

A Study on English Vocabulary Learning Strategies for Non-English Majors in Independent College

ETUDE SUR LES STRATÉGIES DE L'APPRENTISSAGE DE VOCABULAIRE ANGLAIS POUR LES ÉTUDIANTS QUI NE SONT PAS DANS LA SPÉCIALITÉ DE LA LANGUE ANGLAISE DANS LES UNIVERSITÉS INDÉPENDANTES

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Abstract: This paper has investigated the pattern of English vocabulary learning strategies used by the non-English major students in Chinese Independent Colleges: their attitudes to vocabulary learning; the strategies they usually use; the problems of vocabulary learning in English study; the most effective vocabulary learning strategies they assume; differences among the students with different grades, genders, English proficiency and so on. The survey has been done on the non-English majors from grade 1 to 3 in Beihai College of Beihang University. The aim of the paper is to help English learners to improve their ability of vocabulary learning and develop their English proficiency by providing some practical suggestions to both teachers and learners.

Key words: Vocabulary learning strategies; Non-English majors; Suggestions

Resumé: Cet article a étudié les modèles des stratégies de l'apprentissage de vocabulaire anglais utilisés par les étudiants qui ne sont pas dans la spécialité de langue anglaise dans les universités indépendantes chinoises: leurs attitudes à l'apprentissage du vocabulaire, les stratégies qu'ils utilisent habituellement, les problèmes de l'apprentissage du vocabulaire dans l'étude de l'anglais, les stratégies de l'apprentissage du vocabulaire les plus efficaces qu'ils assument, les différences chez les étudiants ayant des qualités différentes, des sexes différents, des niveaux de la maîtrise de l'anglais différents et ainsi de suite. Le sondage a été effectué sur les étudiants qui ne sont pas dans la spécialité de langue anglaise de la 1ère année à la 3ème année à Beihai College de l'université de Beihang. L'objectif de ce document est d'aider les apprenants en anglais à améliorer leur

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capacité d'apprentissage du vocabulaire et de développer leurs compétences en anglais en fournissant des suggestions pratiques aux enseignants et aux apprenants.

Mots-clés: stratégies d'apprentissage du vocabulaire; spécialité non-anglophones; suggestions

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The importance of vocabulary learning in SLA

Vocabulary is the basis in language learning, meantime it forms obstacles. Therefore, vocabulary will have an actual effect on one's language proficiency. Just as Wilkins (Wilkins, 1972: 9-10) stated that "without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." Without vocabulary, skills of language learning including listening, speaking, reading and writing cannot be successfully achieved. So we cannot deny that vocabulary learning plays a very important role in second language learning and a large vocabulary will help learners improve their language proficiency. Study on vocabulary learning, however, received little attention during the 1950s and 1960s. In recent years, it has attracted more and more interest from researchers, scholars, educationalists and teachers. And many linguists, both at home and abroad, have pointed out the significance of vocabulary in SLA. The following quotations can show their views on vocabulary learning. Carthy stated "no matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meaning, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way" (McCarthy, 1990: 265). Laufer also told us "no text comprehension is possible, either in one's native language or in a foreign language, without understanding the text's vocabulary" (Laufer, 1986:275). Some Chinese scholar also clearly indicated "it is absolutely necessary to master a great number of English words. It is the same as that building needs enough materials".

In a word, the basic role of vocabulary in SLA has been established. It is also recognized that the mastery of vocabulary is an essential component of SLA. Therefore, in order to become proficient in an L2, a learner must master a large vocabulary.

1.2 Current situation of vocabulary learning and teaching in China

English has been highly valued in China for its role as a communication instrument following China's entry into WTO. Because the relationship between China and the outside world is becoming closer and closer, more and more people have paid attention to learning English. In college, English is the compulsory course for students. However, vocabulary becomes the bottleneck in English learning for many students and their speed of vocabulary improvement is relatively slow. There is a large gap between the students' English ability and requirements settled in the syllabus. The current situation is, to some extent, caused by many Chinese teachers' neglect in vocabulary teaching. Of course, many students just memorize new words mechanically and there is no systematic research in vocabulary learning.

In China, many English teachers think that students can achieve vocabulary by themselves and believe that every new word appearing in the text is marked with phonetic symbol and its Chinese meaning, so it is unnecessary to devote great efforts to teaching the vocabulary. They only focus on the conceptual meaning and neglect other aspects of vocabulary like collocation, connotation, denotation, synonyms and so on. And there are many teachers still adopt the traditional teaching methods which are proved to be time-consuming and inefficient by many researchers.

