

Vocabulary

There is an internet site which lists publications on vocabulary learning since 1984. – Vocabulary Acquisition Research Group Archive (VARGA). It is rather short.

www.swan.ac.uk/cals/calsres/varga

This review by Read (2004) surveys research on second language vocabulary teaching and learning since 1999. It first considers the distinction between incidental and intentional vocabulary learning. Although learners certainly acquire word knowledge incidentally while engaged in various language learning activities, more direct and systematic study of vocabulary is also required. There is a discussion of how word frequency counts and information on word meaning from computer corpora can inform the selection of words to be studied, with a particular focus on spoken vocabulary. This leads to a consideration of learner dictionaries and some research evidence on how effectively students can use them to understand the meanings of words. Then classroom research on teaching vocabulary is discussed. Another significant topic is the design of computer-based language learning programs to enhance opportunities for learners to expand their vocabulary knowledge. Finally, a summary of recent work on vocabulary testing is presented.

Vocabulary learning can be fun

Vocabulary acquisition is crucial to second language acquisition. However, learning vocabulary is often perceived as a tedious and laborious process. This paper first discusses problems learners have learning vocabulary and offers some guidelines. It introduces language learning strategies that make vocabulary learning interesting and easy for learners. It also familiarizes teachers with useful techniques and activities for presentation and fun games for practice and production. Ideas and viewpoints put forward by distinguished scholars such as

Baker, Ausuble, Uberman, Thompson, Carter, Moras, Schmitt, Richards, Celce-Murcia, Chastain are utilized to substantiate the arguments.

(Rahimi & Sahragard, 2008)

Incidental Vocabulary Learning And Recall By Intermediate Foreign Language Students: The Influence Of Marginal Glosses, Dictionary Use, And Summary Writing

This study is an attempt to compare the effect of four reading conditions on incidental vocabulary learning and recall of intermediate EFL learners. A sample population of 120 Iranian intermediate students read two short passages in one of four reading conditions: 1) L1 Marginal Glosses (MG1 – provision of L1 translations of unknown words), 2) L2 Marginal Glosses (MG2 – provision of L2 meanings of unknown words), 3) Dictionary Use (DU – opportunity to use a dictionary), or 4) Summary Writing (SW – writing a little summary of both texts using new words). After reading, students were tested for their recall of 30 words that had appeared once to six times in the texts. Two weeks later, they were tested again to check long-term retention of words. Support was found for the hypothesis that the four vocabulary learning conditions and the time interval between the two tests have a meaningful influence on the retention of the meaning of unfamiliar target words. The other hypothesis assumed that the retention of the meaning of the words is the highest in SW group, and it lowers in DU group, MG1group and MG2 group respectively. All of the four reading conditions had a significant effect on incidental learning and recall of the words, but neither the immediate nor the delayed tests revealed significant differences

(Ghabanchi, 2012)

The following article is worth reading. It makes studying easier and more methodical.

The Bibliometrics of Vocabulary Acquisition: An Exploratory Study

This paper presents a bibliometric analysis of the research literature on L2 vocabulary acquisition published in 2006. The paper uses a methodology known as Inclusive Author Co-citation. The method uses the pattern of citations appearing in a body of research papers to generate a map of an area of research. These maps reveal 'hidden colleges' within a subject field. The analysis presented here is based on citation data for 101 authors who are significantly cited in the 2006 literature. The analysis identifies four research clusters in the data. The two principle clusters – accounting for 96% of the data – are a psycholinguistic cluster dominated by de Groot, Kroll and David Green, and a mainstream vocabulary cluster dominated by Nation and Laufer. The two clusters are largely self-contained, with very dense patterns of connections between the members of the individual clusters. The analysis identifies only a small number of links between these two clusters. The network dissolves into 30 smaller clusters if the main players are removed from the analysis. The analysis broadly supports intuitive analyses of the L2 vocabulary acquisition literature, but provides some new objective data which supports these intuitions. The paper also suggests that co-citation analysis of this sort might provide a way of mapping changes in the discipline over time.

(Meara, 2012)

Fan (2000) examines the gap between the learners' active and passive vocabulary. They suggest vocabulary learning strategies which help to narrow this gap. They have the following research questions.

1. Is there a positive relationship between English proficiency and active and passive vocabulary knowledge?
2. Is there a positive relationship between active and passive vocabulary knowledge?

3. Of the words L2 learners recognize, how many of them can they recall?
4. What are the strategies which can help narrow the gap between the two types of vocabulary? In other words, which are the strategies which correlate positively with active vocabulary knowledge?

From personal experience I would suggest that the gap widens, when the learner has reached the stage of proficiency. People who have reached this stage are normally interested in the language beyond duty. They become avid readers of literature in the TL. This, in turn, means they will encounter many words that are not all that common in normal discourse. This results in input which becomes intake which not necessarily becomes output.

File & Adams (2010) examine whether vocabulary instruction should be integrated or isolated. Their study compares form-focused instruction for vocabulary development in an English second language reading lesson. Their statistics showed that both types of instruction led to more learning and retention of vocabulary knowledge than incidental exposure alone. Retention rates were similar for both types of instruction; they found a trend for isolated instruction to lead to higher rates of learning.

