

EXPLORING VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES OF MONGOLIAN EFL STUDENTS

Vocabulary is the essential component in language learning. In order to master vocabulary, students use various vocabulary learning strategies, that help students to understand, learn, remember new information and solve problems. This study aims to examine the types of vocabulary memorization strategies and investigate the most and also the least frequent strategies employed by the Mongolian students in learning and memorizing vocabulary. The questionnaire, that was adapted from Li (2004) which is relies on Oxford's taxonomy (2003) was used as a method of a data collection. The participants were 78 undergraduate students studying at Mongolian National University of Education (MNUE). Results of the study revealed that Mongolian students see vocabulary memorization strategies help them in learning the English language and consistent with their cultural and educational background.

Key words: *language learning strategies, vocabulary memorization strategies, memorization.*

Introduction

Chamot and Kupper (1989) defined learning strategies as “techniques which students use to understand, store, and remember information and skills”.

Studies on language learning strategies started within the mid 1960. Oxford (2003) defined language learning strategies as “specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations” [8, p. 8].

Particular strategies used by second language learners for the acquisition of new words in the second language are called ‘vocabulary learning strategies’ [4]. Whereas, language learning strategies

(LLSs) are sub category of general learning strategies and vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) are consider as a part of language learning strategies [7].

The research to date has tended to focus on vocabulary learning strategies rather than language learning strategies. Several studies have produced taxonomies of vocabulary learning strategies (Schmitt and Schmitt 1993; Schmitt, 1997; Nation, 2001 [7]; Fan, 2003; and Gu, 2003 [4]). First, Schmitt and Schmitt (1993) divided learning vocabulary in to remembering a word and learning a new word. Secondly, GU classified second language (L2) vocabulary learning strategies as cognitive, metacognitive, memory and activation strategies [4]. Thirdly, Schmitt (1997) improved vocabulary learning strategies based on Oxford (1990) into determination strategies, social and though the remembering category comprises social, memorization, cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Finally, Fan (2003) who refined Gu (2003)'s classification, categorized vocabulary learning strategies into a "primary category" which contains dictionary strategies and guessing strategies as well as, "remembering category" which integrates repetition, association, grouping, analysis and known words strategies [4].

Literature review

A vocabulary is a set of familiar words within a person's language. It is usually developed with age, serves as a useful and fundamental tool for communication and acquiring knowledge. According to Read (2000), vocabulary are words which form the foundation of language and represent the units of meaning out of which paragraphs, sentences and entire text are formulated [9].

A number of theorists and researchers have recognized the importance of vocabulary knowledge in process of learning foreign or second language. Various strategies and approaches, practices and techniques have been introduced (Hatch and Brown, 1995). According to Nation (2001) the vocabulary learning strategies are critically regarded as a part of language learning strategy and part of general learning strategies [7].

Memorization strategies are the most commonly used method by EFL learners to acquire vocabulary, structure and language in general. The role of memorization strategies to assist learners to commit new words into memory in the learning process cannot be over-emphasized. Wenden and Rubin (1987) pointed out that memorization involves strategies designed to facilitate the storage and retrieval of language and this explains the use of some strategies, such as drill and repetition, which used as same as memorization strategies.

However, Oxford (1990) states that a good strategy must be positive and helpful for a given learner by meeting the conditions as followed: (a) relating well to the L2 task at hand, (b) fitting the particular students' learning style preferences to one or another, and (c) linking the strategy effectively with other related strategies. Oxford's study assigns strategies into two which are: direct and indirect strategies [8].

These strategies are further subdivided into six groups such as memory, cognitive and compensation for direct strategies, and metacognitive, affective and social for indirect strategies. In view of the fact that this study focuses on the memorization strategies, only memory strategies will be reviewed in depth.

Based on Oxford [8] memory strategies are divided into four sets which are:

1. Creating Mental Linkages (CML): this is categorized into three strategies:

- grouping which consists of classifying, and reclassifying language material into meaningful sub-units;
- associating/elaborating which mostly associate new language information to existing ones already stored in the memory;
- placing of new words into a context which focuses on using a word or phrase in a meaningful sentence, the translation equivalents, conversation or story so as to remember it [5].

