

THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH VOCABULARY & COMPREHENSION SKILLS

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Abstract: Learning vocabulary is one of the most important aspects of acquiring a second language, especially in situations where two languages are spoken, such as English-Uzbek university classes. The common practice of memorizing through rote learning does not always bring long-term retention and active use of the new vocabulary over and above that, thus coming up with teaching techniques that are new, fun and lively is the solution. The present research investigates both theoretically and practically the effectiveness of three innovative vocabulary learning techniques: Word Theater, Mnemonic Battles, and Translation Jigsaw. The study is based on well-known second language acquisition research, including that of Nation, Schmitt, Webb, and Laufer, and it discusses how these methods foster.

Keywords: vocabulary acquisition, English–Uzbek, bilingual learning, creative methods, word theater, mnemonic battles, translation jigsaw, active learning, second language acquisition, classroom pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

Acquisition of new words is considered a critical aspect of second language acquisition, as it supports reading, writing, and speaking skills, and thus, overall language competence (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2008). In EFL university classrooms, students usually have difficulties with the memory and the use of the new words, especially when learning through the traditional method of rote memorization. For the English–Uzbek bilinguals, the difficulties are made worse by the differences in the language structure, lack of exposure to English in its real context, and the use of direct translation which may hinder deep processing of the new words (Laufer & Girsai, 2008). New studies underline the need for amusing, context-rich, and multimodal approaches in vocabulary teaching along with the methods that combine visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements (Webb, 2008; Thornbury, 2002). By means of practical classroom activities, such as the ones based on performances, mnemonic devices, and collaborative translation tasks, the retention and switching to active the usage of the target vocabulary have been enhanced. This study is going to test the impact of three innovative methods—Word Theater (mini skits), Mnemonic Battles,

and Translation Jigsaw—on EFL vocabulary acquisition among the university students. The focus of the research is on how these activities affect the students' ability to remember and understand the new words as well as their practical advantages over the conventional memorization techniques.

Theoretical framework

Vocabulary learning has been classified as the most important factor of second language acquisition, and its role has been described as the very basis for reading, listening, and speaking comprehension (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2008). If just the word forms are recognized, the vocabulary acquisition process is rather passive; children are to get the complete mastery of the words and their meanings, usages related to the contexts, and co-occurrences. Schmitt (2008) points out that vocabulary acquisition is not passive at all; students are to get the activities of noticing the forms, the meanings, and the functions in various contexts which would lead to the long-lasting memory of that word. This is especially important for children with two languages, like the students in the Uzbek university context learning English, where the structural and semantic differences between English and Uzbek can be a barrier to simple word memorization. Studies about bilingual vocabulary acquisition have been pointing out the importance of the role of translation and cross-linguistic connections. Laufer and Girsai (2008) claim that bilingual students make use of the interaction between their first and second languages, especially when translation tasks are included in meaningful communicative activities. Such tasks allow the learners to establish for themselves the connection between the English word and its Uzbek equivalent, hence the deeper cognitive processing. Similarly, Webb (2008) states that learners' frequent exposure to the same vocabulary in all four language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—is essential for developing a strong retention. The learners by meeting the same word in various situations, through different modes of use and even in productive ways, do not only strengthen their recognition but also their recall, which is often more effective than rote memory alone.

Efficiency of three creative methods

The first method, Word Theater, achieves by incorporating the target vocabulary into short performances or dialogues and prompts the learner to use the words in a vivid and situational context. In short, students get a limited number of English words with their Uzbek equivalents and then cooperate to create small skits that will most likely include the words. After performing, the class participates in a discussion where they try to point the words, go deeper into their meanings, and study the correct forms of usage. This technique has quite a few clear advantages from the teaching point of view.

First of all, learners, by putting vocabulary in meaningful communicative contexts, not only recognize word forms but also actively produce them; thus, the Output Hypothesis by Swain (2005) which claims that language production leads to inward absorption of knowledge of the language, is supported. Thirdly, performing for the audience raises one's motivation and lowers anxiety which is the case in learning a new language so, a friendly atmosphere for proving one's skills in the language is established.

One more imaginative method is Mnemonic Battles, which focuses on memory skills more than any other vocabulary retention technique. In this activity, students have to come up with mnemonics for the hard vocabulary items along with their team members. They can use different ways like telling a story, making a rhyme, and even using those associations that have cultural significance for them. Then the mnemonics are presented by the teams, and the classmates evaluate them for being clear, creative, and memorable. The main benefit of this method is to increase the use of elaborative processing which is a cognitive mechanism that helps the retention of complex or abstract vocabulary (Hulstijn, 2001). Students get to create mnemonics that help them encode the meanings of English words by associating them with familiar Uzbek concepts. This process not only makes the English word meanings stronger but also promotes deeper cross-linguistic awareness (Laufer & Girsai, 2008).

Translation Jigsaw presents another way to boost vocabulary acquisition, which is a combination of translation practice and collaborative problem-solving. In this technique, a text gets broken down into parts, and every group translates its part from English to Uzbek or the other way around. Then, the groups swap their translated parts and work together to fill in the gaps with necessary vocabulary, eventually putting the whole text back together and checking their translations for accuracy and lexical choices. The learners are very much involved in the activity and this gives rise to the processing of deep lexicon which in turn requires them to focus very much on the meaning, collocations, and syntactic structures at the same time. The nature of collaboration in the task provides the students with exposure to different word choices and usage patterns which in turn speeds up the learning process through peer-mediation.

Conclusion

The merging of the three methods under consideration - Word Theater, Mnemonic Battles, and Translation Jigsaw - is in keeping with the second language acquisition theories that advocate for active participation, multisensory input and contextual use (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2008; Swain, 2005). The incorporation of the communicative, cognitive, and translational approaches will enable teachers to offer a more

comprehensive and effective vocabulary acquisition framework that caters to the different needs and preferences of learners. In the end, the hints from this research are that the application of creative, cooperative, and mentally challenging methods in EFL classes at the university level can lead to substantial improvement in both the retention and use of vocabulary, thus providing a practical and theoretically informed method of turning knowledge into application. The implications for future research are that they could look into the effects of these methods over a longer period of time with larger groups and also their applicability to other bilingual learning contexts thus contributing more towards understanding the dynamics of creativity, engagement, and vocabulary development.

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