

**A STUDY OF TEACHING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL  
ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING**

**提高初中英语词汇教学质量的策略研究**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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## Abstract

Vocabulary is one of the three core elements of language. D.A. Wilkins, a famous English linguist, states that provided one knows the appropriate vocabulary without much knowledge of grammar, communicating in a foreign language may not be very difficult, but it is next to impossible without vocabulary. (D.A. Wilkins, *Linguistics in Language Teaching*, London: Edward Arnold, 1972.) Nevertheless, for so many years, the teaching and learning of vocabulary have been undervalued in the field of Second Language Acquisition throughout its varying stages. In the traditional English teaching in China, many teachers think that the students have no problem in remembering vocabulary and they pay little attention to it. Instead, they spend much time explaining grammar to the students. Moreover, a lot of problems appear in their process of vocabulary teaching. On the part of the students, they normally learn English vocabulary by mechanical recitation and the effect is awful. The English Syllabus has higher and higher requirements on the students' vocabulary ability and vocabulary becomes the most serious obstacle in the students' process of learning English.

In recent years, many researches have proved the central role of vocabulary acquisition in language acquisition. Vocabulary instruction and learning has been thought highly of by language researchers, language teachers and language learners. More and more researchers, teachers included, have been doing researches to find reliable and valid approach to vocabulary teaching and learning. They want to find better ways to help students to learn vocabulary and use it appropriately. But which method or approach is more effective in vocabulary instruction and learning, different researchers speak in favor of different conceptions.

Accordingly, this paper tries to get an overview of the theories concerning vocabulary acquisition and the English vocabulary teaching and learning situation in China, and then find out the proper strategies for teaching English vocabulary in junior high school based on previous researchers' findings and real teaching practice.

**Key words:** English vocabulary acquisition, teaching and learning strategies,

Junior high school students in China

## 中文摘要

词汇是语言的三大要素之一，英国著名的语言学家威尔金斯说过没有语法而有恰当的词汇的话，一个人用外语传达信息不会有太大问题，但是如果没有词汇，那就什么也传达不了了。然而这么多年来，在二语习得领域的各个阶段，词汇的教学都没有受到重视。在中国传统的英语教学中，老师们认为学生在记忆英语词汇上不会有什么问题，所以在在这方面关注比较少，而把大部分的时间精力都放在解释语法上面。同时，在教词汇的方法上也存在不少问题。中国的学生学习英语词汇基本上都是靠机械的死记硬背，效果很不好。现在新的英语课标对学生的英语词汇掌握能力的要求也是越来越高，致使词汇成为中国学生学好英语的“拦路虎”。

近年来，大量的研究都证实了词汇的习得在整个语言习得中的核心地位，词汇的教学得到语言学家和语言教学者的高度重视。包括教师在内，越来越多的研究者做了大量的调查研究致力于寻求可靠有效的英语词汇教学方法以帮助学生更好地学习和应用词汇。然而关于哪个教学方法更加有效，不同的研究者都有自己不同的意见。

因此，本文写作的目的在于统观词汇习得相关理论和中国英语词汇教学状况，在前人研究的基础上，结合自身的教学经验，探索出符合中国初中学生学习特点的英语词汇教学方法。

**关键词：**英语词汇习得，教学策略，中国初中学生



## I. Introduction

In teaching a foreign language, one of the most important aspects is to enlarge language learners' vocabulary. A large, useful vocabulary is the basis of word power. Word to essay is brick to building. "It has been said that learning a second language means learning its vocabulary" (Gass, 1999). Wilkins (1972) states that without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed (as cited in Carter McCarthy, 1988), and Singer points out that in a reading activity, understanding vocabulary is about 39% of a reader's reading competence, 47% of a reader's ability to understand vocabulary in texts relies on his/her vocabulary size, and 28% of the reading speed is used to recognize the vocabulary items (as cited in Sun Xingwen, 1998).

Beginners of English learning as they are, junior high school students find it difficult for them to memorize new words and enlarge their vocabulary, which becomes the main choke point of their English learning. Facts have borne out that failure to grasp the effective approaches to vocabulary learning, vocabulary memory, and vocabulary usage at the early stage of learning a foreign language can lead to a loss of interest and even quit the language study.

Therefore, more and more language learners, instructors and researchers are considering vocabulary as being a vitally important element in language learning, and consequently vocabulary teaching has been regarded as a significant segment in the practice of language teaching and learning.



## II. Literature Review

In history, there have been many researches and findings of language acquisition. In this part, the writer is going to review some concepts of vocabulary and some major theories of vocabulary acquisition to get a good preparation for further discussion.

### 2.1 Concepts of Vocabulary

Before learning vocabulary, we must know what vocabulary is and what knowing a word is.

#### 2.1.1 The Definition of Vocabulary

Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics (2002) defines vocabulary as “a set of lexemes, including single words, compound words and idioms”. In The New Oxford Dictionary of English (2001), vocabulary is “the body of words used in a particular language”. According to Nation (1990), whether extra learning is required or not is the criterion for defining a word. Therefore, “happy, unhappy, happily” can be regarded as one word, for they require no additional learning. However, “bank” (the areas of ground along a river or lake) and “bank” (the commercial place), two different words for their meanings, are quite different from each other.

