Review of English L2 Vocabulary Learning and Teaching:

Concepts, Principles, and Pedagogy

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Abstract

Vocabulary knowledge is crucial for comprehending input and generating output. To date, vocabulary learning has been extensively researched regarding incidental vocabulary learning, the effect of various input modes and input enhancement techniques, yet more studies are needed to explore and discuss pedagogical implications. The monograph under review, authored by Lawrence J. Zwier and Frank Boers, bridges the gap between research and practice. The monograph elaborates on L2 vocabulary acquisition from theory development (Chapters 1 & 2), empirical studies (Chapters 3 & 4), curricular design (Chapters 5 to 7), and classroom practice (Chapters 8 to 11) respectively.

Keywords: vocabulary, collocation, incidental vocabulary acquisition, classroom vocabulary teaching, vocabulary techniques and activities

1. Chapters 1 & 2

The first part (Chapters 1 & 2) introduces the terminology of single words and multiword expressions, their categorization, challenges and remedies for classroom teaching of vocabulary. Chapter 1 covers core concepts and categorization of words and reveals the substantial, polysemous and dynamic nature of words. Chapter 2 delineates different types of multiword expressions and discusses the challenges to involve multiword expressions in classroom teaching due to its amount, idiomaticity and non-transparency. In order to cope with these difficulties, pedagogical suggestions are offered based on the usefulness, nontransparency and degree of bondedness. Accordingly, authors recommend three direct instructions, selecting frequent multiword expressions, nontransparent multiword expressions, and items with high mutual information score.

2. Chapter 3

The second part discusses vocabulary research with regard to three questions: why to teach, what to teach, and how to teach vocabulary. Chapter 3 overviews vocabulary studies pertaining to receptive vocabulary knowledge measured by lexical coverage, productive vocabulary knowledge manifested by lexical richness, lexical diversity, and lexical sophistication, as well as incidental vocabulary learning. Vocabulary knowledge is said to play a dominant role in reading comprehension, displayed by lexical coverage at a 95% or 98% level but two questions call for further study. First, while adequate text comprehension can be impacted on by a variety of factors such as topic familiarity (Pulido, 2004) and inference strategies (Laufer, 2020), then to what extent vocabulary knowledge decide text comprehension still remains to be investigated. The second aspect considers lexical coverage at the level of multiword expressions. The last two subsections discuss lexicon-related factors for effortless vocabulary learning, and learner-related variables for successful vocabulary uptake. And the real problem is how to make sophisticated lexical items easier to learn and how to improve learners' motivation, engagement with lexical items and working memory which are not discussed here.

3. Chapter 4

Chapter 4 focuses on intervention studies relating to the effects of classroom-based vocabulary teaching and learning, such as the research designs of quasi-experimental study (e.g., between-group and within-group) and different research perspectives: incidental vocabulary acquisition, deliberate learning approach, and learning strategies. Though research has yielded abundant findings, the authors suggest new research directions. First, research investigating the comparison between gloss and dictionary found no effect of dictionary, partly due to the boom of online dictionary. Thus, future study could compare the impact of gloss and online dictionary. Second, a few research considered output after offering content-based activity, but no research includes typographic enhancement techniques in input to verify whether it could generate significant learning gains in producing multiword expressions. Third, comparatively few studies so far examine long-term effect of inferencing meaning from context and word-part strategy. Lastly, Involvement Load Hypothesis indicates that more engagement learners pay in vocabulary, more learning outcomes they will get. While few studies examined the quality of learners' use of lexical items generated by their own and this quality would indeed influence learning gains. To sum up, the second part informs researchers who are new to vocabulary research designs of possible research topics as well as research gap.

4. Chapter 5, 6 & 7

The third part expounds on curricular design from the macroscopic view of education. Chapter 5 discusses students' vocabulary proficiency, target vocabulary selection for teaching and learning, and expectations for vocabulary acquisition and accumulation. Chapter 6 lays out the aim for evaluating vocabulary knowledge, various test formats for assessing lexical items, and the selection of test format for specific purposes. It is recognized that explicit teaching of vocabulary is not common so far and most teachers leave vocabulary learning for students, thus the authors believe that integrating vocabulary in the curriculum should be the primary aim which is the theme of chapter 7. To achieve this, potential approaches are recommended: Nation's vocabulary instruction program which would be a benign loop to connect input and output during vocabulary learning, and Sökmen's pedagogical themes which attempt to grasp large size and profound depth of vocabulary knowledge.

5. Chapter 8, 9, 10 & 11

The fourth part evaluates viable techniques and activities from the microscopic view of pedagogy by reviewing continuous scenario, acquisition, initial memorization, consolidation, and automatic learning. Chapter 8 discusses four prerequisites for vocabulary knowledge acquisition through input materials, including comprehensible discourse, salient target items and comprehensible items and engagement. Accordingly, instructors could pre-teach novel lexical items which could make materials comprehensible for students and promote retrieval in content-based activities. Then, text-based output tasks could be implemented to entrench vocabulary knowledge in memory. Chapter 9 proposes techniques to promote initial retention of lexical items in memory intentionally through either semantic elaboration or structural elaboration or a combination of both. Association is key word in this chapter by which novel lexical items are integrated into the mental lexicon, such as the comparison between target items and existing vocabulary knowledge. Chapter 10 elaborates on how to strengthen the memory trace and to retrieve vocabulary from mental lexicon. Vocabulary exercises implemented should meet at least four requirements: order of arrangement, repetition, retrieval, and use. In terms of order, exercises should be arranged from less demanding to more demanding, that is, from meaning recall to form recall and then to use. Chapter 11 displays a comprehensive discussion on achieving lifelong learning. It records personal- and environmental-related factors that will generate autonomous study, strategies for vocabulary learning and sources which could be resorted to in self-study.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the monograph makes a comprehensive elaboration on vocabulary-related concepts, research on incidental vocabulary acquisition, deliberate learning, and strategy as well as vocabulary teaching in these aspects. Two types of vocabulary including single words and multiword expressions are crucial in the whole monograph. And two key ideas, retrieval and repetition, are frequently mentioned throughout the book.

This monograph has the following merits. Firstly, the systematic design of four parts, covering basic terminology, the empirical research design, and pedagogical practices. The comprehensive description of vocabulary and

logical design is conducive to develop readers' knowledge on the academic and pedagogical perspective of vocabulary. Secondly, there are no fancy words, opaque jargon in this monograph, and technical words that demands attention are elaborated clearly through studies, examples, charts, etc. This will benefit beginning linguistic students for its readability. Thirdly, the authors introduce research procedure, design and evaluation which are crucial for conducting empirical studies. This will acquaint novel researchers with the methodologies in vocabulary research. Most importantly, it attempts to put the current findings in academia into pedagogical practice which accords with the goal for conducting research and solves practical problems encountered in L2 education.

Nevertheless, the monograph will be more complete and more exhaustive if it ends with a summary chapter. The ending section could involve a summary of the whole monograph, the connections among each chapter, the overall suggestions for language teachers and the gap for illuminating future research. Adding a conclusion part could inform readers of the logical connections among each part and the unsolved problems for future study.

In brief, because of its panoramic elaboration of vocabulary from theories, empirical studies and pedagogical practice, the monograph will attract broad audiences with various purposes in mind. For novice applied linguistic scholars, they will be informed of basic terms, research methodology and practical tasks around vocabulary. For teaching practitioners, they will enjoy the great benefit of the last two parts with practical suggestions. Reading the monograph, further booming vocabulary research and bringing research findings down to earth are the missions for every one of us in the language researching and teaching field.

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