

# Vocabulary Learning with the Instruction of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

## 語彙学習方略指導と語彙学習

Ayako Taguchi

田口 綾子

**Abstract:** Acquiring vocabulary plays a key role for learning a target language and students try to memorize vocabulary using vocabulary learning strategies such as writing or pronouncing the target word repeatedly. This paper attempts to discuss the importance of instructing vocabulary learning strategies. First, I will describe different kinds of vocabulary learning strategies. Second, I will explore how teachers can give vocabulary learning strategy instruction. Third, I will examine the impact of this instruction. Through a review of the literature, two approaches were found to be effective for vocabulary learning strategy instruction, and it was revealed that instruction can lead not only to a better vocabulary acquisition, but also an increase in learners' motivation.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary learning strategy, Vocabulary learning strategy instruction, EFL

**要旨:** 語彙の習得は、言語を学ぶにあたり重要な役割を果たしており、学習者は、単語を繰り返し書く、音読する等の語彙学習方略を使用して単語を暗記する。本稿では、語彙学習方略の指導の重要性について考察すべく、様々な語彙学習方略の種類、その指導方法について述べ、さらに、その指導法がもたらす効果について分析する。先行研究によると、効果的な語彙学習方略の指導には2つのアプローチが認められ、また、その指導により語彙の習得だけでなく、学習者のモチベーションにも良い影響があることが明らかになった。

**キーワード:** 語彙学習方略、語彙学習方略指導、EFL

## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary is one of the key issues in language learning. In compulsory English classes aimed at improving TOEIC scores at university, students are supposed to memorize target words at home and have a vocabulary test in every class. Students struggle to memorize all the words and it is not rare to hear students say it's hard to memorize them. To memorize vocabulary items, some students write the target words again and again,

and others repeatedly say the words out loud. Nation (2013) suggested teachers could help students try such vocabulary learning strategies as they can help students memorize words.

In this paper, I would like to discuss how important vocabulary learning strategy instruction is. First, I will describe a variety of types of vocabulary learning strategies. Second, I will explore what approach can be used for vocabulary learning strategy instruction. Third, I will examine how this instruction can contribute to learners' vocabulary and the vocabulary learning process.

## 2. Types of Vocabulary Learning Strategy

It is well-known that one of the most famous research projects about vocabulary learning strategies is Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies. Schmitt (1997) categorized vocabulary learning strategies using the Vocabulary Learning Strategy Questionnaire (VLSQ) to research the strategies used by learners. I will give examples of the strategies, and then will describe what is claimed about the strategies in previous research.

The VLSQ contains 58 items divided into discovery strategies and consolidation strategies. Discovery strategies are used for understanding the meaning of a word when learners first find the target word and there are two subcategories:

- determination strategies such as using a dictionary, guessing from context, checking the part of speech; and
- social strategies such as consulting teachers for translation, or finding meaning during group work.

On the other hand, consolidation strategies involve remembering the words after the learner has understood the meaning of the word, and has four subcategories:

- social strategies, such as practicing the vocabulary with others and communicating with speakers of the target language;
- memory strategies, such as practicing word spelling, checking the pronunciation, studying affixes and roots, and thinking of words with similar or opposite meanings;
- cognitive strategies, such as repeating the word verbally, repeatedly writing the word, using flash cards (pieces of paper with the word written on one side and the definition of that word written on the other side), and taking notes; and
- metacognitive strategies such as getting exposed to media including songs or movies in the target language, and giving word tests to themselves.

Gu and Johnson (1996) suggested learners use not only one strategy but various strategies together, and that successful learners tend to use more strategies. Schmitt (1997) found that there is a difference between which strategies learners use and which they believe to be helpful. Schmitt (1997) suggested that there is a need to teach strategies to learners so that they can try new ones they think might be beneficial. Vocabulary learning strategies can be an effective tool for improving learners' vocabulary (Nation, 2013). Therefore, if teachers can not only teach vocabulary but also teach strategies to learn vocabulary, there should be a positive impact on learners' vocabulary learning.

### **3. Approaches for Vocabulary Learning Strategy Instruction**

After introducing the types of strategies, I would like to investigate what approaches were applied for the strategy instruction. The 10 articles regarding vocabulary learning strategy instruction were chosen in consideration of the age of participants and the English learning settings. All the participants in the studies were high school age to adults, and were learning English in an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting. After synthesizing the research, there were two approaches found to be used in the instruction: the CALLA model and the encouragement of interaction. First, I will explain the CALLA model, then, I will explain the approach to encourage learners to interact with other learners.

Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009), Sardroud (2013), and Chiang et al. (2023) used the same approach for the vocabulary strategy instruction, the CALLA model. CALLA stands for Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach, and the approach was originally suggested by Chamot and O'Malley (Chamot & O'Malley, 1996). There are five steps in the approach: preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion. First, teachers prepare for the instruction of the strategy use. Second, teachers demonstrate how the strategy can be used. The instructor can pick out a word from the textbook to demonstrate the strategy (Sardroud, 2013). Next, students practice the newly learned strategy. Chiang et al. (2023) explained that students should choose the word on which to try the strategy. Then, in the evaluation procedure, students have time to discuss with classmates if the strategy was helpful or not. In the study by Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009), students were asked four questions: their experience using the target strategy, whether they felt the strategy was useful, its suitability for them, and their willingness to use it in the future. Finally, in the expansion stage, students try to use the

same strategy on other words in the reading texts for the expansion task. In the study by Sardroud (2013), in addition to using the same strategy on different words, students decided on their own combination of other strategies. Comparing the three studies using the CALLA model, small differences can be found such as additional expansion tasks in the study by Sardroud (2013), and a degree of customization by the teachers for their class. Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009) pointed out that one of the benefits of the CALLA model was that it was simple, so students could easily follow the instruction.

Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009), Hazrat and Hessamy (2013), Chacón-Beltrán (2018), and Chiang et al. (2023) had their students interact with others during the instruction of vocabulary learning strategies. In the study by Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009) and Chiang et al. (2023), students were asked to share their opinion about the target strategy in the evaluation stage in the CALLA model. Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009) also instructed students to sit close to the students who had a tendency to use different strategies so that those students could share their ideas. Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009) emphasized that this kind of information sharing could help learners try different strategies and they could become accustomed to using the strategies. Studies which did not use the CALLA model also emphasized the positive impact of the interaction with other students. Hazrat and Hessamy (2013) pointed out the importance of active engagement toward vocabulary learning, especially pushed oral output with other participants. Not only were students repeating the sound, but they also had an opportunity to hear the other participants' pronunciation, and therefore the students' awareness toward the sound was raised (Hazrat & Hessamy, 2013). Chacón-Beltrán (2018) had students give feedback to other participants through the use of rubrics, and suggested that this activity requiring cooperation with each other was beneficial.

#### **4. Benefits of the Vocabulary Learning Strategy Instruction**

As the result of the vocabulary learning strategy instruction, three major benefits were found from the 10 articles, in spite of the fact that the learners were instructed with different vocabulary learning strategies with different methods. These benefits were: learners' successful vocabulary acquisition, an increase in the strategy use, and learners' increased motivation and positive attitude toward vocabulary learning.

Vocabulary acquisition was measured by vocabulary tests. Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009), Sardroud (2013), Atasheneh and Naeimi (2015), and Chacón-Beltrán (2018) compared the scores of a vocabulary test after vocabulary learning strategy instruction

with those of a pretest before the treatment, and the results showed that the instruction helped learners' vocabulary acquisition. Ismaiel and Al-Asmari (2017) and Kiasi and Gilakjani (2023) conducted two posttests, one of which was a delayed posttest, and the results suggested that vocabulary learning strategies can be effective across a long period of time. A study by Liu (2014) revealed that students who were instructed in morphological strategies performed better in vocabulary tests, from the eye tracking data.

The second benefit is the improvement of learners' vocabulary learning strategies usage. As Gu and Johnson (1996) suggested, successful learners use more strategies than less successful learners. Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009), Hazrat and Hessamy (2013), Ismaiel and Al-Asmari (2017), and Chacón-Beltrán (2018) reported that learners who were instructed in vocabulary learning strategies came to use more strategies than before the instruction. In the study by Chacón-Beltrán (2018), participants were asked about the usage of strategies three times: before the treatment, during the treatment, and later asking about their future intention to use strategies. The result was that participants started to use new strategies during the instruction, and moreover, the participants answered in the questionnaire that they would like to use more strategies in the future. Compared to the number of strategies used during the instruction course, there were more strategies the students answered they would use after the course in total.

Third, the vocabulary learning strategies instruction resulted in an increase in the learners' positive feelings toward vocabulary learning (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009; Little & Kobayashi, 2014; Chiang et al., 2023). Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009) held an interview session after the treatment, and some students gave positive comments such as that they could learn the vocabulary easily because of the instruction, or that they felt they became better at learning English. Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009) also had a survey about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation along with strategy usage, and as a result of the 10 weeks of instruction, the increase in intrinsic motivation was statistically significant. Little and Kobayashi (2014) also asked learners about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Although the statistical data did not show a difference in motivation, qualitative data showed some positive effects, for example, learners of various proficiencies felt the imagery strategies were important because they could build associations among words, even though they recognized the imagery strategy to be a complicated and time-consuming strategy. Chiang et al. (2023) collected the qualitative data using informal discussion, which was based on the idea that the learners can better express what they think as part of a group discussion rather than in an interview with their teacher.

Participants were asked for their thoughts about explicit instruction toward vocabulary learning strategies, and the usefulness of the strategies. Chiang et al. (2023) reported that all participants were positive toward learning strategies through instruction, and many of them showed satisfaction after learning the strategies. Also, all participants accepted the usefulness of vocabulary learning strategies for vocabulary acquisition (Chiang et al., 2023).

## 5. Conclusion

There are various ways to learn vocabulary. Learners use various vocabulary learning strategies and successful learners tend to utilize more of them (Gu & Johnson, 1996). The CALLA model was found to be an effective approach for instructing vocabulary learning strategies (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009; Sardroud, 2013; Chiang et al., 2023) and participants were encouraged to interact with other learners (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009; Hazrat & Hessamy, 2013; Chacón-Beltrán, 2018; Chiang et al., 2023).

Vocabulary learning strategy instruction can lead to better vocabulary acquisition (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009; Sardroud, 2013; Atasheneh & Naeimi, 2015; Chacón-Beltrán, 2018; Chiang et al., 2023; Kiasi & Gilakjani, 2023), learners' variation of strategy usage (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009; Hazrat & Hessamy, 2013; Ismaiel & Al-Asmari, 2017; Chacón-Beltrán, 2018) and increased motivation (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009; Little & Kobayashi, 2014; Chiang et al., 2023). As Atasheneh and Naeimi (2015), Ismaiel and Al-Asmari (2017) and Chiang et al. (2023) insisted, teachers should recognize the importance of vocabulary learning strategies and spend more time on teaching vocabulary.

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