#### 2.1.2 The Assumption of Knowing a Word

When a learner learns a word, the following two aspects should be included: 1) form, e.g. pronunciation and spelling of the word; 2) meaning, e.g. the vertical and horizontal relationship of the word. For example, when learning the word “prefer”, the learner should recognize it by its sound [pri'fə:] and its spelling “p-r-e-f-e-r”. After that, the learner should know the meaning and usage of this word. “Prefer” means “like something better” and it’s usually used in the pattern “prefer something to something else.” The learner should know its changed forms —preferred, preferring, prefers—at the same time. Additionally, the students should also know the words “preferable, preference, preferential, and preferment” which share the same root as “prefer.” They have a vertical relationship with “prefer.” Horizontally, words such as “like, enjoy, love, relish, dote and fancy” that share the similar meaning of “prefer” should also be discussed and distinguished.

Richard (1976) thought that knowing a target word as a native speaker means as follows:

1) Knowing a word means knowing the degree of probability of encountering that word in speech or print.



2) Knowing a word implies knowing the limitations imposed on the use of the word according to variations of function and situation.

3) Knowing a word means knowing the syntactic behavior associated with that word.

4) Knowing a word entails knowledge of the underlying form of a word and the derivations that can be made from it.

5) Knowing a word entails knowledge of the network of associations between that word and the other words in language.

6) Knowing a word means knowing the semantic value of a word.

7) Knowing a word means knowing many of the different meanings associated with the word.

Wallace (1982) shared the similar conceptions of knowing a word as Richards. He stated that to know a word means the ability to “recognize it in its spoken or written form, recall it at will, relate it to an appropriate object or concept, use it in the appropriate grammatical form, pronounce it in a recognizable way in speech, spell it correctly in writing, use it with the words it correctly goes with, use it at the appropriate level of formality, and be aware of its connotations and associations”.

According to Nation (2001), nine aspects are involved in knowing a word, which fall into three categories, namely 1) Form (spoken, written, and word parts), 2) Meaning (form and meaning, concept and referents, associations), and 3) Use (grammatical functions, collocations, and constraints on use).

## **2.2 Theories on Vocabulary Acquisition**

Language is sequential. Speech is a sequence of sounds. Writing is a sequence of symbols. Learning to understand a language involves parsing the speech stream into chunks which reliably mark meaning. The role of language is to communicate meanings, and the language learners should acquire the label-meaning relations. Vocabulary acquisition is very important. It is the prerequisite for improving other language skills such as reading, listening, speaking, writing and translating.

### **2.2.1 The Definition of Vocabulary Acquisition**

Because of the inadequate research on vocabulary acquisition, there lacks a universally accepted definition of it in the literature. Channel (1996) defined it as follow: “I regard an L2





word as having been acquired by a learner when (1) its meaning can be recognized and understood rather than guessed at both in and out of context, and (2) it can be used naturally and appropriately to situation.”

### **2.2.2 Aspects of Vocabulary Acquisition**

When we learn a new word, minimally we must recognize it as a word and enter it into our mental lexicon. There are several lexicons specialized for different channels of Input / Output. To understand speech, the auditory input lexicon must categorize a novel sound pattern; to read the word, the visual input lexicon must learn to recognize a new orthographic pattern (or, in an alphabetic language, learn to exploit grapheme-phoneme correspondences in order to access the phonology and hence match the word in the auditory input lexicon); to say the word the speech output lexicon must tune a motor program for its pronunciation; to write it the spelling output lexicon must have a specification for its orthographic sequence.

We must learn its syntactic properties. We must learn its place in lexical structure: its relations with other words. We must learn its semantic properties, its referential properties, and its roles in determining entailments. We must learn the conceptual under-pinning that determines its place in our entire conceptual system. Finally we must learn the mapping of these Input / Output specifications to the semantic and conceptual meanings. Henriksen (1999) describes the acquisition of word meaning as two interrelated processes: item learning (adding items to lexical store by creating extensional links) and system changing (re-coding / changing the lexical store through network building).

### **2.2.3 Process of Vocabulary Acquisition – Implicit & Explicit Learning**

Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition is a complex phenomenon with several different learning processes involved. The most often cited distinction is that between implicit and explicit learning. Implicit learning is often defined as “accidental learning of information without the intention of remembering that information” (Hulstijn ET. Al., 1996). Explicit learning means the application of vocabulary learning strategies on the part of learners.

The most extreme positions concerning vocabulary acquisition processes are reflected by “Implicit Vocabulary Learning Hypothesis” and “Explicit Vocabulary Learning Hypothesis”. Based on Karashen’s (1985) Input Hypothesis, the Implicit Vocabulary Learning Hypothesis argues that the meaning of new words are acquired subconsciously as a result of repeated exposures in various contexts, where the conscious focus is on the message rather than on the form. The Explicit Vocabulary Learning Hypothesis postulates that the adoption of varieties of



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vocabulary learning strategies can considerably facilitate and enhance vocabulary acquisition. Ellis (1995) argues that both hypotheses are applicable to different aspects of vocabulary acquisition. The former concerns simple pattern recognition of surface form, i.e., “shallow processing” of input and output; the latter is necessary for the mapping of those surface input and output to the corresponding semantic / conceptual representations.