I have a little problem with this kind of research. When the learners receive additional instruction on top of their incidental learning, there are bound to be better results. The outcome is therefore not surprising.

Second Language Vocabulary Growth

The vocabulary knowledge of 166 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Taiwan was measured annually over a five year period using a bilingual version of the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) (Nation, 1983, 1990; Schmitt, Schmitt, and Clapham, 2001). The five years of data collection

involved English language instruction in high school and university. Test scores were examined according to the amount of English language instruction the participants received. The results indicated that one group of participants learned as few as 18 words in one year, while another group learned as many as 430 words. The findings also revealed that in the final year of the study only 47% of the participants had mastered the 1,000 word level, and 16% had mastered the 2,000 word level. The results suggest that vocabulary learning within the institution could be greatly improved. Key features of a vocabulary learning plan within institutions are outlined. (Webb & Chang, 2012)

Are Alliterative Word Combinations Comparatively Easy To Remember For Adult Learners?

Lindstromberg and Boers (S. Lindstromberg & F. Boers, 2008; S. Lindstromberg & F. Boers, 2008) have reported experiments with adult learners of English which revealed a comparative mnemonic advantage afforded by word combinations that display sound patterns such as alliteration (*green grass*) and assonance (*home phone*). These findings are relevant for TESOL, given the fact that English phraseology abounds with alliterative and assonant expressions (F. Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009 ch. 6). The authors recommend classroom interventions that draw learners' attention to the alliteration or assonance in standardized word strings such as collocations so as to unlock their mnemonic potential. They contend that such interventions are justified because learners are unlikely to take notice of a sound pattern such as alliteration spontaneously, while noticing is widely believed to be a crucial step towards retention (e.g. Schmidt, 2001). The mnemonic advantage of alliteration and assonance in Lindstromberg and Boers' (2008a, 2008b) experiments was attested after tasks that required the participants' conscious engagement with the given sound pattern. This does not actually preclude the possibility that learners reap some mnemonic benefits of these sound patterns also without being made aware of the sound repetition. In this

article, the authors report a new within-participant experiment in which matched samples of alliterative and non-alliterative word pairs were dictated to upper-intermediate to advanced learners of English. The participants were not briefed about the presence of alliterative stimuli; they were merely asked to repeat each dictated word pair before writing it down. The results of an unannounced free recall test revealed significantly better recall of the alliterative stimuli, but the difference was not at all as pronounced as in the aforementioned experiments, where the participants had engaged in more explicit and more elaborate processing of phonological form. (F. Boers, Lindstromberg, & Eyckmans, 2012)

Does phonological short-term memory causally determine vocabulary learning? Toward a computational resolution of the debate.

The relationship between nonword repetition ability and vocabulary size and vocabulary learning has been a topic of intense research interest and investigation over the last two decades, following the demonstration that nonword repetition accuracy is predictive of vocabulary size (Gathercole & Baddeley, 1989). However, the nature of this relationship is not well understood. One prominent account posits that phonological short-term memory (PSTM) is a causal determinant both of nonword repetition ability and of phonological vocabulary learning, with the observed correlation between the two reflecting the effect of this underlying third variable (e.g. Baddeley, Gathercole, & Papagno, 1998). An alternative account proposes the opposite causality: that it is phonological vocabulary size that causally determines nonword repetition ability (e. g. Snowling, Chiat, & Hulme, 1991). We present a theory of phonological vocabulary learning, instantiated as a computational model. The model offers a precise account of the construct of PSTM, of performance in the nonword repetition task, of novel word form learning, and of the relationship between all of these. We show through simulation not only that PSTM causally affects both nonword repetition accuracy and phonological vocabulary size, but also that

phonological vocabulary size causally affects nonword repetition ability. The plausibility of the model is supported by the fact that its nonword repetition accuracy displays effects of phonotactic probability and of nonword length, which have been taken as evidence for causal effects on nonword repetition accuracy of phonological vocabulary knowledge and PSTM, respectively. Thus the model makes explicit how the causal links posited by the two theoretical perspectives are both valid, in the process reconciling the two perspectives, and indicating that an opposition between them is unnecessary.
(Gupta & Tisdale, 2009)

Gestures

Macedonia, M. and Knösche, T. of the Max-Planck-Institute for Cognition and Neurosciences confirmed in a study that gesturing helps remembering vocabulary. Subjects of the study improved considerably their ability to learn an artificial language “Vimmi” when their words were accompanied by gestures. MRI pictures seem to suggest that new concepts are represented through the linking with complex memory networks and are therefore better to memorise. This is also true for abstract words.
(Mind, Brain and Education)

I am still trying to find out the exact issue, but it has to be one of the most recent.

