LEARNING VOCABULARY IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE: ARABIC, ENGLISH AND MALAY

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Date:

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Statement of Originality

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled “Learning in Another Language: Arabic, English and Malay” is to the best of the author’s knowledge that of the author except where due reference is made.

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15338
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ABSTRACT

LEARNING VOCABULARY IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE: ARABIC, ENGLISH AND MALAY

Suhainim Said

This study was carried out with the aims of identifying the actual and perceived vocabulary learning strategies used by students taking Arabic classes in learning Arabic, English and Malay and specifically attempts to achieve these specific objectives: (1) to identify the various strategies of vocabulary learning used by students who are taking Arabic classes in acquiring Arabic, (2) to compare the difference in types of strategies used to learn 1st language and 2nd language, and (3) to identify the similarities and the differences between the perceived and the actual strategies used by Malay students in learning Arabic and English. In obtaining the data, questionnaires were administered among the students who are taking Arabic classes level 1 in UNIMAS and interview was conducted on three Arabic lecturers in Center of Language Studies (CLS) and also Arabic level 1 and 2 students. The total number of respondents involved in this is 62. Based on the findings of this study, there is a difference between the perceived and the actual strategies as learners might think that sometimes they use a particular vocabulary learning strategy not because it works, but because they think that they should be able to learn that way. Another finding is in relation with one of the vocabulary learning strategies that the learners reported they frequently used which is interaction with friends, classmates and their instructors. It can be concluded that interaction does play an important role in language learning. Besides, the use of bilingual dictionary is also one of the most frequently used strategies among the respondents. Another finding is that there is a slight difference in using vocabulary strategies when learning English, Arabic and Malay. Further studies shall be conducted in order to enrich the findings on this issue by involving a larger scale of respondents from all over Malaysia region. Besides, qualitative study shall be conducted for a clearer and deeper understanding towards the issue of language learning.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview of the chapter

This chapter discusses the overall purpose of the study which includes the background of the study, statement of problems, research objectives and research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms and scope of the study.

1.1 Introduction

Excellence in learning any of foreign languages such Arabic, Japanese or Korean depends on how different the languages are from the learners’ first language or second language. This is in terms of morphology, phonology, syntax, lexis and grammar of the languages themselves. For instance, in
learning Arabic, the script which comes in different forms, the vocabulary as well as the rules and grammar affect the learners’ performance. Thus, the use of various learning strategies in the learning process is very crucial in determining learners’ performance.

Learning a foreign language such as Arabic is different from English language for example. Learners without previous experience in learning Arabic might find it a bit difficult as they have to learn to recognize the letters first before going to the next stage. Additionally, identifying the letters is complicated by their varied appearance depending on whether the letter was at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a word, or just standing alone.

Letter recognition is the foundation of literacy and an essential step in learning to read Arabic. Milo (2002) on his research stated that originally, the Arabic script stems from the same sources as the Latin, Greek and Hebrew alphabets, Phoenician. Arabic writing system is alphabetical. Commonly alphabets consist of a few dozen letters which represent only one particular unique sound. However, in Arabic, some letters are ambivalent between two or more sounds, and some other letters do not indicate a sound as they only consist of a grammatical function. Modern Standard Arabic consists of 28 basic letters, 8 of them doublet differentiated by optional letters for representing vowels and diacritics marks. These marks are not often used in ordinary writing, since native speakers can easily identify the intended words from the context and experience. This is one of the difficulties that students of Arabic as a foreign/second language encounter.
1.2 **Background of the study**

Acquiring any foreign languages such Arabic, Mandarin, French depends very much on the way how a particular individual should have some knowledge on the strategies to be used in order to maximize the learning and fully comprehend the words that they have acquired.

Students should be able to use different various vocabulary learning strategies when dealing with different aspects of words meanings. A single word contains a few meanings which depend on the context it is being used. Commonly, we thought that we use or we should use the same strategies in learning different languages, however the truth is they are actually different.

In knowing a word, Nation (1990) indicated that there are two things that involve; (i) receptive knowledge and (ii) productive knowledge. In receptive knowledge, the process of knowing a word involves when learners are able to recognize it when the word is heard (what does it sound like?) or when it is seen (what does it look like?) Learners are also able to distinguish the word from other words that have similar forms and being able to make judgment if the word sounds right or look right. Additionally, knowing a word involves having some expectations on the collocation of a word, being able to recall the meaning when the word is encountered for the following times and able to distinguish which shade of meaning that suits most for the context it occur. Besides, knowing the meaning of a word involves the ability of learners to make various associations with other related words.

Productive knowledge on the other hand involves the extension of receptive knowledge. Knowing a word in productive knowledge means learners know how to pronounce the word, how to write and spell it, how to
use it in correct grammatical patterns along with the words it usually collocate with. Productive knowledge also involves the rare use of low – frequency word, and using it in suitable situations.