In brief, the current situation of vocabulary learning and teaching in China can be summarized as follows: 1) A lack of systematic research in vocabulary learning. For many years, vocabulary learning mythology has not changed much. Many teachers have undervalued vocabulary learning strategy. 2) A passive way of learning vocabulary. In vocabulary learning, many students memorize new words mechanically, which should be replaced by some more efficient strategies. 3) Inadequacy of developing the students' competence in actual use of English as mentioned above hinders students' ability undoubtedly.

1.3 Necessity of vocabulary learning strategies research

Vocabulary is an active part of a language. The mastery of vocabulary not only takes place in classroom or school, but it also has to be accumulated over lifetime. Besides, no one can master all the vocabulary in a language. What can be done is to obtain certain strategies to speed up the acquisition of new words. So the study of vocabulary learning strategies is demanded naturally as an important step in SLA.

Vocabulary is one of the three essential elements (sound, vocabulary and grammar) of a language, and it is very important for people's communication and language learning, which plays an important role in the whole process of SLA. If L2 learners cannot make a breakthrough in vocabulary learning, the lack of vocabulary will prevent learners from developing language skills like listening, reading and writing. Many researchers claim the close relationship between vocabulary knowledge and second language proficiency. Coady (1993) conducted two experiments which showed that increased proficiency in vocabulary also led to an increase in reading proficiency. Wilkins (1978) and McCarthy (1990) advocated that vocabulary was the center of SLA.

In China, many students work hard on learning new words, but the result is so disappointing. Why is vocabulary so difficult to learn? Compared with the changes of grammar and pronunciation, the amount of vocabulary is keeping on changing and enlarging so teachers should help students to adopt effective ways to learn vocabularies more efficiently. But unfortunately, only few researchers focus on vocabulary learning strategy in China and they just focus on one or two aspects in the research. The learning of vocabulary has been undervalued in the field of SLA for many years in China so the research into vocabulary learning strategy is absolutely needed and has significant practical value.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Research into language learning strategies

2.1.1 Definition of learning strategies

Vocabulary learning strategies are "specific strategies for learning vocabulary" as Ellis (1999) put it. Accordingly, we admit that vocabulary learning strategies are one aspect of the overall learning strategies. Then what are learning strategies?

Different definitions of learning strategies can be found in recent literature. A typical sample of these definitions is presented below (Elks, 1994).

Learning strategies are attempts to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language (Tarone, 1981).

Strategy is best reserved for general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learner, learning techniques as the term to refer to particular forms of observable learning learner's encoding process (Stern, 1983).

Learning strategies are techniques, approach or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning, recall of both linguistic and content area information (Chamot, 1987).

Language learning strategies are behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable (Oxford, 1989).

A strategy consists of mental or behavior activity related to some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition or language use (Ellis, 1994).

It can be observed that it seems difficult or even impossible to set a criterion to judge which definition is more perfect or comprehensive. Ellis (1994), therefore, suggested that the following characteristics should be recognized.

(1) Strategies refer to both general approaches and specific actions or techniques used to learn a language.

(2) Strategies are problem-oriented, and the learner employs a strategy to overcome some particular learning problem.

(3) Learners are generally aware of the strategies they use and can identify what they consist of and they are asked to pay attention to what they are doing and thinking.

(4) Strategies involve linguistic behavior (such as, pointing at an object so as to tell its name)

(5) Linguistic strategies can be performed in language learning.

(6) Some strategies are behavioral while others are mental. Thus some strategies are directly observable while others not.

(7) In the whole, strategies contribute indirectly to learning by providing learners with data about the second or foreign language they can process. However some strategies may also contribute directly (e.g. memorization strategies directed at specific lexical items or grammatical rules).

(8) Strategies use varies considerably as a result of both the kind of task the learner is engaged in the individual learner preferences.

Taking all the characteristics into account, Ellis (1994) suggested that strategies can be defined as “production sets that exist as declarative knowledge and are used to solve some learning problem”.

