CONTEXTUALIZED ENHANCEMENT OF VOCABULARY IN THE CONTEXT OF ESL LEARNING

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Abstract: Learning is an active and dynamic process in which individuals can perceive a variety of information and strategic modes of processing. Learning strategies are made as procedures undertaken by the learners in order to make their language learning as effective as possible. Lexical knowledge/Vocabulary has been considered as a primary factor throughout the educational research. The Objective of this research is to show the appropriate vocabulary strategy to enhance the autonomous learning. The traditional methods of learning vocabulary such as word building strategies, activities to find word definitions, studying vocabulary in context and the usage of marginal glosses were discussed. But there was a strong indication from the findings that students are now resort to computer facilities as well as referring newspapers, reciting poems, listening to songs, watching films etc to improve their vocabulary store. It moves a step further from the synthetic teaching to contextualized learning of vocabulary. It has the potential to engrain the vocabulary in the long term memory of learners. It is based on a large corpus of empirical evidence. Literature was reviewed regarding appropriate strategies and theories related to vocabulary teaching strategies according to the criticism of several authors. The study is based on the theories as they clearly stamp to promote the vocabulary development through context in second language learning.   So the concept of learning vocabulary should be carried onto a productive level rather than as a receptive skill for a sustainable future of English in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Dynamic Context Productive Long term memory Autonomous

1. Introduction

Learning vocabulary is fundamental and important though it is considered as difficult.   There is a complexity of the English native speakers' mental lexicon and its relation to an L2 syllabus target and on how to teach vocabulary effectively in classrooms. This paper outlines some common vocabulary teaching strategies and discusses the effectiveness of the vocabulary teaching and learning strategies. The paper highlights general dimensions, implications and dynamics of vocabulary teaching and learning strategies and illustrates 2C-5R model.

1.1 The importance of vocabulary in ELT

In the early 1980s, there was severe criticism on the neglect of vocabulary research. (Meaia 1980, 1984) Wilkins (1974) indicated that learning vocabulary is as important as learning grammar. Learning is remembering. The learning of grammar is essentially a rule-based system. Vocabulary knowledge is largely a question of accumulating individual items. Alen (1983:5) also emphasized that lexical problem frequently interferes with communication; communication breaks down when people do not use the right words. This depicts the importance of vocabulary in ESL classroom. Earlier the teaching of vocabulary was considered as an insignificant thing in the ELT classrooms. Researchers realized that many of learner's difficulties both receptively and productively result from an inadequate vocabulary and even when they are at higher levels of language competence and performance, they still feel in need of

learning vocabulary. (Laufer 1981, Newton 1990) Vocabulary has got its central and an important status in discussions about learning a language. Particular approaches were developed like 'discourse based language teaching' (Carter and McCarthy 1988) the 'Lexical Phrase approach' (Nattinger and DeCarrica 1992) 'the lexical Approach' (Lewis, 1993, 1997) and the 'Lexical syllabus' (Sinclair and Renouf 1988) one of the research implications about the importance of vocabulary is that 'lexical competence is at the heart of communicative competence.' (Meaia 1996:35)

Maiguascha (1993) stated that teaching or rules with coherent structures which students follow is not true of vocabulary. (p.91) within the last few years vocabulary has become viewed as an important aspect in second Language learning. Nation (as cited in Nation and Waring, 1997) explained 'vocabulary knowledge enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of the world enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge and language use and so on.' (p.6). In the last 25 years the researchers and Applied linguists of second language acquisition have seen renewed interest in vocabulary acquisition. There are many dimensions to vocabulary learning and acquisitions in the multitude of different areas of research.

2.0 Theoretical concepts

Learning vocabulary is an ongoing process that takes time and effort among students. Nakata (2006) recognized that vocabulary acquisition demands continuous repetition in order for effective vocabulary learning (p.19) It is not something about a student can spend time learning or memorizing, like grammar and be successful. The learner is required to be disciplined throughout the process of acquisition, spending each day working for words he/she doesn't know. The learners should remember high frequency words and put them into their long term memory. Nation and Waring stated that learners need to encounter the word multiple times in authentic speaking, reading and writing contexts at the student's appropriate level (p.8). Developing new lessons allow the student to encounter new words into his/her long term memory. But it is time-consuming. Learning new vocabulary through context rather than the decontextualized methods helps the student to understand the word's correct usage. Learning new words from a word list has vast different from gaining new words through contexts. Yongq Gu (2003) stated that learning new words through context is a step students may use, and students should think meta-cognitively and learn new words within the context of where they appear (p.14) Students can get to know the important words from the context of a lesson. High frequency words occur so regularly in daily conversation. If students understand those words, they are able to write and speak in comprehensible English. Low frequency words deal more with academic studies that appear throughout all academic texts and courses. Low frequency words are the more difficult aspect for teachers to teach and learners to understand.