Chitravellu, Choon and Sithamparam (2005) point out Channell’s (1988) suggestion which is when the learners are able to identify a word’s meaning both in and out of context and capable to use it appropriately and naturally, it shows that a new vocabulary item is acquired. In order to know a word, there are a number of important aspects that a learner should know. Chitravellu, Choon and Sithamparam (2005) stated that learners need to know what is the meaning of a word in its current context, the differences or similarities that the word has with other words that have the same meaning, the other meaning that the word possibly has, the differences that the word has in term of grammatical forms, how the word can be used and the situation in which it can be used and how a particular word changes according to grammatical requirements.

1.3 Statement of problems

Lots of people think that they can use the same vocabulary learning strategies in learning their mother tongue, second language or even foreign languages. The truth is, the strategies that they use are slightly different from one another. Any individual who intend to succeed in learning second or foreign language should put much effort in knowing what word they are dealing with. Nation (2001) pointed out that with regards to the fact that words are not isolated units of language, but fit into many interlocking systems and level, thus there are many things to know when dealing with any particular word and there are many degrees of knowing.
Learners have to put much effort in knowing a word. In the process of knowing a word, learners should have a numbers of vocabulary learning strategies so that they will be able to know words. Nation (2001) stated that the learning burden of a word is the amount of effort required to learn it. Learners’ background plays a crucial role in assisting them to learn a word as different words have different learning burdens. When dealing with second or foreign language, therefore for unquestionably learner will have to face difficulties in knowing the words as they have different language background from the targeted languages. The more a word represents patterns and language that learners are already familiar with the lighter its learning burden is. When mentioning about the amount of effort needed to learn and remember words, there are three things that involve; (i) the learners’ previous experience of the second or foreign language and their mother tongue, (ii) the way in which the words is learnt and taught, and (iii) the intrinsic difficulty of the words.

Thus, learners should be exposed or expose themselves to the various and different vocabulary learning strategies which suit them and maximize their learning.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to identify the actual and perceived vocabulary learning strategies used by students taking Arabic classes in learning Arabic, English and Malay.

This research is conducted in attempts to achieve these specific objectives:
1.4.1 to identify the various strategies of vocabulary learning used by students who are taking Arabic classes in acquiring Arabic
1.3.2 to compare the difference in types of strategies used to learn 1st language and 2nd language

1.3.3 to identify the similarities and the differences between the perceived and the actual strategies used by Malay students in learning Arabic and English

1.5 Research questions

1.4.1 What are the common vocabulary learning strategies used by students in learning Arabic and English?

1.4.2 Do students use more vocabulary learning strategies when learning Arabic compared to other languages?

1.4.3 Do students actually employ more discovery or consolidation strategies after a reading task?

1.4.4 What are the differences and similarities between the perceived strategies and actual strategies used by Malay students?

1.6 Significance of the study

Little number of studies had been done previously with regards to vocabulary learning strategies which somehow lead the researcher to work on it. This research study is conducted in order to identify possible suggestion and recommendation in order to assist in identifying the differences between the actual strategies and the perceived strategies for learners who are learning foreign language or second language. It may also give a clear guideline how learners learn third language. To add on, it also provide suggestions and ideas to the lecturers those who involve in teaching foreign or second language
regarding vocabulary learning strategies which can be introduced to the students.

1.7 Definition of terms

1.7.1 Discovery strategy

Discovery strategy as stated by Schmitt (1997) in Catalan (2003) comprises determination and social strategies. He stated that discovery strategy involves the learners to determine the new words when they encountered for the first time. In research done by Warrant-Price (2004), Schmitt stated that by exploiting both determination and social strategies, learners shall discover the meaning of a word by guessing from their structural knowledge of the language, guessing from an L1 cognate, guessing from context, using reference materials, primarily dictionaries and by asking someone else, for instances lecturer, teacher or peers.

1.7.2 Consolidation strategy

Consolidation strategy comprises of social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Schmitt (1997) in Catalan (2003) stated that consolidation strategy is the ones to consolidate meaning when the learners encountered the previous words again. For examples: verbal repetition, written repetition and connect the words with its synonym or antonym, etc.
1.8 **Scope of the study**

This research focuses on the vocabulary learning strategies used by students who are taking Arabic classes in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak when they study Arabic and English compared to Malay. Participants are those taking Arabic classes Level 1 and 2 and 3 lecturers who are currently teaching Arabic language in Center of Language Studies (CLS) in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. The number of level 1 students is 55 (53 – questionnaire and 2 - interview) while level 2 students is 4 for interview. The total number of participants is 62.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Knowing word

‘Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed,’ as summed up by David Wilkinson the importance of vocabulary learning in Thornbury (2002) He also stated that knowing the meaning of a word actually involves knowing the word associated with it (its
collocations), connotations, register and its cultural accretions instead of knowing the dictionary meaning (or meanings) only.

Nation (2001) indicated that words are not isolated units of language that they fit into many interlocking systems and levels. With regards to this, learners should have knowledge about any particular words and they should know that there are many degrees of knowing. Additionally, Nation added that different words possess different learning burdens for learners who come from different language backgrounds. Making the effort towards what it means to know word can contribute to its learning burden.

