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Developing Strategy Knowledge for Vocabulary Learning in Speaking English as Second Language

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تطوير معرفة استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات اللغوية للمحادثة باللغة الانجليزية
كلغة ثانوية

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دائرة التعليم الديني والدراسات الإسلامية/ بغداد

المخلص:

يسعى متعلموا اللغة الإنجليزية الى معرفة وتعلم جميع مفرداتها وإتقان مهاراتها الأربع ولكن قد لا يعرف الكثير منهم من أين يبدأ. لذا يطرح العديد من المتعلمين أسئلة مثل؛ ماذا علي أن أفعل لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؟ كيف ومن أين يمكنني البدء؟ ما هي الطريقة والاسلوب الذي يجب ان اتبعه؟ كيف يمكنني ان اتقن مهارات اللغة الانجليزية؟ ان اتباع مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية لاستراتيجيات فعالة في تدريس المفردات اللغوية يمكن ان يؤدي الى رفع كفاءة الطلاب في المهارات الأربع في اللغة المطلوب تعلمها. من المعلوم ان استراتيجيات التعلم كثيرة ومتنوعة ، ولكن الأهم من ذلك هو زيادة وعي وادراك المتعلمين لهذه الاستراتيجيات, حيث ان تطوير وزيادة ادراك المتعلمين حول تلك الاستراتيجيات يمكن أن يؤدي بالنتيجة إلى التعلم المستقل الفعال لهؤلاء المتعلمين. وبذلك يمكن للمدرسين استخدام زيادة الوعي عند المتعلمين من اجل وضعهم في صلب عملية التعلم. انطلاقا من وجهة النظر هذه، يعد من المهم جدا للمعلمين إعداد خطة جيدة لزيادة وعي المتعلمين بهذه الاستراتيجيات المفيدة حيث ان معرفة استراتيجيات التعلم يعد أمراً مهماً لأنها ستزيد من وعيهم بالطرق الأفضل والأكثر فائدة للتعلم. تؤكد هذه الورقة البحثية على الحاجة إلى مراعاة تأثير تطوير المعرفة الاستراتيجية على تطوير قدرة المتعلمين في حفظ وتعلم المفردات اللغوية. كما تهدف إلى إيجاد الطرق المفيدة والتي من الواجب اتباعها في تطوير قدرتهم في تحديد الاستراتيجيات المناسبة للتعلم ، وتطوير مهارات التحدث وتعلم المفردات اللغوية على وجه الخصوص. تم اختيار موضوع هذه الورقة البحثية وفقاً لتحليل محادثة 28 طالباً في عامهم الأول من المستوى الجامعي حيث اظهرت نتائج تلك التحليلات ضعفاً لدى الطلبة في مجال معرفة استراتيجيات التعلم اضافة الى ضعف المفردات اللغوية المستخدمة في التحدث. وتقتصر هذه الورقة البحثية بعض الطرق المناسبة لتطوير المعرفة الاستراتيجية عند مدرسي اللغة في تدريس المفردات التي تؤدي إلى تطوير قدرة المتعلمين على الأداء الأفضل في تعلمهم.

المصطلحات الأساسية: المعرفة الاستراتيجية ، المفردات اللغوية ، المحادثة ، وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.

Abstract

Learners of English as a second language would like to learn all the language and master its four skills. Many learners may not know from where to start. Many learners may ask such questions; what should I do to learn English? How can I start? If ESL teachers followed effective strategies for teaching vocabulary, they could facilitate students' proficiency in the four skills of English. Strategies of learning are many and various, but the more important is to raise the awareness of learners about these strategies. Developing of the metacognition of learners about strategies can lead to effective independent learning. Teachers can use developing learners' awareness to put students at the centre of the learning process. From this point of view, it is important for teachers to prepare a good plan to develop students' awareness of such useful strategies. Knowing the strategies of learning is an important thing for learners because they will raise their awareness about the best and the more useful ways of learning. This paper emphasizes the need to take into account the impact of developing strategy knowledge on developing the ability of the learners in memorising and learning vocabulary. It also aims to find ways which are useful for students to follow in developing their ability in defining the suitable strategies for learning, and to develop speaking skill and vocabulary specifically. The choice of this topic was according to the analysis of 28 students' speech in their first year in the university. The results show a weakness in the field of vocabulary in speaking and suggest some ways of developing strategy knowledge in teaching vocabulary that lead to develop the ability of the learners to perform better in their learning.