2.1.2 Classification of learning strategies

Much of the earlier research on language learning strategies focuses on compiling inventories of the learning strategies that learners were observed to use or reported using. Little attempt was made to classify the strategies into general categories (Ellis 1994:535). Gradually the classification of learning strategies became the focus of research. However, so far no agreement has been reached on this issue since researchers classify the strategies from different angles and use different terms to describe them as we can see from the definition of the learning strategies. In this section some representative and influential strategy classification models are presented.

(1) Metacognitive Strategies: Cognitive Strategies and Social/Affective Strategies

Metacognitive strategies are strategies that make use of knowledge about cognitive process and regulate language learning by means of planning, monitoring and evaluating. Metacognitive strategies are higher order executive skills and include advance organizers, directed attention, selective attention, self-management, advance preparation, self-monitoring, delayed production and self-evaluation.

Cognitive strategies refer to the steps or operations used in problem solving that require direct analysis, transformation or synthesis of learning materials. Cognitive strategies include repetition, directed physical response, translation, grouping, note-taking, deduction, recombination, imagery, auditory representation, key word, contextualization, elaboration, transfer and inference. Cognitive strategies such as these appear to be directly linked to the performance of particular learning tasks according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990).

Social/ affective strategies are the way in which learners interact with other learners or native speakers, and represent a broad grouping that involves interaction with another person. Generally, they are considered applicable to a wide variety of tasks. Social/affective strategies include cooperation and question for clarification.

(2) Direct Strategies and Indirect Strategies

Direct strategies consist of memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. As Oxford defines memory strategies as those “helping students store and retrieve new information”, cognitive strategies as “enabling learners to understand and produce new language by many different means”, and compensation strategies as “allowing learners to use the language despite their often large gaps in knowledge” (Oxford 1990:37).

Indirect strategies are composed of metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Again, as the word “indirect” conveys, the strategies in this category indirectly involved in target language learning. Oxford defines metacognitive strategies as those “allowing learners to control their own cognition, that is, to coordinate the learning process by using function such as centering, arranging, planning, and evaluating”, and social strategies as “helping students learn through interaction with others” (1990:135).

(3) Language Learning Strategies and Language Using Strategies

Language learning strategies include strategies for identifying the material for learning, distinguishing it from other material, grouping it for easier learning, having repeated contact with the material, and remembering it with effort.

Language using strategies include retrieval strategies, rehearsal strategies, cover strategies, and communicating strategies. Retrieval strategies would be those strategies used to call up language material from storage, through whatever memory searching strategies the learners can master. Rehearsal strategies are composed of strategies for rehearsing target language structure. Cover strategies are those strategies that learners use to create the impression that they have control over material when they do not. Communication strategies are approaches to conveying a message that is both meaningful and informative for the listener or reader.

2.1.3 Methods used to investigate learning strategies

One approach that has been used to investigate learning strategies is to observe learners' performance in a variety of tasks, usually in classroom settings. Another approach, structured interview, which obtains retrospective accounts of the strategies learners employ and can provide the most detailed information about learning strategies, has been proved to be more successful. But there is one problem that learners differ greatly in their ability to describe the strategies they employ and they need tutoring in how to perform self-reporting. The third approach, questionnaire, has been commonly used. Learners are asked to react to written questions. There are several types of questionnaires, from the open-ended to the highly structured. The next approach, diary studies, should be considered briefly too, in which the subject records in writing different aspects of a process. But all of these approaches have their own opposite or not good features. Of course there are other approaches but just not usually used.

From the conclusion that has been drawn, it is evident that every method has two sides. In order to elicit more accurate information, multiple data collecting procedures might be the better way. For instance, data could be obtained by retrospective accounts through interviews together with introspective accounts of performance on specific tasks.

2.1.4 Factors influencing learner's choice of learning strategies

Learners differ greatly in both the overall frequency with which they employ strategies and also the particular types of strategies they use (O'Malley et al. 1985; Chamot et al. 1987 and 1988; Ehrman 1999). In this section the range of factors affecting strategy choice will be considered from two large angles: individual learner differences (e.g. beliefs about language learning, learner factors, and the learner's personal background) and situational (e.g. the language being learned, the setting in which learning takes place, and the tasks that the learner is asked to perform) and social factors (e.g. sex).

Wenden (1987) finds that learners attaching importance to learning are likely to employ cognitive strategies, while learners stressing the importance of using language tend to employ few learning strategies, depending on communication strategies instead.