### **III. Problems in Traditional Vocabulary Teaching in Junior High School**

#### **English**

In vocabulary teaching, a teacher is supposed to teach the students the form, the meaning and the appropriate usage of a word. Considering English vocabulary teaching in Junior High School, however, there are many problems on the English teachers when they instruct the new words and expressions to their students. Searching many researchers' findings and discussions from the Internet, comparing them with my own observation and discussions with the teachers and students in Guangdong Experimental Middle School where I took my teaching practice, I find that most commonly High School English teachers in China will spend equal amount of energy on each word, teach the vocabulary without context and pay little attention to the cultural meaning of it. These problems lead to the low efficiency of vocabulary teaching and learning.

#### **3.1 The Goal of Vocabulary Teaching**

It is commonly accepted that the goal of vocabulary teaching should not help the students internalize the meaning of the words only. The main goal of vocabulary teaching should encourage and help the students know well how the native speakers and other high proficient learners use the target language in order to enhance their sensibility of subtle differences in vocabulary.

The aim of vocabulary teaching should be to provide the students with the ability of distinguishing the words and mastering usage, and to enhance the ability of using words instead of knowing the meaning only.

In traditional vocabulary teaching, the teachers usually offer the meaning of the words only. After learning some words, as well as their synonyms and antonyms, the students think that they have enlarged their vocabulary, but this can not help the students comprehend and master the target language better, or why one lexical item is more appropriate than the other. It is helpful for the students to remember a large number of new vocabularies in a short time. Nevertheless, their knowledge of the vocabulary is too limited to use the words appropriately. Students tend to think in Chinese and try to translate their sentences from Chinese into English. Most often, they find some "equivalent words" to help themselves and sentences like "You are not possible to win" come out of their mouths. This means that the students don't really learn the word "possible" at all. The students should be encouraged to foster the habit of making comparisons about the linguistic usages of the vocabularies and really master them. Then, they will change the above sample sentence into "It is not possible for you to win." or "You are not likely to win." Hearing it,



we know that the students really learn the word “possible” because they can compare it with “likely” and use the two words correctly.

### **3.2 Junior High School English Teachers’ Problems in Vocabulary Instruction**

In the actual English teaching in China, vocabulary teaching is usually squeezed in other courses (such as reading, literature, etc.) because there are no classes specializing in vocabulary teaching and learning. Traditionally, the teachers’ way of vocabulary instruction in the classroom is by means of explanation with some examples made randomly. The students try to recite both the new words and sample sentences without proper comprehension, which puts more burden on their memory activity and affect the process of vocabulary acquisition. For the teachers, the most difficult part to tackle in vocabulary instruction is the usage of some new words and expressions.

In junior high school, some English teachers only pay attention to the teaching of phonetics, grammar and syntax, asking students to do lots of exercises about them so as to get good marks in the exams. Teachers pay little attention to vocabulary teaching because they think that there is no need to do so. They would ask the students to recite the relevant vocabulary list and remember the Chinese meaning, and then they will do some dictations to check the students’ memory. The teacher’s attitude towards vocabulary teaching also misleads their students. The students are not willing to spend time accumulating their vocabulary. They only recite the vocabulary before the test without knowing the usage properly. When tested, many students will complain that they come across too many unfamiliar words and expressions. As a result, a lot of mistakes appear in their test because of their misunderstanding of the vocabulary, which will make them lose interest in learning English.

Based on my survey on the Internet and the discussions with other Middle School English teachers, I conclude that at the stage of vocabulary instruction, there are still many problems among the English teachers in their class teaching in junior high school.

#### **3.2.1 Equal Time on Active and Passive Vocabulary**

There are two basic criteria for judging which lexical items should be taught. One is frequency of items and the other is usefulness of items. The New English Syllabus requires the students of junior high school to master the usages of 1500—1600 words and 200—300 idioms, and it has Specific requirements on the learning of each word on the aspects of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Many teachers, however, spend equal time pouring new words and expressions of the word-list to the students, without notifying which one is the most important that should be learned to the fullest extent and which one only needs to be recognized.



This teaching method puts much more burden on the students in vocabulary learning and causes their psychological repercussions, resulting in their failure of mastering the vocabulary, even the easier ones. The students will become worried and doubt their ability of learning English vocabulary. Gradually, they will lose interest in it and give up learning.

In teaching vocabulary, the occurrence of a word is relevant. Just as Nation (1994) says, vocabulary can be considered from a cost-benefit viewpoint. High frequency words are essential and the “cost” of teaching them is justified by the resulting benefit, but low frequency words will not generally be met often enough to merit individual explicit teaching. Therefore, teachers should spend more time in teaching high frequency words than that of the low frequency ones.

### 3.2.2 Vocabulary Teaching Without Context

In the vocabulary of the junior high school students, many words will have quite different meanings in different sentences and contexts. For example, the word “light” means quite differently in the following sentences:

- (1) *This light is too poor to read by.*
- (2) *I prefer light-colored clothes.*
- (3) *This coat is very light but very warm.*

Because of the various meanings and usages of the English word, when instructed, it must be put into context so as to let the students know when to use it and how to use it in a proper way. In real English vocabulary teaching, however, for the sake of convenience, some teachers just teach vocabulary directly from the word-list and some even play the roles of dictionaries, copying the meanings of the words directly from the dictionary to the students and asking them to recite after class. Teaching vocabulary out of context like this makes the students bored and tired. It is difficult for the students to learn the vocabulary well if they are tired of the teacher’s teaching method.