The Role of Imagery in Dictionaries of Idioms

This article adopts a cognitive linguistic approach to idioms as motivated lexical units. The focus is on lexicographic applications of the notion of motivation; specifically, on the usefulness of imagery in the form of pictorial illustrations and etymological notes in idioms dictionaries. The authors discuss the main features of idiom semantics, review the results of research into the influence of motivating information on idiom acquisition, and outline the issue of imagery in idiom entries,

highlighting the problems involved. Finally, they report on a study with Polish university students of English. Our findings point to a facilitative role of pictorial illustrations on short- and long-term retention of both form and meaning of idioms. In contrast, etymological notes do not have any positive effect. (Szczepaniak & Lew, 2011)

List learning of second language vocabulary

The learning of second language vocabulary in lists of word pairs is a widespread practice. A basic practical question in this respect is whether it is more effective for non-fluent bilinguals to learn word pairs in first language/second language order (L1-L2), or vice versa. This article reviews some aspects of psychology that are relevant to L2 vocabulary list learning. The experiment examined the presentation of vocabulary items to be learned. It was found that presenting items in L1-L2 order was the more versatile form of presentation if both production and comprehension of L2 items were required on the part of the learner.

(Griffin & Harley, 1996)

Here is some more literature on the question of vocabulary learning: concrete vs. abstract

Concrete words are easier to recall than abstract words: Evidence for a semantic contribution to short-term serial recall.

Immediate serial recall and maximal speech rate were assessed for concrete and abstract words differing in length. Experiment 1 showed large advantages for spoken recall of concrete words that were independent of speech rate. Experiment 2 showed an equivalent effect with written, rather than spoken, recall. Experiment 3 showed that the concreteness effect was still present when recall was backward rather than forward. In all 3 experiments, concrete words

enjoyed an advantage that was roughly constant across all serial positions (with the possible exception of the 1st and last items). Experiment 4 used a matching-span procedure and showed that when there was no requirement for linguistic output, the effect of concreteness (but not the effect of word length) was eliminated. It is argued that semantic coding exerts powerful effects in verbal short-term memory tasks that have generally been underestimated.

(Walker & Hulme, 1999)

Remembering can cause forgetting: Retrieval dynamics in long-term memory.

Three studies with 148 university students show that the retrieval process itself causes long-lasting forgetting. Ss studied 8 categories (e.g., Fruit). Half the members of half the categories were then repeatedly practiced through retrieval tests (e.g., Fruit Or). Category-cued recall of unpracticed members of practiced categories was impaired on a delayed test. Exps 2 and 3 identified 2 significant features of this retrieval-induced forgetting: The impairment remains when output interference is controlled, suggesting a retrieval-based suppression that endures for 20 min or more, and the impairment appears restricted to high-frequency members. Low-frequency members show little impairment, even in the presence of strong, practiced competitors that might be expected to block access to those items. Findings suggest a critical role for suppression in models of retrieval inhibition and implicate the retrieval process itself in everyday forgetting.

(Anderson, Bjork, & Bjork, 1994)

An investigation of two ways of presenting vocabulary

The use of semantic links or networks in L2 vocabulary acquisition has been a popular subject for numerous studies. On one hand, there is a strong theoretical background stating that presenting words in related fashion facilitates the learning of L2 vocabulary. On the other hand, research evidence indicates that semantically related vocabulary seems to hinder rather than ease the learning of L2 vocabulary. The aim of the present study is to examine which manner of L2 vocabulary presentation is more helpful for L2 learners. It was conducted in EFL classrooms with Greek EFL students. The subjects were 31 intermediate EFL children and 32 beginner EFL adults. The two different ways of organizing new vocabulary for presentation were tested. The article will focus on the main conclusion that semantically related clustering impedes L2 vocabulary learning at beginners' level. (Papathanasiou, 2009)

Direct teaching of vocabulary after reading: is it worth the effort?

This experimental study evaluated the effectiveness of direct teaching of new vocabulary items in reading passages. The study compared vocabulary learning under a reading only condition (incidental learning) to learning that is aided by direct communication of word meanings (explicit learning). Three levels of vocabulary knowledge (form recall, meaning recall, and meaning recognition) were assessed using three tests (completion, L1 translation, and multiple choice, respectively). Incidental learning plus explicit instruction was found to be more effective than incidental learning alone for all three levels. The results also showed that direct instruction is especially effective in facilitating the deepest level of knowledge, i.e. form recall. These findings demonstrate the value of the time and

effort spent on direct teaching of lexical items in EFL reading classes.

(Sonbul & Schmitt, 2010)

Immediate serial recall and maximal speech rate were assessed for concrete and abstract words differing in length. Experiment 1 showed large advantages for spoken recall of concrete words that were independent of speech rate. Experiment 2 showed an equivalent effect with written, rather than spoken, recall. Experiment 3 showed that the concreteness effect was still present when recall was backward rather than forward. In all 3 experiments, concrete words enjoyed an advantage that was roughly constant across all serial positions (with the possible exception of the 1st and last items). Experiment 4 used a matching-span procedure and showed that when there was no requirement for linguistic output, the effect of concreteness (but not the effect of word length) was eliminated. It is argued that semantic coding exerts powerful effects in verbal short-term memory tasks that have generally been underestimated. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2012 APA, all rights reserved)
(journal abstract)

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