Of the learner factor, it is very clear that age affects the way strategies are used. Young children's strategies are often simple, while adults' strategies are more complex and sophisticated. Another factor, the individual's learning style, seems to be strongly associated with strategy use, but little research has examined the relationship. Still another learner factor, motivation, has a causal effect on the quantity of learning strategies they use. Also, the type of motivation might affect strategy choice and determine strategy use.

There is considerable evidence to prove that learners' personal background is related to strategy use, too. Nation and Maclaughlin (1986) prove that experienced language learners are better on an implicit learning task than inexperienced ones.

Besides individual learner differences, situational factors also constitute one source of variation in the use of learning strategies. Much evidence points to the fact that learning some language brings about greater strategies use than learning others.

In conclusion, learners' beliefs about language learning, the learner factors of age and motivation, and personal background tend to be as important factors, while learners' affective states, language aptitude, learning style, and personality are very likely to have little relationship with strategy use. Situational and

social factors related strongly to strategy use are: the language being learned, the learning setting, the type of learning tasks, and the learner's sex. Ellis (1994) concludes that the fact that learning strategies differ in accordance with learning task shows that it might be possible to change learners' strategic behavior through training.

2.1.5 The good language learner

Some people are better at learning a second language. They seem to have a natural talent for learning a second language. In 1975, Rubin, a language researcher, decided to examine people who were "good language learners" in classroom setting by observation. Rubin thought that researching about this would help people understand more about language learning. She discovered the following characteristics of being good language learners: 1) Good learners are prepared to guess. 2) They have a strong drive to communicate. 3) They are willing to appear foolish. 4) They think about correct grammar and sentence structure when they speak. 5) They seek out practice. 6) They monitor their own speech and the speech of others. 7) They think about the meaning of the sentences they say and hear. Of course, there are still other discoverers of the good language learners.

But all in all, language learning strategies facilitate the learning of the target language by the language learner. It is evident that all language learners use language learning strategies in the learning process. Since the factors like age, sex, personality, motivation, self-concept, life-experience, learning style, etc. affect the way language learners choose learning strategies, it cannot be tenable that all language learners employ the same good language learning strategies or should be trained in using and developing the same strategies to become successful learners.

2.2 Studies on vocabulary learning strategies

2.2.1 Studies on vocabulary learning strategies abroad

In a study, Cohen and Aphek (1981) find that the use of mnemonic association is helpful to vocabulary learning. Incidental learning through guessing from the context is the most important strategies for vocabulary learning. Many researchers have done comprehensive study in this field. Through answering some questions put forward by Nation (2001:233-247), some important findings can be taken into consideration.

- (1) What proportion of unknown words can be guessed from context?
- (2) How much vocabulary is learned from context?
- (3) What can be learned from context?
- (4) What are the causes of poor guessing?
- (5) Do different learners approach guessing in the same way?

Although specific vocabulary learning strategies have been increasingly researched, only two researchers have investigated vocabulary learning strategies as a whole. The first is Stoffer (1995). She develops a questionnaire, containing 53 items, which are designed to measure vocabulary learning strategies specifically. She administered this Vocabulary Learning Strategies Inventory (VOLSI) and the Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to 707 students at the University Alabama. From what she has studied, Stoffer suggests that the 53 items on the VOLSI cluster into nine categories. They are as follows.

- (1) Strategies involving authentic language use
- (2) Strategies involving creative activities
- (3) Strategies used for self-motivation
- (4) Strategies used to create mental linkages
- (5) Memory strategies
- (6) Visual/auditory strategies
- (7) Strategies involving physical action
- (8) Strategies used to overcome anxiety
- (9) Strategies used to organize words

The other researcher who investigates many strategies as a whole is Schmitt (1997). His scheme is, different from Stoffer's. In his scheme, the distinction has been made between the strategies, which learners use to determine the meaning of new words when they first meet them and the ones they use to consolidate meanings when they encounter the words again. The former includes determination and social strategies, and the later includes social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. Both of the two categories contain the social strategies because they can be used for both purposes. Schmitt is careful about generalization of these results. As he states, since strategies may be culture-specific, the same finding may not be true of people with different L1 backgrounds. His research is meaningful in three respects: 1) it proposes taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies; 2) it shows clearly, the change of strategies use over time, and 3) it puts forward the idea of introducing new strategies to learners at different stages of cognitive maturity.