### 3.2.3 Ignoring Cultural Meaning

Language is the tool for communication. In some cases, though you can speak fluent English, you will still find it difficult to communicate with native English speaker and sometimes become embarrassed because of different customs. Custom is part of culture, and culture is the deep-seated basis of language. In vocabulary teaching, the teachers only teach the students the spelling, pronunciation, part of speech and collocation of the words, seldom do they make any mention of information concerning culture. It is better to tell the students some cultural



knowledge of vocabulary to broaden their vision and stimulate their learning interest. It will also benefit the students to think in English more and thus enhancing their English learning.



## IV. Junior High School English Vocabulary Teaching Strategies

Learning strategies are the means and techniques adopted by the teachers and learners to obtain, store, retrieve and use new information more efficiently. In the process of teaching vocabulary, it will be very beneficial for the teachers to use proper teaching strategies to present new vocabulary and help students consolidate them. Getting some information from previous researchers' findings and discussions, connecting them to the second language acquisition theories and my own real teaching practice in Guangdong Experimental Middle High School, I discuss some useful vocabulary teaching strategies in this part of the paper.

### 4.1 Strategies on Presenting New Vocabulary

In English vocabulary teaching and learning, a close relationship exists between presentation modes and vocabulary learning and retention effects. Generally, two presentation modes are typically adopted in vocabulary teaching: (1) The teacher directly shows (presents) the target words to students, and then ask them to read and memorize the vocabulary items; (2) After the target vocabulary items are presented, the teacher offers (usually hastily and randomly) some collocations or example sentences, while students are hardly required to make sentences by themselves. These two modes make the students learn vocabulary passively. Different presentation modes will surely produce different vocabulary learning and retention effects, so the teachers should design and use some strategies in vocabulary presentation.

#### 4.1.1 The Definition of Vocabulary Presentation

It is commonly accepted that presentation is one of the steps or stages in language teaching, during which new language items are introduced. Presentation stage includes showing the language items and explaining their meanings, giving examples, illustrations, etc. as well as introducing other necessary information, and it is also called the stage of showing or introduction.

In English vocabulary teaching, vocabulary presentation is the procedure of introducing the target vocabulary items (words) to learners by using certain methods. The aim of vocabulary presentation lies in the following two aspects: To begin with, the target words (words to be learned) are shown/introduced to learners at this stage, and this is called learning task assigning; Next, if the teacher effectively uses certain presentation methods, then the learners' perceptual impression of the target words can be deepened, and this ensures that the rich information about the target words obtained at this stage will enter the long-term memory in time.



#### 4.1.2 The Importance of Vocabulary Presentation in Vocabulary Teaching

Vocabulary presentation is extremely important since, on the one hand, learners are assigned the task of learning, and on the other hand, utilizing appropriate and efficient presentation methods enables the learners to obtain a deeper impression of and richer information about the target words so as to make it easier for the target words to enter the long-term memory.

Therefore, English language teachers need to seriously consider and carefully design certain ways (methods) of implementing vocabulary teaching to ensure that learners will benefit from their teachers' instructions to the fullest possible extent.

#### 4.1.3 Strategies in Junior High School English Vocabulary Presentation

In junior high school, there are several strategies, based on the features of the students' age, for the English teachers to adopt in their teaching of English vocabulary in the classroom so as to help the students learn the target words and expressions better.

##### (1) Visual Aids

B.Spolsky states that the motivation of second language learning includes the attitude towards it, the eagerness of it and the effort put to it as well. If the teaching aids presented by the teacher can attract the students' attention and arouse their interest, the students will thirst for learning the language.

In teaching some nouns of concrete things such as *apple, pear, cake, dog, car* and *moon*, the teacher can bring to class the real objects or some pictures of them. Concrete images are easily accepted by the students and the teacher doesn't have to tell the students the Chinese meanings of those words. While teaching some verbs such as *eat, walk, jump, open, close, write, sit, stand*, and some adjectives like *delicious, hard* and *hot*, the teacher can show the students vivid actions and facial expressions, then there is no need for the teacher to explain anything more about the words, because the students already understand them tacitly with their eyes.

##### (2) Games

Using games in classroom English vocabulary teaching will make the class alive. Junior high school students are active and they like playing games. Sparing some time in playing some competitive games in vocabulary teaching will excite them and enhance their eagerness to learn English. For example, guessing riddles is a good game in vocabulary teaching to practice the students' abilities of listening, and speaking, and at the same time help them to remember the target words.





*What has four legs but only one foot? (a bed)*

*What has a bed but never sleeps, and what has a mouth but never speaks? (a river)*

*What fruit is never found singly? (a pear)*

Teenage students like attracting others' attention. In order to fulfill this amour-propre, they will be active in guessing the words and really learn them by heart.