2. Applying Images and Sounds (AIS): a total of four main strategies are included under images and sounds. The use of imagery which associates new language knowledge to concepts in

memory through visual imagery that is meaningful, either by depicting it in the mind or actual drawing; b) semantic mapping include arrangement of words into a picture or diagram; c) use of keywords that is done through remembering a new word by use of auditory or visual links.

3. Reviewing Well (RW): this involves reviewing the words learnt carefully at regular intervals.

4. Employing Actions (EA): There are two strategies such as using sensation or physical response, involving the use of mechanical techniques by means of creative but still tangible techniques.

Thus, Oxford's vocabulary learning strategies are assumed to be commonly appropriate categorization for the present study [1; 2].

Methodology

The purpose of the current study is to examine vocabulary memorization strategies used by the Mongolian students and to find out the most, least strategies frequency used.

The participants in this study are Mongolian freshmen, sophomore and senior students at MNUE, who have been studying English as their second language for more than 6 years. They are around 20 years old and majoring at social studies and Russian language. They have English classes twice or 3 times a week.

Table 1 shows the number of participants.

Table 1

Background of the participants in the study

School name	freshmen	sophomores	seniors
MNUE	25	31	22

Instrument

A written vocabulary memorization strategies /VMS/ was used to collect data. It was adapted from Sinhaneti and Kyaw (2012) which is actually based on the studies of Li [6] and Oxford [8]. In order to find the use and frequency of these strategies, the questionnaire included a four-scale measurement with the following measures: never, sometimes, usually, and always. The questionnaire included two parts. The first part consists of questions about the participants' demographic information such as gender, age, and the period of learning English. Whereas the second part included 25 questions about the vocabulary memorization strategies, 7 questions for CML strategies, 9 questions for AIS strategies, 4 questions for RW strategies and 5 questions for EA strategies.

Findings

As mentioned before the purpose of the present study was at first to investigate the individual learning strategies, then find out the rank of 4 main strategies and the most and the least used strategies.

The first section provides the information on students' report of individual strategy use, when they were asked about the usage of strategies in vocabulary memorizing. There were 25 items which are a collection of 4 main categories of VMS in vocabulary learning. (CML, AIS, RW, EA).

Table 2 shows the vocabulary memorization strategies used by 78 Mongolian undergraduate students individually. The strategies ranged from 1 to 15 according to amounts of students that use it always.

The vocabulary memorization strategies used by Mongolian students /rank, frequency/

№	Strategies	Categories	Number of students /always use this strategy/	Rank
1.	I make vocabulary lists of new words that I meet	CML	12	12
2.	I remember new words by combination sounds and images	AIS	16	10
3.	I keep the vocabulary lists of new words that I make	CML	38	1
4.	I use semantic mapping to enlarge vocabulary	AIS	32	3
5.	I make a regular and structured reviews of new words I have memorized	RW	28	5
6.	When I try to memorize a word, I repeat it aloud to myself	CML	30	4
7.	When I try to remember a word, I write it repeatedly	RW	22	7
8.	I do oral spelling exercises with my friends whose English level is at a similar level of mine	EA	8	13
9.	I write both the English new words and Mongolian repeatedly in order to remember them	CML	36	2
10.	I image the word meaning.	AIS	12	12
11.	I recall the words by pair checking with someone else	EA	4	15
12.	I connect a word to a personal experience	CML	12	12
13.	I memorize examples in some context when using the words	AIS	18	9
14.	I remember a group of new words that share similar letters in spelling.(e.g. big, bag,bug)	AIS	20	8
15.	I associate the sound of the word with the same sound of a similar word in English	AIS	6	14
16.	I associate new words with words that sound similar in Mongolian	AIS	14	11
17.	I break up the word into components (e.g.roots, prefixes)	CML	12	12
18.	I group words into categories (e.g., animals, utensils, vegetables, etc.)	CML	32	3
19.	I review newly learned words	RW	28	5
20.	I pay attention to set phrases and collocations that go with a word	EA	8	13
21.	I write the new words on one side of a card and the definition on the other side	EA	6	14
22.	I make vocabulary cards and take them with me wherever I go	EA	2	16
23.	I focus my attention on completing vocabulary exercises repeatedly before exams	RW	38	1
24.	I can use words correctly and efficiently after memorizing them	AIS	16	10
25.	When I meet a new word, I search in my memory and see if I have any synonyms and antonyms in my memory stock	AIS	24	6

Table 3 shows the frequency of main categories of vocabulary memorization strategies. The most preferred strategies among the four strategies were **applying images and sounds** at high usage level, followed by **creating mental linkage** and **reviewing well** strategies. Employing actions strategies were the lowest. This result doesn't go in line with research findings by Iranian researchers Shooshtari, Hayati Samian, Khaziae (2013) and Fouad Hussein Al-Qaysi, Ahmad Affendi Shabdin's [3].