2.2.2 Studies on vocabulary learning strategies in China

While research on vocabulary learning strategies is booming abroad, similar studies are also fruitful at home (eg. Gu and Johnson 1996; Wang Wenyu 1998; Wu Xia and Wang Qiang 1998; Chen Hui 2001.). Some researchers have investigated some specific strategies of vocabulary learning while some others have made rather thorough investigation into the overall state of vocabulary learning strategies used by Chinese EFL learners.

First, it is necessary to mention the research done by Gu Yongqi and R.Johnson (1996) because their subjects are all Chinese. As Gu Yongqi puts it, there are more English learner in China than there are native speakers of English. In their study, the results show that the participants generally do not use memorization strategies. Instead, they employ more meaning-oriented strategies. Participants also report using a wide variety of vocabulary learning strategies including dictionary use, note taking, guessing, and repletion.

Wu Xia and Wang Qiang (1998) make an investigation into the vocabulary learning strategies of Chinese non-English majors in Beijing Normal University. They get the following findings.

(1) Chinese college students employ a number of vocabulary learning strategies including cognitive strategy and metacognitive strategy. (2) Vocabulary learning strategies are strongly associated with both the quantity and the quality of the English vocabulary knowledge. (3) There are different ways of approaching the vocabulary learning strategies between proficient students and less proficient students.

Chen Hui (2001) also makes an investigation into the vocabulary learning of Chinese non-English major students of science in Beijing Forestry University. In his study, he concludes some major strategies used by his subjects: (1) rote learning (2) understanding English words through memorizing their Chinese translation (3) understanding the distinction between active vocabulary and passive vocabulary (4) not fully mastering the usages of active vocabulary (5) monotonous way of memorizing words, and (6) guessing words from context.

The studies both at home and abroad show vocabulary learning strategies, but no study has dealt solely with Chinese freshmen non-English majors in English proficiency levels.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research questions

(1) What is the attitude of vocabulary learning for Chinese independent college students and what kind of strategies do they usually use? (2) What is the problem of vocabulary learning in English study and how helpful are the strategies they used? (3) What are the similarities and differences in vocabulary learning during different grades?

3.2 Participants

Participants in this study are 390 non-English majors from grade one to grade three, studying in Beihai College of Beihang University. Their ages range from 18 to 21, majoring in different specialties. The

non-English majors are chosen because there are large quantities of non-English majors required to take college English course in China in order to prepare themselves for the future career. Vocabulary plays an important part in their study. Thus, investigation into their vocabulary learning strategies is very meaningful and useful. Three hundred and one students returned valid questionnaires, while eighty-nine did not finish their questionnaires and their feedback was considered invalid. In the end one was deleted from the 301 questionnaires for ease of analysis.

3.3 Instrument and data collection

The data for this study were collected through questionnaire. The survey was designed to provide a variety of results which could be compared with each other. The questionnaire was sent to the students on line and they are required to answer the questions according to their individual situation. The survey provided information on the attitude of vocabulary learning, strategies they usually use, problems of vocabulary learning in English study, most effective strategies they assume, differences among the students with different grades, genders, English proficiency and so on.

4. SURVEY AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Attitudes towards vocabulary learning

The first section to be surveyed is the attitudes to vocabulary learning. There are five questions in Section One: Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 and Q5. The purpose of these five questions is to investigate Chinese-speaking EFL learners' attitudes toward vocabulary in acquiring English and how they consider the relationship between their English proficiency and vocabulary.

Q1: Learning vocabulary is very important in learning English.

Q2: My English ability will be improved if I know more words.

Q3: I often make a learning plan and learn many new words regularly

Q4: It is difficult in learning vocabulary, but I always overcome it and persist in studying

Q5: I often reflect on my own vocabulary learning methods and look for the relative problems and solutions

Table 1: Participants' attitudes to vocabulary learning

Response Questions	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Q1	89	11	0	0	0
Q2	61	27	12	0	0
Q3	12	19	29	30	10
Q4	19	35	11	29	6
Q5	7	11	31	30	21

From the statistics in Table 1, we may say all of the participants hold positive attitudes to vocabulary learning and realize the importance of correlation between English proficiency and vocabulary.