### **(3) English Explanations in Class**

To learn a language, the learner must listen more to get enough language input. Enough comprehensible language input is the premise to form the language rules. Therefore, the teacher should use English to explain vocabulary and sentences in English class and enlighten students to think in English. The English Syllabus also requires the teachers to use English in class as often as possible and only use the mother tongue as assisted language. The students in China learn English in a Chinese environment, so it is very important to create an English environment in the English class for the students to practice their listening and speaking skills. When teaching new vocabulary, the teacher uses some simple words that the students have learned to explain the new ones. Learning in this way, the students get more chances to practice their listening skill and can have more exposures to the words they learned before to enhance memory. When the students can understand the English explanations the teacher gives and learn the new vocabulary at the same time, they will become more and more confident in learning English. For instance, the following words can be explained in this way: (1) *holiday*: time off from work or school; (2) *invite*: ask someone to dinner or a party; (3) *housework*: work done around the home; (4) *afternoon*: between 12:00 and 6:00 in the daytime; (5) *exam*: an important school test; (6) *different*: not the same; (7) *entrance*: place where you go in.

### **(4) Contextual Teaching**

Context is vital to the meanings of vocabulary. It is stated that vocabulary is alive only if put into context, then it will be easily remembered, its usage acquired. Contextual teaching makes the students learn more deeply the various meanings and usages of vocabulary and consolidate their memory.

In presenting new words, the teacher can provide the context for the students and let them guess the meaning of the target vocabulary. For example, in teaching the word "water", the teacher can show the following sentences to the students:

*(1) I am very thirsty; I want to drink some water.*



(2) *The flowers are dry; I must water them every day.*

(3) *There is some water in the bottle, we can drink it.*

From context, it is not difficult for the students to guess that “water” in sentences (1) and (3) is a noun, while the one in sentence (2) is a verb. Then the students will know the different parts of speech and usages of the word “water”.

Similarly, the teacher can also create some context and ask the students to infer the meaning of the target word from the context. For example, the teacher can provide the students with the following context in order to teach the word “umbrella”.

*It's raining and I want to go out. I don't want to get wet. I haven't a raincoat, but I have an umbrella. The rain is coming down on my umbrella but it isn't coming down on me. My umbrella is protecting me from catching rain. Now the rain has stopped. I will take my umbrella down. An umbrella is very useful when it is raining.*

Teaching a word in this way, putting the word in context, the teacher not only teaches the student vocabulary, but to think in English as well.

#### **(5) Multimedia**

In the era of high-technology, multimedia is a good aid to vocabulary teaching and learning. The information multimedia provides is a hypertext system that integrates words, sound, images and moving-pictures. With the help of multimedia, the teacher can activate all the senses of the students in learning vocabulary.

Researchers found that 83% of the information gained by human being comes from vision, 11% of it comes from hearing, and that people can remember 10% of what he/she reads, 20% of what he/she hears, 30% of what he/she sees, 50% of what he/she hears and sees, and 70% of what he/she says in communication. In the process of vocabulary teaching and learning, if the students can hear and see the content at the same time, and put it into use, the content will be more easily remembered and firmly stored in the students' memory. Take multimedia as a teaching aid and make students use their eyes, ears, brains and mouths altogether in learning vocabulary, and the students will become more active and achieve more.

#### **4.2 Strategies on Consolidating Vocabulary**

Memory-fading is a natural phenomenon for human beings. After the input (new information) has been received, it is restored in the short-term memory temporarily to be forgotten or to be processed to enter the long-term memory. After the first exposure to the new vocabulary, it is



necessary to consolidate vocabulary and make it enter long-term memory from short-term memory.

#### **4.2.1 Some Theories about Forgetting**

Understanding how we store information in the memory and why some of the information will “stick” while some other information slips away is important to language teachers. This knowledge will help them to promote learners’ effective learning and retention of new language items. According to Gaims and Redman (1986), we have short-term memory and long-term memory. They also have several theories about lapses of information that have already stored in the memory.

##### **(1) Short-Term Memory and Long-Term Memory**

According to Gaims and Redman (1986), short-term memory refers to the ability to hold information over brief periods (usually up to thirty seconds in duration). It demands fairly constant repetition, and distraction or interruption is likely to severely impede that ability. Moreover, the capacity is remarkably consistent, and that most people experience some breakdown in retention as soon as the numbers of items exceeds seven. For example, someone looks up a telephone number and repeats it to himself for the time it takes to sit down and dial the number. But when he needs the same number 24 hours later, he finds that he is quite unable to remember it.

Long-term memory refers to the capacity for recall of information minutes, weeks and years after the original input. It is seemingly inexhaustible and can hold any amount of new information. It is necessary to work much harder to commit information to long-term retention, and the type of repetition which is essential to short-term memory may not be adequate for long-term memory. However, information entering short-term memory may pass quite effortlessly into long-term memory, and repetition may be a very effective way of turning information into long-term memory.

##### **(2) Decay Theory & Cue-Dependent Forgetting**

Gaims and Redman’s Decay Theory suggests that information stored in the memory will fall into disuse unless it is activated fairly regularly. In other words, we have to practice and review what we have learned; otherwise the new input will gradually fade in the memory and ultimately disappear. Again, their theory of Cue-dependent Forgetting asserts that information does in fact persist in the memory, but we may be unable to recall it. In other words, the failure is one of retrieval rather than storage.