2.1 Implications

The objective of this research is to probe the contextualized enhancement of vocabulary in ESL context. It is based on a large corpus of empirical evidence. Literature was reviewed regarding appropriate strategies and theories related to vocabulary teaching strategies according to the criticism of several authors. The study is based on the theories as they clearly stamp to promote the vocabulary development through context in second language learning.

- Teacher facilitates the student to be actively involved in the learning of words.

- Learners need multiple exposures to words and it should urge the students to retrieve words repeatedly.

- Learners need to make multiple decisions about words.

- They must represent a variety of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

- Learners need tasks and strategies to help them organize their mental lexicon by building networks of associations - the more the better.

- Learners need to wean themselves off a reliance on direct translation from their mother tongue.

- Words need to be presented in their typical contexts though literature, so that learners can get a feel for their meaning, their register, their collocations, and their syntactic environments.

- Direct attention should be given to the sound of new words, particularly the way they are stressed.

- The learners can be 'taught but learners will need plentiful exposure to talk and text as well as training for self-directed learning

- Students must be encountered multiple times in different forms in various tests.

3.0 Vocabulary Teaching Strategies

Palmberg (1990) proposed two main types of teaching methods to improve vocabulary learning. The first focuses on the sense of L2 based exercises and activities, which stand for Communicative Language Teaching. The development of learners' own L2 associations is difficult. It is partly dependent on learners' background of language and their learning experiences. Seal (1991) classified vocabulary feeding strategies should be prepared as planned and unplanned activities in classrooms. Seal proposed a three C's method, which convey meaning by giving synonyms, anecdotes or using mime. Then the teacher checks the meanings to confirm that students understand. Finally, the meanings can be consolidated by practicing them in contexts. Oxford and Crookall (1990) classified common techniques into four categories 1. Decontextualizing 2. Word lists, flash cards and dictionary use. 3. Semi-contextualizing: word grouping, association, visual imagery, physical sensation and semantic-mapping 4. Fully

contextualizing: reading, listening, speaking and writing 4. Adaptable: Structured reviewing

Therefore it is argued that contextual, semi-contextual and de-contextual strategies are also needed to help learners to learn vocabulary. Learners need a lot of native-like input in order to absorb authentic frame works of the target language and to enable them to achieve native—like proficiency. L2 teaching may learn from L1 vocabulary acquisition processes and principles, as was argued by Hague (1987), Mc William (1998), Singleton (1999) and Stahl (1986). Vocabulary teaching should be dynamic. It should be taken into account the various dimensions of the mental lexicon.

3.1 Decontextualized methods

Non-mnemonic elaboration techniques such as semantic mapping and ordering support learners to process target words. 'Semantic mapping' involves brainstorming associations. 'Ordering' is a technique that asks learners to organize scrambled lists of words and to distinguish differences in meaning during the arrangement process. It has been shown that combining nonmnemonic semantic elaboration techniques with the mnemonic Keyword Method results in greater retention of words than if the Keyword Method alone is used (Brown and perry, 1991-cited in Ellis, 1995 p.5). However, semantic elaboration techniques are mostly recommended for reviewing activities in the classroom (Steielitz, 1983; Nation, 1990-cited in Sokmen, 1997). In addition, it would seem that since these techniques also assume a reasonable L2 vocabulary base from which associations can be made, they are also largely unsuitable for beginner level L2 learners. The Sentence Writing Method is recommended by researchers as a way to increase vocabulary.

3.2 Contextual Dimensions and dynamics

Learning by heart has not been accepted by teachers and educationists in the field of language teaching for long years. This has been a reaction against the rote learning which is associated with audiolingual

ICSBE2016-61

methodology. In the 1960s audiolingual method was rejected by most methodologists. It emphasized learning unthinking habit is forming relied heavily on mimicry and memorization. The use of contexts will bring positive outcome to help learners to receive target words, 'recognize the contextual meanings, retrieve words, restore them in long term memory and have more appropriate lexical use in the four language skills. (Carell 1984; Clarke and Nation, 1980…..) This should help to establish or consolidate learners' prior schematic knowledge to improve reception and production of L2 vocabulary. Therefore real use of words is highly valued by many teachers and learners. However, contextual input is not a panacea for vocabulary acquisition (Hulstijn, Hollander and Greidanus 1996) The uses of contexts do not assure an increase in the quantitative size of the mental lexicon. Findings from studies in Asian contexts (Bensoussan and Laufer 1984; Laufer and Sim 1985; Qian, 1993) imply that contextual learning is less familiar than decontextual learning. Furthermore as Hulstijin (1992) clearly indicated, contextual vocabulary teaching should not put too much importance on the benefit of just expanding vocabulary, but on understanding the form and the meaning of new words from the context. Therefore, It cannot be confirmed that oral negotiation is necessarily positively useful for learning vocabulary in classrooms. This is not to deny the useful function of drawing learners' attention to context and raising their awareness of its importance. Two groups of teaching dynamics are suggested for affective vocabulary pedagogy: contextual and consolidating (2C) dimensions and dynamics of strategies. The contextual strategies are used both for lexical input whereas the consolidating ones are used to restore words.

