DATZMAN

要約（**Summary**）

In the past 30 years second language acquisition research has seen an increase in focus on vocabulary and language learning strategies. In more recent years research focused on EFL and ESL students use of vocabulary learning strategies has found factors such as age, gender, culture, and context to have a significant effect on students use or lack of use and how successful they are in their use. The following paper provides a brief overview of the role vocabulary learning strategies can have in the classroom and how that role should be defined.

過去 30 年間、第二言語習得の研究は語彙と言語習得方法にフォーカスを当ててきた。また、最近の研究によれば EFL, ESL の学習者の語彙習得法における年齢、性別、文化、文脈などの要因が、新しい語彙の使用頻度や適切さに重要な役割を果している。この論文では、言語習得法が実際に教育現場でどのような役割を果たしているのか、また、その役割はどうのように定義されるのかを考察する。

INTRODUCTION

The enormity of the English vocabulary poses a great challenge to foreign language learners. When we consider the amount of knowledge needed to know a word and the incremental nature of the acquisition of that knowledge the task becomes that much greater. The amount of attention that can and should be given to increasing this knowledge in the classroom is miniscule in comparison to the amount of attention needed. Vocabulary learning strategies can play an important role in shaping how learners deal with vocabulary both in and outside the classroom. In order for learners to successfully use these strategies learners need to first be aware of them and their importance. From there instruction and practice can lead to successful use and the possible benefits that come from that use.

Before this can occur it is import for educators to first become aware of the various strategies available and how they might best be utilized. From there an analysis of the learning situation to find out what strategies students use , why they are using them, and how they are using them should be attempted whether by written or oral surveying or observing them as they use them. Educators also need to consider various other factors when dealing vocabulary learning strategy instruction. Who are the students? What are their goals? What is the learning environment?

How many Words do learners need to know?

Reports on the size of the number of words in the English language range anywhere from 200,000 words in common use to over 2 million in total words (Schmitt 2000: 143). The large difference in estimates is due to the varying definitions of a word. A more reliable estimate comes from a study on Websters English Dictionary that found about 114,000 word families (Goulden, Nation, and Read 1990). Word families include the base word, its inflected forms, and a small number of regular derived forms. The same study estimates that native speakers add about 1,000 word families per year and that English native speaking university graduates have a vocabulary size of about 20,000 word families with large variations among individuals. Although native like growth in vocabulary size is possible among individuals living in a second language environment the reality is that it is highly unlikely and an unrealistic goal for learners of a foreign language.

The question then becomes how many and, more importantly, which words do learners need to know to effectively comprehend and communicate in English. Nation (1990) divides vocabulary in a text into four categories: high frequency, academic, technical, and low frequency words. High frequency words include function words and many content words and cover about 80% of a given text. The most frequently referenced list of high frequency words is West's (1953) General Service List (GSL) of English which consists of 2,000 words. Academic words are those that are commonly found in various academic texts and cover about 9% percent of a given text. The Academic Word List is considered the best reference for these words. It consists of 570 word families not found in the most frequent 2,000 word list. Technical words cover those that are specific to their subject areas and high frequency words that take on a specialized meaning within a specific subject area. They cover about 5% of a given text and rough estimates have them at less than a thousand words per subject area. Low frequency words are those that occur very infrequently and cover only a small portion of any text. They are the largest group of words and include those that have moderate frequency, proper nouns, technical vocabulary, and those that are rarely used.

The answer to which words learners need to focus on will vary depending on the goals or purposes of the learner but if a learner wishes to express themselves in English and provide a strong basis for furthering their study a widely accepted goal is of the most frequent 2,000 words. The 2,000 words in the GSL cover about 80% of a written text and about 96% of informal spoken text (Nation 2001: 17). Knowing these 2,000 words will not only help facilitate comprehension but can also help learners begin to discern grammatical patterns (Schmitt 2000: 144). Beyond the 2,000 word list it depends on the learner. If they have an academic or professional purpose a concentration on academic and or technical words in their fields would be desirable. The 2,000 word level is just a small fraction of what a student will actually need if they wish to further their studies. Various strategies can be applied to aid learners in the acquisition of vocabulary and the employment of one strategy over another may be dependent on whether that word is high frequency, academic, technical, or low frequency.

How should vocabulary be taught?

Vocabulary in the classroom can be approached in one of two ways that are not mutually exclusive, directly or

indirectly. Indirect, incidental, learning refers to learning one thing while intending to learn another (Richards & Schmitt 2002: 252). Incidental learning in relation to vocabulary is strongly affected by exposure and repetition. The main goal of incidental learning is to ensure that students get maximum, repeated exposure to language. In a foreign language context this could be done through a variety of activities, the most recommended of which is extensive reading.

Direct learning refers to learning language items by means of overt study(Richards & Schmitt 2002: 192). For vocabulary study this involves explicit attention to vocabulary items and may include setting aside time for vocabulary study, vocabulary tests, vocabulary exercises, and instruction in and use of vocabulary learning strategies. A growing consensus found in recent literature on SLVA is that direct and indirect learning should complement each other. The question then becomes which words to focus on and how to focus on them. Which words to focus on was discussed earlier and depends on the individual learner/s. When dealing with vocabulary explicitly Sokmen(1997) provides some key principles teachers should consider.

Explicit Approach in Vocabulary Instruction **Sokmen's Key Principles**
✧　Build a large sight vocabulary
✧　Integrate new with old
✧　Provide a number of encounters with a word
✧　Promote a deep level of processing
✧　Facilitate imaging
✧　Make new words real – personalize
✧　Use a variety of techniques
✧　Encourage independent learning strategies

Fig. 3.1 Sokmen's (1997)　Key Principles to Explicit Vocabulary Instruction

These principles provide a good resource for dealing with vocabulary in the classroom, but the amount of English vocabulary learners need and are likely to encounter on their own suggests that a focus on independent learning strategies may be most beneficial for learners. Sokmen (1997: 255) notes that 'it is not possible for students to learn all the vocabulary they need in the classroom' and that there should be an emphasis on aiding them in learning on their own.