Generally speaking, it is impossible for students to keep the new vocabularies for a long time in their mind by memorizing once. The efficient way is to memorize again and again. H.Ebbinghaus, a German psychologist, analyzed that memorial process accompanied with the beginning of forgetting. At first it was forgotten very fast, step by step the process of forgetting slowed down, and in the end almost all that had been learnt were forgotten. Obviously, the good way to avoid forgetting is to memorize and review repeatedly. So it is essential for the teachers to let all the students know the memorial process and help them to review and consolidate the new words and expressions in case of forgetting.

#### 4.2.2 The Need of Consolidating Vocabulary

Laufer and Hill (2000) indicated that just one encounter with a new word, no matter how deep it might be, was not likely to let it get into long-term memory. Nation (1990) concluded from various studies that 5~16 encounters with a word were needed to acquire it, so it is unrealistic to expect the second language students to comprehend the intricacies of a given lexical item and be able to use the word appropriately after only one single exposure. Therefore, repeated exposures to the new words are needed before they are acquired.

#### 4.2.3 Practical Strategies

In vocabulary learning, Hatch and Brown (2001) described five essential steps: encountering new words, getting the word form, getting the word meaning, consolidating word form and meaning in memory and using the word. So the teacher should help the students to consolidate the newly learned vocabulary before they can use it.

##### (1)Vocabulary Revision

It is generally acknowledged that of the information we forget, 80% is lost within 24 hours of initial learning. Sokmen (1997) pointed out that if the encounters with a word were arranged in increasingly longer intervals, there was a greater likelihood of long-term storage than if the word had been presented at regular intervals. So the teacher should consciously cue reactivation of the vocabulary in the process of vocabulary teaching and learning. In *The Brain Book*, Peter Russell introduced the following revision schedule:

- a. A five-minute review five to ten minutes after the end of a study period.
- b. A quick review twenty-four hours later.
- c. A further review one week later.
- d. Final reviews one month later and six months later.



Reviewing the newly learned vocabulary in time is an efficient method to avoid forgetting it. So the students must form the habit of reviewing new vocabulary in order to put it into long-term memory.

### **(2) More Exposures to Vocabulary by Reading**

As discussed before, 5~16 encounters with a word are needed in order to acquire it. Learning vocabulary from reading context is a good way to acquire the form, meaning and usage because the vocabulary will be met again and again. As a result, it is the teacher's responsibility to urge the students to do more reading related to the topic they are learning. In this way they will have more encounters with the vocabulary they have to learn and consolidate them. It is suggested to read different books and articles on the same subject rather than read the same book or article several times.

### **(3) Cooperative Group Learning**

Nation (1997) stated that besides the initial discovery of a word, group work could be employed to learn and practice vocabulary. Cooperative group learning promotes active processing of information and cross imitation and it can prepare the participants for team activities outside the classroom. As there is less intervention of the instructor, students have more time to actually use and manipulate language in class. As a result, the teachers should guide the students to practice the vocabulary in social context through cooperative group learning.

### **(4) Imagery, Linking Words & Grouping**

Relating the word to be retained with some previously learned knowledge, using some form of imagery, or grouping are all good memory strategies of consolidating vocabulary.

New words can be learned by studying them with pictures of their meaning instead of definitions. Pairing words with pictures has been shown to be better than pairing them with their first language equivalents and imagery has been shown to be more effective than mere repetition for reading passages and sentences. Learners can create their own mental images of a word's meaning. New words can be also associated with a particularly vivid personal experience of the concept. So teachers should encourage their students to use pictures and imagery to learn and accumulate vocabulary.

Likewise, new words can be linked to the words that the students already know. This involves some type of sense relationship, such as coordination, synonymy or antonyms. These relationships can be illustrated with semantic maps, which are often used to help consolidate vocabulary. Some words, particularly gradable adjectives, have meanings relative to other words



in their set. Setting them in a scale is a helpful way to remember them.

Grouping is an important way to aid recall, and people seem to organize words into groups naturally without prompting. It has been proved that if words are organized in some way before memorization, recall is improved. (Cofer, Bruce, and Reicher, 1996; Craik and Tulving, op. cit) Words can be grouped according to their meaning category, for example, animals and names. Words can be grouped together in a very natural way by using the target word in sentence. Similarly, words can be grouped together in a story. Grouping words may work better for more proficient learners, however, as they have been shown to favor grouping strategies more than beginners did.



## V. Discussions and Comments on Vocabulary Teaching Strategies

The development of a rich vocabulary is an important element in acquisition of second language. Indeed, as evidence from larger error corpora indicates, lexical errors are the most frequent in the second language learners. Both the second language learners and the native speakers view lexical errors as the most serious and disruptive obstacle to communication. In addition, as demonstrated in many studies, large lexical size could predict well a learner's reading and writing ability. So it is very important to put vocabulary at the center of language learning from the very beginning. English study in Junior High School is a critical stage for teenage students. At present, some of the students in Junior High School can have the grammar at their hands, but cannot express their ideas in English fluently and accurately, which results from the inadequacy of vocabulary. Meanwhile some others can possess a great amount of vocabulary, but cannot use it with high proficiency, which is attributed to the inflexibility of vocabulary learning. In face of these common phenomena, some feasible methods or strategies of vocabulary teaching must be placed in a crucial position.