4.2 Learning strategies

Table 2: Statistics of the survey

Table 2-a

Strategies Group	Use(% Rank)	Helpful (% Rank)
Strategies for the meaning of a new word		
Vocabulary of textbook	81	2
English dictionary	60	4
Bilingual dictionary	10	9
Analyze the part of speech	89	1
Analyze affix and word root	19	7
	51	5
	9	10
	10	9

To be continued

Continued

Table 2-a

Strategies Group	Use(% Rank)		Helpful (% Rank)	
Strategies for the meaning of a new word				
Guess from the context	76	3	9	10
Resort to dictionary after guessing the meaning of a word but still with doubt	61	4	81	2
Ask teacher for Chinese translation	16	8	39	6
Ask teacher for a sentence including the new word	57	5	71	3
Ask classmates for the meaning of a word	41	6	19	7
Strategies for consolidating a word once it's seen				
Oral repetition	82	2	86	2
Written repetition	87	1	89	1
Read new word aloud and write it down when studying	80	3	81	3
Listen to the recording of words	49	8	37	15
Flash cards	61	6	43	13
Vocabulary	78	4	76	4
Keep words in notebook	53	7	57	8
Put English labels on objects	41	10	50	11
Learn the word with a sign of its meaning	4	24	6	24
Connect the word to a personal experience	23	14	33	17
Learn and practice the meaning in a group	29	13	35	16
Learn the spelling	33	12	22	20
Affix and word root	36	11	48	12
Vocabulary classification	3	25	31	18
Imagine word form	21	15	28	19
Connect word to its synonyms and antonyms	70	5	40	14
Associate the word with its coordinates	43	9	70	5
Learn the word and its idioms together	20	16	61	7
Oral practice with the words already learned	6	23	10	23
Make sentences with new words	18	17	62	6
Consolidate vocabulary by translation	16	18	56	9
Read an article and repeat the content in detail with the new words learned	7	22	11	22
Deepen the understanding and enhance the memory of words by extensive reading	9	21	16	21
Do word tests by oneself	11	20	54	10
Review the words learned regularly	12	19	6	25

One important finding is that the survey indicates that most learners either use a strategy or not. The percentage of respondents indicating YES to where they used each strategy or not and whether they thought it helpful is calculated and the results are given in Table2. The rank figure indicates the position from the 35 strategies which are included in the survey.

(1) Most-and-least used strategies

Table 3: Most-and-least used strategies

Table 3-a

Rank 10	Discover meaning	%	Rank 25	Consolidate meaning	%
Most-used strategies					
1	Bilingual dictionary	89	1	Written repetition	87
2	Vocabulary	81	2	Oral repetition	82
3	Guess from the context	76	3	Read new word aloud and write it	80
4	Resort to dictionary after guessing the meaning of a word but still with doubt	61	4	down when studying Use vocabulary	78
5	Ask teacher for a sentence including the new word	57	5	Associate the word with its coordinates	43

To be continued

Continued

Table 3-b

Rank	Discover meaning	%	Rank	Consolidate meaning	%
10			25		
Least-used strategies					
6	Ask classmates for the meaning of a word	41	21	Deepen the understanding and enhance the memory of words by extensive reading	9
7	Analyze the part of speech	19	22	Read an article and repeat the content in detail with the new words learned	7
8	Ask teacher for Chinese translation	16	23	Oral practice with the words already learned	6
9	English dictionary	10	24	Learn the word with a sign of its meaning	4
10	Analyze affix and word root	9	25	Review the words learned regularly	12

Part of the figures in Table 2 are filtered out and make up the following table in an attempt to find out which strategies are the most often used by learners and which the least.

(2) Most helpful and least helpful strategies

Table 4: Most helpful and least helpful strategies

Most helpful strategies					
Rank	Discover meaning	%	Rank	Consolidate meaning	%
1	Bilingual dictionary	91	1	Read new word aloud and write it down when studying	89
2	Resort to dictionary after guessing the meaning of a word but still with doubt	87	2	Oral practice with the words already learned	81
3	Ask teacher for a sentence including the new word	60	3	Use new word in sentences	79
Least helpful strategies					
8	Analyze affix and word root	18	23	Do word tests by oneself	11
9	Analyze the part of speech	16	24	Imagine word form	17
10	Guess from context	11	25	Learn the spelling	9

(3) Relative contrast

Between the male and female students: Usually the female students use more strategies than the male students' which imply that the male students do not pay more energy on vocabulary learning. The female students are willing to pay more time to learning vocabulary and put them into practice.