Table 3

The use of vocabulary memorization strategies in four categories

№	Category	Numbers	Rank	Frequently ranks
1.	AIS /applying images and sounds/	158	1	High use
2.	CML /creating mental linkage/	140	2	Medium use
3.	RW /reviewing well/	114	3	Medium use
4.	EA /employing actions/	28	4	Low use

Table 4 shows the five most preferred strategies used by Mongolian students in this study. Three of them belong to CML categories and the others are RW and AIS categories.

The following section shows the least frequently used strategies used by Mongolian undergraduate students aged around 20s.

Table 4

The five most preferred strategies by students

№	Strategies	Categories	N	Rank
1.	I keep the vocabulary lists of new words that I make	CML	38	1
2.	I focus my attention on completing vocabulary exercises repeatedly before exams	RW	38	1
3.	I write both the English new words and Mongolian repeatedly in order to remember them	CML	36	2
4.	I use semantic mapping to enlarge vocabulary	AIS	32	3
5.	I group words into categories (e.g., animals, utensils, vegetables, etc.)	CML	32	3

Table 5 shows the least frequently used strategies by the students in this study. The strategies mentioned above indicated that four of five least frequently used strategies belong to EA /employing action/ strategies. These strategies seem to be rarely used by Mongolian students such as Arab, Chinese and Burmese students. (Hussein Al-Qaysi, Ahmad Affendi Shabdin's [3] and Li [6]). It means students of different countries don't prefer to use deep processing strategies.

Table 5

The five least preferred strategies by students

№	Strategies	Categories	N	Rank
1.	I make vocabulary cards and take them with me wherever I go	EA	2	16
2.	I recall the words by pair checking with someone else	EA	4	15
3.	I associate the sound of the word with the same sound of a similar word in English	AIS	6	14
4.	I write the new words on one side of a card and the definition on the other side	EA	6	14
5.	I pay attention to set phrases and collocations that go with a word	EA	8	13

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that Mongolian students use different types of vocabulary memorization strategies which are related to different main four categories of memory strategies. As the study shows the most preferred strategies among Mongolian students were creating mental linkage and the least were employing action strategies. The possible reasons for using CML could be the traditional memorization method that have been used for many years. Another reason for this result may be that the Mongolian students are not familiar with some types of memorization strategies and don't understand how to use them efficiently. According to Schmitt [9], the Asian participants opted for simple vocabulary memorizing strategies. Thus, the result of this study might take into consideration the learning culture and the educational background is also taken into consideration.

The results of the current study can assist language teachers to improve their teaching methods. Second, teachers who are interested in their students' performance in learning the English vocabulary can introduce the vocabulary learning strategies and techniques to their students by designing useful tasks and giving relevant assignments.

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ИЗУЧЕНИЕ СТРАТЕГИЙ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ЛЕКСИКИ МОНГОЛЬСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ EFL

Словарный запас является важным компонентом в изучении языка. Чтобы овладеть словарным запасом, учащиеся используют различные стратегии изучения словарного запаса, которые помогают им понимать, усваивать, запоминать новую информацию и решать проблемы. Целью данного исследования является изучение типов стратегий запоминания лексики и изучение наиболее и наименее частых стратегий, используемых монгольскими студентами при изучении и запоминании лексики. В качестве метода сбора данных использовался вопросник [6], который основан на оксфордской таксономии [8]. Участниками были 78 студентов бакалавриата, обучающихся в Монгольском национальном университете образования (МНЭУ). Результаты исследования показали, что монгольские студенты считают, что стратегии запоминания лексики помогают им в изучении английского языка и соответствуют их культурному и образовательному фону.

Ключевые слова: стратегии изучения языка, стратегии запоминания словарного запаса, запоминание.