Ellis (1997) as quoted by Alosh (2005) when responding to the question of whether words are learned as discrete items or in sequence, he stated that vocabulary is initially learned in sequence of words rather than as discrete items. Ellis also added that each chunk is assigned a single meaning, or function. The sequence that is acquired may be analyzed into its component parts. From this point, it can support that it is also important to learn language in meaningful chunks, such as idioms, phrasal verbs, similes, phrasal metaphors and collocation. As in Arabic itself, Alosh supported that an Arabic beginning student should learn the greeting ﻋَﻠَﯿُّكم ﺍﻠﺴَّﻼﻢُ ‘peace upon you’ long before he learns ﺳَﻼﻢ ‘peace’ and the prepositional phrase ﻋَﻠَﯿُّكم ‘upon you.’

Schmitt (2000) stated that being able to understand a word is known as receptive knowledge and is normally connected with listening and reading. If we are able to produce a word of our own accord when speaking or writing, then that is considered productive knowledge (passive/active are alternative terms). In Nation (2000), Meara, 1998; Corson, 1995; Laufer, 1998) defined the term ‘passive’ for listening and reading while ‘active’ for speaking and writing as synonym for receptive and productive. However, there are some individual who object these terms as they do not see listening and reading as
having some of the other characteristics which can be attached to the term ‘passive’.

As stated by Nation (2000), receptive knowledge which is always related to passive vocabulary involves learners receiving messages and language ideas from others through listening or reading that they try to comprehend it. It is more to perceiving the form of word whenever they are listening or reading as well as trying to retrieve its meaning. Nation added that receptive knowledge involves the learners as being able to recognize the word when it is heard, being familiar with its written form in order to make sure that it will be recognized when the learners encounter it in the reading, knowing what the word means in the particular context in which the word occurred, knowing the concept behind the word that somehow will provide the learners in understanding the various contexts the word belongs to and being able to know and identify the collocation of that particular word.

Productive knowledge on the other hand involves the learners to produce language forms by speaking and writing in order to convey messages to others. Productive vocabulary use involves the learners in expressing meanings through speaking or writing and retrieving and producing the appropriate spoken or written word form. Based on some of the point of view of productive knowledge and use, knowing a word involves the learners in being able to pronounce the word correctly including stress, able to write it with correct spelling, being able to construct it using the right word parts in their appropriate forms, being able to produce the word in different contexts in order to express the range of the word’s meanings, being able to produce synonyms and antonyms of the word and being able to use the word correctly in its original sentence.
Nation (1990, p. 31) in Schmitt (2000) proposed a list of the different kinds of knowledge that a person must master in order to know a word.

- the meaning(s) of the word
- the written form of the word
- the spoken form of the word
- the grammatical behavior of the word
- the collocations of the word
- the register of the word
- the associations of the word
- the frequency of the word

There are some factors which contribute to the difficulties in knowing and learning a word. As stated by Thornbury (2002), the factors are pronunciation, spelling, length and complexity, grammar, meaning and range, connotation and idiomaticity.

2.2 Learning strategy

According to Oxford (1989, 1993) in Catalan (2003) the term learning strategy can be referred to ‘steps or action taken by students to improve their own language learning’ Schmitt on the other hand, adopts Rubins (1987:29) definition of learning as ‘the process by which information is obtained, stored, retrieved. Schmitt broadens this definition into vocabulary learning strategy as the following; vocabulary learning strategies could be any which affect this rather broadly-defined process. Catalan (2003) then adopts the definition as knowledge about the mechanism (processes, strategies) used in order to learn vocabulary and steps or actions taken by students; (a) to find out the meaning of unknown words, (b) to retain them in long-term memory, (c) to recall them at will, and (d) to use them in oral or written mode.
According to Ellis (1995), a strategy involves mental or behavioral activity which related to some specific stage in the overall process of both language acquisition and language use. Additionally, a language learning strategy involves an attempt in developing linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language. Rubin 1987 in Ellis viewed learning strategies as strategies that contribute to the development of the language system which the learners construct which somehow affect learning directly. Chamot 1989 on the other hand defined learning strategies as approaches, techniques or deliberate actions which learners take for the reason of facilitating learning, recall of both linguistic and content area information.

The definitions proposed for LLSs (Language Learning Strategies) seem to suggest that they are conscious actions, but after a time of using them, they become automatic, i.e. unconscious (Oxford, 1990a: 12). Cohen (1998: 11) views that learning strategies are ‘either within the focal attention of the learners or within their peripheral attention, in that learners can identify them if asked about what they have just done or thought’. Oxford (1989) in Ellis (1995) defined learner strategies in language acquisition as ‘behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable’.

Riding and Rayner (1998) in Tseng, Dornyei and Schmitt (2006) argued that an activity become strategic when it is particularly appropriate for the individual learner in contrast to general learning activities which a student may find less helpful. Besides, they added that learners engage in strategic learning if they exert purposeful effort to select, and then pursue, learning procedures that they believe will increase their individual learning effectiveness.