4.0 Theory Vs Practice

4.1 Teaching through Literature

Literature learning involves the education of the emotions and hence engages the emotions. It is not merely creation of

meaning (signification) but also giving 'value' in Widdowson's (1985) terminology.

The affective domain comprises the following skills:

1. Internalizing values
2. Organizing: creating a unique value system
3. Valuing: giving value to persons, object, idea
4. Responding to phenomena: active, participate (attends, reacts to phenomena)

Translated into action in the classroom these skills could be interpreted as:

- Understanding responding to the critical frame work
- Empathizing with context/situation/characters
- Personalizes values/ value systems

Infact the affective domain relates to the Three Channels of communication defined by Brumfit and Carder (2000):

a) Verbal response: learners' answers direct text related questions

b) Activity response: Learner is involved in a task verbally or creatively

c) Individual response: After the stimulus learner has received, learner begins to make the own value judgements. According to Carter and Long (1991), it is the creative response channel which seems to be the strongest justification for the teaching of literature

4.2 Interpretative + Interpersonal modes

Guessing vocabulary in context: Use the context of the paragraph to guess the meaning of the following words. This can be enhanced through the computer application and programmes.

Paragraph-1   Astronomy   is the…explicated….

ICSBE2016-61

Paragraph 2- Kalpanana Salva is the astronomer ….

Paragraph 3……………..cosmic ways

Paragraph 4 Constellation

Use the following questions to interpret the words after the discussion with the group friends

4.3 Interpersonal + Presentational modes

Creative phase

Role play

Student A: You are a reporter for a popular Hispanic teen magazine (and prepare for the interview with Shakara) Ask her six questions. Be sure to obtain information that would be of interest to your teenage readers…

Student B: You are Shakira's public Relations manager. She was scheduled to be interviewed by a Hispanic teen magazine today, but unfortunately she is sick Shakira has asked you participate in the interview in her place, since you also speak Spanish and know Shakara so well. Give details that you think Shakira's teenage fans will enjoy?

Teacher will be a facilitator to increase the curiosity of the students.

Memorized chunks of language or formulaic utterances are associated with particular communicative contexts which furnish the learner with a rich and reliable vocabulary of ready-made expressions which contribute significantly to his or her overall mastery of the language (Widdowson, 1989) The definition of 'chunks' is 'a unit of memory organization formed by bringing together a set of already

formed chunks in memory and welding them together into a larger unit. (Newall, 124-128) The following are the examples for types of chunks

E.g Com pounds- Tape recorders, book shelf

Phrased verbs- come, get, go, put, take off, in, on, down

Idioms- multi- word items which are not the sum of their parts- spill the beans, kick the bucket, have an ox to grind

(Fixed collocations, institutionalized utterances)

Fixed phrases- of course, atleast, infact, by far, how do you do, excuse me (poly words)

Proverbs- lexical phrases the thing/the fact/point is that (sentence frames) etc.

Chunks prove highly motivating by developing fluency at very early stages and thus promote a sense of achievement. Chunks let speakers to overcome memory and since they are stored as wholes and are readily accessible. It is easy to acquire as it occurs frequently such as in context-bound and having situational meaning. As they were ready-made they can be easily retrieved. It is, however, generally agreed that chunks behave more like individual words than like separately constructed sequences. *Unemployed* and *out of work*, for instance, both consist of three morphemes. If the first is handled mentally as a unit for comprehension and production, rather than being analysed into or built up from its constituents it is processed, it seems reasonable to suppose that its multi-word synonym may be treated similarly, even if we happen to write this with spaces between the three components.

It is important to shed light on the usage of certain lexical chunks which need to be mastered for certain kinds of pragmatic competence. It is important to give them a central role in the English Language Teaching classrooms. It is based on a large corpus of empirical evidence. Literature was reviewed regarding appropriate methods and activities related to chunks to the development of learner autonomy.

5.0 Conclusion

Vocabulary acquisition is an extremely important part of second language acquisition. Teachers cannot rely on students acquiring the needed vocabulary just through interaction with the language. Students need to be taught vocabulary in context so that they can acquire the words and use them more frequently. The students should be allowed to use the new vocabulary during the course of the lesson.

Table 1: Vocabulary Development Discourse

Thematic focus	A topic is initiated and developed by a question or a comment with related subtopics throughout the discourse
Connected Discourse	Multiple interactive and coherent topic development
Direct teaching	Introduction of new words Students able to connect with the new contexts Activate prior knowledge to confirm meaning Use context clues to identify and clarify word meanings.
Questions with unpredictable Answers	Questions are open-ended
Promotion of language and expression	Repeating, rephrasing or expanding his/her own utterances to elicit a response

It will help them to retain it in their long term memories. The students must be given appropriate situations, giving them the chance to use the vocabulary and build upon their language repertoire

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