In teaching vocabulary, it is found that for beginners some more mechanical strategies are often favored over more complex ones. Word lists are effective for learning a great deal of vocabulary in a short time, and even rote repetition can be effective if students are accustomed to using it. For intermediate or advanced students, however, they benefit more from contextualized words. Beginners and teenage children as they are, Junior High School students are active and curious. They like excitement. While at the same time they are very easy to lose interest in something and lose heart if they find it difficult or boring. Therefore it is important for the teachers to find appropriate means to pace the way for the students, encouraging and helping them acquire English vocabulary efficiently.

When considering vocabulary teaching and learning strategies, we should remember that strategies are not inherently good, but are dependent on the context in which they are used. The effectiveness with which strategies can be used will depend on a number of variables, including proficiency level, task, text, language modality, background knowledge, context of learning, culture and learner characteristics. Therefore, whether a high school English teacher can follow scientific methods to teach vocabulary or not directly brings good or bad influence toward the students. If his methods are suitable for the students and beneficial for them in the long run, he could arouse their interest in English and help them to develop a solid foundation of language acquisition ability; whereas if he fails to do so, it might result in the students' diffidence toward themselves and might cause them to disgust English.



Knowing a word requires more than just familiarity with its meaning and form. Nation (1990:30—33) and Richards (1976) describe the various kinds of word knowledge necessary to master a word completely, including knowledge of its orthographical and phonological form, meanings, grammatical behavior, associations, collocations, frequency and register. These different categories of word knowledge are interrelated and vocabulary knowledge is an integrated whole. Generally, a new word would well turn into an active one in students' minds after at least three stages: The first stage is known as forming an acoustic link. That means students are able to link the pronunciation with the word when they hear it in a conversation. The second stage is probably forming a visual link. That is to say, when students come across this word in reading materials, they can understand it. The third stage is more difficult to achieve but very important. It is to form mental image of the word. That means they can imitate, choose and give the reign to it freely and accurately in speaking and writing as if it is their native word. The deeper the mental processing used when learning a word, the more likely that a student will remember it. The Depth of Processing Hypothesis ( Craik and Lockhart, 1972; Craik and Tulving, 1975) states that mental activities which require more elaborate thought, manipulation, or processing of a new word will help in the learning of that word. Deeper, richer semantic processing, such as creating a mental image of a word's meaning, judging the formality of a word, or grouping the word with other conceptually associated words, will be more likely to enhance leaning than shallower processes such as rote repetition. Therefore, the teacher should vary the techniques of vocabulary teaching according to the different stages of students' vocabulary acquisition step by step, and get students to try to learn vocabulary actively and independently all the time.

At the stage of presenting new vocabulary, the teachers should choose proper strategies to teach different kinds of words: giving the first language translation, giving a synonym, giving a definition by paraphrase, using the new word in a sentence, using teaching aids such as multimedia or any combination of these. The teachers should remember that a word is much easier for the students to remember when they can connect the form, the meaning and the concrete image of it together rather than just explain the abstract concept.

Teaching vocabulary in class, the teachers must put stress on function words. As for lesser-used words, students need only to know them, rather than master them. Active words must be attached importance to, by presenting them in various ways, such as pictures, dialogues, drills, and through different channels.

When students say that they know the meaning of an English word, they usually mean that they have found an equivalent word in Chinese language from the wordlist, but this equivalent





word may be misleading. So the teachers should employ strategies to help students recognize new vocabulary first. As the linguist Lv Shuxiang said, a language is alive only when it exists in specific context. As a result, it is better for students to recognize the exact meaning of the target word in context. Context which consists of linguistic context, situational context, and cultural context is closely related to language, especially to the English language, for most of the English words are polysemous. They mean differently in different context. The students should bear it in mind that the word meaning is not only affected by the sentences before or after the word. The person who says it, the place where the person uses it and the cultural factors, etc. also affect it. To understand the different associative meanings of words, context plays a crucial role. Therefore, the teachers are suggested to connect the word spelling with its sound, word meaning with specific context, and proper word usage with students' communication in reality together when teaching new words to the students. Students can remember the new words and expressions more easily by means of connection and imagination.

Many students always complain their bad memory, "I have recited these new words (sometimes the writing) again and again but immediately I forget all, so I will never remember them." The students in junior high school are always cast down by a large number of new words. It is hard for them to expand their vocabulary, which will become a block for them to improve their reading, writing and comprehension abilities. Therefore, English teachers should adopt techniques to help students memorize new vocabulary. Teaching vocabulary in a monotonous way will make students feel dull and boring. The novel and diversified presentation of words is better for students to be willing to commit words to their memory. Supposing teachers prepare teaching materials as a game, adding some amusement and humors or show students materials by showing them a film, using all kinds of multimedia, the lessons will become vivid and interesting, impressing the students deeply and they can remember materials naturally without pressure. This interesting teaching method involves students' intelligence, participation and cooperation, and aims to create a relaxed and delightful atmosphere for students to acquire English in class. At the same time, students will personalize the target words in an autonomic and natural way in the activities.