Importance of LLS and VLS

Language learning strategies are an integral part of foreign language education for a variety of reasons. They give the learner control over their own learning process. There may be any number of differences between

individual learners and the benefits of having access to and the ability to decide which strategies are best for them cannot be overlooked. Knowledge of a variety of strategies and the ability to apply them according to the situation may foster a more efficient and effective learning process (O'Malley & Chamot 1990: 169). One of the most important aspects of language learning strategies is that they are trainable and are therefore amenable to change (Takac 2008: 56). Strategies can be taught, practiced, improved, and adapted until they move from being a conscious activity to an unconscious activity. They can in effect become automated. The size of the English vocabulary is a great challenge for the second language learner and learning strategies can be seen as a way of helping learners cope with and control their vocabulary learning both outside and inside the classroom.

Factors affecting strategy use

A number of factors interact to create a unique set of variables for each individual foreign language learner. Socio-affective, individual, cognitive, and situational factors all play a significant role in shaping a language learning experience. Gu (2003) provides a useful model of the factors affecting the choice, use, and effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies.
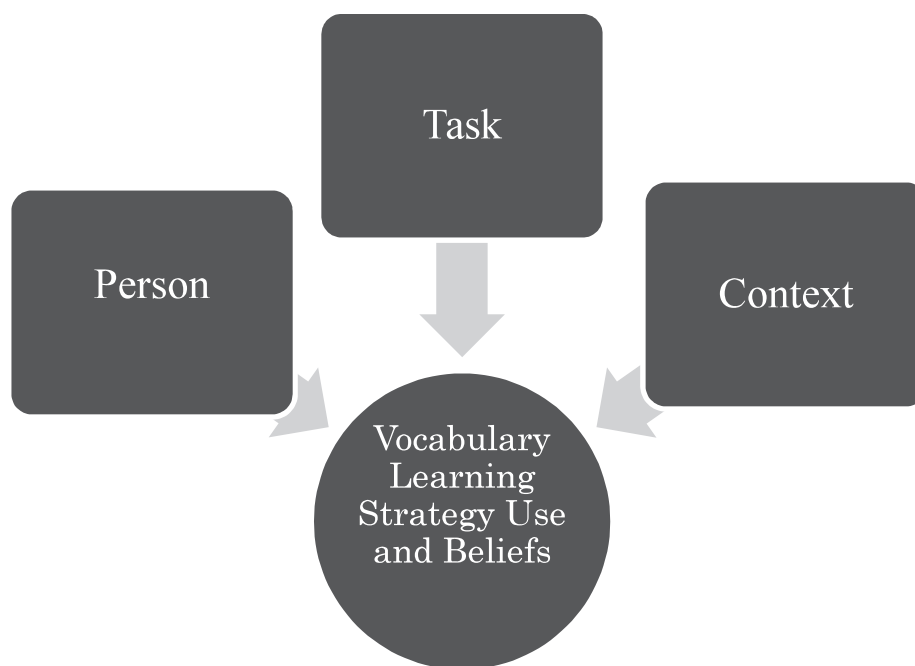

Fig. 3.2 Factors Affecting VLS Use and Beliefs (Gu 2003)

He notes that:

> '*an analysis of learning strategies will never be complete without knowing the person-task-context configuration of the particular situation...When assessing the use or lack of use of strategies it's important to remember that these factors work together to create a unique learning*

situation for the teacher, the class, and each individual learner.`

Strategies by definition are actions taken and controlled by the individual learner and various factors may contribute to differences in their use of them including age, sex, language, intelligence, prior knowledge, motivation, self-concept, personality, and cognitive learning style. Task refers to the specific goal of the learner related to the material being learned and what the learner is trying to achieve with that material. Learners choose strategies based upon the material being used, the purpose of the task, and difficulty.

Context refers to the learning environment which includes everything from teachers, peers, the classroom climate, family support, the social and cultural traditions of the learning, the curriculum, and the availability of input and output opportunities.

Classification of Strategies

A number of different taxonomies(e.g. Rubin 1981, O'Malley & Chamot 1990, Gu and Johnson 1996) have been created to classify a number of strategies that have been identified since the research on the good language learner began in the 1970's. Oxford's (1990) division of strategies into six categories under two headings, direct and indirect, has been used extensively in research on strategy use and preference. Direct strategies are those that directly deal with the target language and include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies are those that allow the learner to control their own cognition and include metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Using this taxonomy as a basis Schmitt (1997) proposed a division of vocabulary learning strategies into two categories: discovery and consolidation. Discovery strategies are those strategies the learner use to determine a word's meaning and include determination and social strategies. Consolidation strategies are those that aid in the retaining of a words meaning or use and are divided into three categories: memory, cognitive, and metacognitive. A detailed discussion into the specific strategies found under these categories is beyond the scope of this paper.

Vocabulary learning strategies are necessary and important tools in aiding the foreign language learner. There are a number of strategies learners can take advantage of and it is important that learners be given exposure to those they are not aware of and information on how to maximize the potential of those strategies they already use. However, before instruction in the use of these strategies can take place it is necessary to find out to what extent learners are aware of these strategies and how effective they believe them to be. This can best be accomplished through surveys, observing students use, and testing them on their use. Using these methods and taking into account the task and context of the classroom teachers can begin to develop a structured focus on vocabulary in the classroom.

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datzman@tc.nagasaki-gaigo.ac.jp