Between the good and poor learners: The good learners study harder and use more vocabulary learning strategies than the poor ones. They are also good at using what they have learned in actual use. Instead of remembering words mechanically the good learners make them alive and master a larger vocabulary.

Between low and high grades : The juniors focus self-learning and actual use while the freshmen are almost dependent on the teacher, focusing on the textbook almost without extracurricular reading. The freshmen do not have their own vocabulary learning strategies and even have no relative awareness. The sophomore want to learn English well but did not find their own approaches, and sometimes they feel puzzled in vocabulary learning, the emphasis is self-learning, though.

4.3 Difficulties and problems in vocabulary learning

There are 10 questions composed in Part Three to identify the difficulties and obstacles the non-English majors experienced in the process of learning the target vocabulary. These questions are to investigate participant's overall perception about how difficult it is to learn English vocabulary and to identify specific difficulties and obstacles they encounter in acquiring the target vocabulary. The purpose of the identified

difficulties and obstacles is to provide useful information for English instructors to design an effective supplemental vocabulary exercise to assist EFL students in learning the target vocabulary more efficiently.

From the feedback of the questionnaire we know that there are three top obstacles in vocabulary learning. They are as follows: 1) Word forms; 2) Technical terms (e.g. technology, news and so on); 3) Polysemant.

4.4 Implications

First, from the survey we can safely conclude that students do feel it helpful when properly employing a strategy to learn a new word. Oxford and Scarcella (1994) argue that learners should be taught how to continue to improve their vocabulary on their own by teaching them appropriate vocabulary learning strategies in contrast to letting students learn vocabulary in whatever manner they themselves may devise. This suggests that teaching students learning strategies has become one of the primary concerns of English teachers. Efforts made on them would be worthwhile and beneficial for both teachers and students .

Second, as we have mentioned above, when the most helpful list of strategies is compared with the most-used, we find that there are many strategies that students not only employed frequently but also perceived helpful, like bilingual dictionary, written repetition, oral repetition and so on. However, there are also some strategies those students perceive helpful but not so frequently used. For example, oral practice with the words learned, use new word in sentences etc. These strategies with high helpfulness but low usage suggest that learners call the value of the strategies they do not currently use which implies that they are lack of an actual practice and correct leading and they may be willing to try new strategies if they are conducted and instructed.

Third, from the survey we see all overwhelming majority of college students not only use bilingual dictionary(89%),but also feel they are helpful(91%). This shows that bilingual dictionaries are clearly the most favored.

Fourth, the female students using more strategies than the male students and are willing to pay more time to learning vocabulary and put them into practice. The good learners study harder and use more vocabulary learning strategies. They are also good at using what they have learned in actual use. Instead of remembering words mechanically, they make them alive and master a larger vocabulary. High-grade students have more self-learning and awareness than low-grade ones. They focus on actual use and the low-grade students learn them step by step mechanically. The low-grade need teachers lead them to achieve more useful vocabulary learning strategies to reach a higher level.

5. CONCLUSION

The results show that non-English major learners in independent college have an active attitude about English vocabulary learning and usually employ a large variety of learning strategies when they come across new words in their English learning, either to discover the meanings of the new words or to consolidate the words but did not form effective vocabulary learning strategies. The most frequently employed strategies, the least-used strategies and the least-helpful strategies can be seen in the tables obviously.

Although, we also need to remember that one's vocabulary learning is a very personal possession and one's ability to exploit its comprehensible ways is equally individual. And therefore, students should be encouraged to seek ways they find most helpful for expanding and maintaining their vocabulary. Now, the present research has showed some lights on vocabulary learning strategies but the study is also limited in several aspects. We need further research on this study to investigate the related effectiveness and importance of each particular strategy in a more actual, controlled and systematic way. And to some extent, the feedback of the survey implies that there exist certain problems in the vocabulary learning of the students. Some suggestions should be put forward from the perspective of teaching and learning: As a teacher, one should pay more attention to vocabulary teaching, consciously try to seek successful learning strategies, stimulate and help students to use a strategy suited them and let them put what they've learned

into practice and actual use as much as possible. And then stimulate the students' interest in English learning.

In short, teachers should provide students with more space and time and lead them to form positive cognitive style, and meanwhile help them recognize the importance of language learning and solve the difficulties encountered in their English learning. For different students, teachers should take different teaching methods, develop unique and effective teaching programs and learning programs to enrich the cultural atmosphere and effectively improve the level of both language learning and language teaching.

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