Application plays an important part in second language acquisition. We must emphasize the application of words in actual situations, because the very purpose of learning is using what has been learnt. Teaching vocabulary in class, teachers can choose communication as a teaching technique. Since real experience can deepen the impressions of things upon people, teaching new words through thinking and talking with students about the things presented or happening in our daily life has a great advantage that the new words presented in the conversation immediately



become active words which students can exploit freely and properly. It can also arouse the students' motive and interest toward enlarging their vocabulary. When students meet difficulty in communication, they will have the urge to consult the dictionary or ask for help from the teacher or the other students, and try to remember the words they want to express so that next time they would not be awkward when speaking out.

Forgetting is inevitable. According to the "forgetting curve", the process of forgetting always develops more quickly at first, and then more and more slowly. So students must review and consolidate what they have learnt in time. After the first encounter with the new words and expressions, students should take measures to consolidate them and keep them from slipping away from memory. Apart from the purposive instruction in class, the teachers should teach their students some learning strategies to consolidate and enrich their new vocabulary after class. As discussed before, some cognitive strategies are needed. New words should be reviewed effectively and it is better to review them in increasingly longer intervals. Students can also use social strategies to consolidate vocabulary. They can form in small groups and help each other to acquire and consolidate the new words through discussion and communication. If it is possible, they can even communicate with native English speakers to consolidate their vocabulary. For some more advanced learners, they can also make full use of the memory strategies like pairing words with imagery, relating relative words and grouping words to enhance the memory of the target words. New words can be further grouped to point out similarities and differences among them. The association can take effect, which requests students to make efforts to establish familiar relations between new words and known words in their mind. They can group the new words with already known words that are similar in some aspects. The new word can be placed with words with a similar meaning (prank— trick, joke, jest), a similar sound structure (prank— tank, sank, rank), the same beginning letters (prank— pray, pretty, prod), the same word class (prank— cow, greed, distance), or other grouping parameter, although by far the most common one must be meaning similarity. Because the old words are already fixed in the mind, relating the new words to them provides a 'hook' to remember them by so they will not be forgotten. "The association attached to a word will affect the way that it is stored in students' brains and also influence the availability of the word when it is needed."(I.S.P.Nation, 2004:42) So teaching words in a systematic way must be taken seriously. Leaving enough room for students' imagination or association is beneficial to their abilities of exploiting their own word fields.

After class, the students should also continue their vocabulary self-study on radio, TV, broadcasting, or by extensive reading, and try to use what they have learned or are learning in their composition. It is found that besides vocabulary learning from reading context, oral context



also plays an important role in second lexical development. The first several thousand word families in a language, which cover the most of the words in oral interaction and roughly 84% of words in written texts, tend to be learned first in naturalistic context largely from oral input (Wesche and Paribakht, 1999, p177). Wode (1999) identified that the students in an immersion program possibly acquired some words from oral input incidentally rather than from the textbook or from other kinds of teaching materials. As a result, oral input must be attached much importance to. Apart from the teachers' oral input in class, students must make full use of the above mentioned media after class. What's more, according to the experiments of linguists, an average English learner will better remember a new word and make it become an active one if he observes, speaks out, hears, and writes as well as recites it. As a prompter for students' English study, the teacher should engage in maintaining students' enthusiasm of enriching vocabulary and urging them to acquire new vocabulary consciously and continually by means of some periodic inspections.

Vocabulary teaching has no fixed patterns or techniques, and it cannot exist alone in English teaching but is employed in various activities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Whichever strategy is used, it should be suitable for both the teaching context and the students, or else it will slow down the process of vocabulary acquisition instead of accelerating it. Teaching depends on students' learning.



## VI. Conclusion

As Lewis (1993) stated, “language is grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar”. From the beginning level, vocabulary knowledge plays a key role in the whole process of Second Language Acquisition. With no good acquisition of vocabulary, there will be no way for listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation to develop well and appropriately. No matter how well the students learn grammar, no matter how successfully the sound of the second language is mastered, without words to express a wider range of meanings, communication in the second language just cannot happen in any meaningful way.

Teaching English vocabulary in junior high school, the teachers are responsible to help the students to develop their ability to understand and to use a word automatically and appropriately for communicative purposes rather than just tell the students the equivalent Chinese meaning of the word.

In teaching different kinds of words, the teachers should choose different teaching aids and strategies to activate the students’ learning motivation. Junior high school students like curious and exciting activities, so the teachers can design some competitive exercises or play some games in the process of teaching vocabulary to arouse their interest in learning. When it is possible, make full use of the multimedia to activate the students’ different senses in learning.

In class teaching, it is suggestive for the English teachers to use English explanations to teach new vocabulary. The English learning environment of Chinese students is inferior to that of the native speakers’. In class, the teachers should create an English environment for the students to gain more language input and at the same time guide and encourage the students to think in English rather than in Chinese. In this way, the teachers can help the students to review the vocabulary learned before while learning the new ones.

When a word is introduced to the students for the first time, it enters their short-term memory. Revision and repetitive exposures to the word are needed in order to consolidate it and make it into the students’ long-term memory. Extensive reading of the same subject is a good way to achieve this purpose. Cooperative group learning, linking relative words and grouping words into categories are also good aids of vocabulary consolidation.

Only after a language learner can master the form, the meaning and the usage of a word and put it into communicative practice can we say that he/she really knows the word. English teachers of junior high school should convert their roles for the need of their students in vocabulary teaching.



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