Introduction

Learning English for non-native speakers demands the proficiency of oral and written communication skills. But, learners may pay more attention towards acquiring speaking skills than other skills to establish themselves in the society. In this regard, Michael Bygate (1987: 57) states, "Speaking is, however, a skill which deserves attention every bit as much as literary skills, in both first and second languages. Speaking skills are essential because it helps learners to develop their grammar and vocabulary and at the same time, they also can develop their writing skills. Speaking enables the learners to express their ideas, opinions and feelings freely. According to Howarth (2001), "Speaking is a two-way process involving a true communication of ideas, information and feelings. The main means of developing speaking skill of a language is to control its vocabulary. In this regard, Stevick (1980: 42) says, "Learners can take their knowledge of the first few words in the new language and figure out additional words by using that knowledge". Vocabulary plays an important role in the ESL classrooms because it not only supports the four language skills, but also mediates between ESL students and content-area classes in that these students often find that lack of vocabulary knowledge is an obstacle to learning (Nation 2001). Learning vocabulary demands working on number of strategies. The more important thing for learners is the knowledge of their levels and the knowledge of these strategies. As Nunan (1999) states "Knowledge of strategies is important, because the greater awareness you have of what you are doing, if you are conscious of the processes underlying the learning that you are involved in, then learning will be more effective".

At the beginning, this paper considers the importance of strategies and their characteristics and how the teachers can identify the necessary strategies for learners. Then a detailed explanation will be given of the speaking task, its importance, the factors that affect it and the characteristics of successful speaking activity. The final part of this paper will make recommendations for improving the learning of vocabulary. This arrangement will help to address the following research questions in this paper.

- 1- What do the data show about the students' metacognition?
- 2- What do the students need to learn to improve their speaking?
- 3- What are the strategies that can encourage and support students to develop their speaking?
- 4- How can the students develop their vocabulary?

Literature review

Knowing strategies of learning is an important thing in the process of learning. Students must be aware of the strategies that are necessary for their learning. In the field of language teaching and applied linguistics in the last few years, there has been growing interest in the process of learning. This has led to extensive research into the way people learn languages and in particular into the kind of strategies they use. These strategies are "the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information" (O'Malley and Chamot'1991). For the importance of strategy knowledge in learning, one can find a lot of focus on the steps to be followed to get this knowledge and one of these focuses is textbooks.

Brown (2001: 220) points to the increasing inclusion of strategies work in textbook exercises, designed to promote learning beyond the classroom.

Developing the language learning process is the aim of language teaching in classes. Teachers do what is possible to develop the control of language. Cohen and Weaver stated that one goal of learner training is, therefore, to empower students by allowing them to take control of the language learning process (Cohen and Weaver 1998:70). Learner training develops the best strategies in the processes of learning. Ellis defines learner training as: "Enabling learners of English to discover the learning strategies that suit them best, so that they can learn more effectively." (Ellis and Sinclair 1989). In other words, learner training aims to develop students' learning strategies with the intention of making learners more effective and independent.

To help students learn with a sense of what they are learning, they have to be aware of the strategies used in learning. Williams and Burden (1997) define the skills and strategies used in learning as: the various operations that learners use to make sense of their learning. They refer to specific actions that a learner uses in response to a particular problem, rather than describing a learner's general approach to learning. Depending on all the last definitions of scholars for strategy knowledge and its importance in the learning process, this study will make use of the analysis of the weakness of students in vocabulary which affect speaking skill and will show how they can follow suitable strategies to conquer these difficulties and develop speaking through learning vocabulary.

Data analysis and discussion

The data collected for this purpose was a speech record for 28 students. They were Undergraduate students, Western Languages and Literature Department, Suleyman Demirel University, (SDU). The students were in their first year of their study in Suleyman Demirel University in Isparta (a city in Turkey). In the speech of the students, they talked about their ability in speaking, and the difficulties that face them. They also talked about whether they know the suitable strategies that are available for them and are they practice or follow any strategy.

According to the analysis of the speech of the students, it is found that most of the students have knowledge about the difficulties they faced in speaking and especially in vocabulary. They related these difficulties to a number of reasons and they can be listed under five classifications: weakness of vocabulary, psychological reasons, forgetfulness of vocabulary, lack of ideas and difficult topics.

1- The weakness of the vocabulary. Thirteen students found that the difficulty of speaking came from the lack of vocabulary they have. Some of these speeches are:

Student (1) "I think. my most important problem is lack of vocabulary. I can't express myself very well because my vocabulary knowledge is not enough. I hope, I can overcome this problem".

Student (9) Vocabulary lackness makes me fail to speak variety of topics. As a result, generally, I manage to speak with a foreigner and

transpose my ideas clearly.

This shows that students have personal knowledge about their proficiency and how much vocabulary they have. In general, they know that they need more vocabulary but they don't know which kind of vocabulary they need. Choosing a suitable kind of vocabulary is one of the problems that face learners. In the recommendation chapter (vocabulary in speaking), the suggested levels of vocabulary will be presented so that learners will be able to make use of these levels to start learning vocabulary from the right point.

2- Psychological reasons. Ten students relate this difficulty to the fear of speaking a foreign language, such as:

Student (3) "But if there is a speaking exam or a person who come from abroad something interesting happen to me because of my fear. I forget about vocabulary, grammar, word patterns".

Student (8) "Speaking English is a phobia for me. I worry about this issue".

These statements show the effects of speaking English as a second language on learners. One of the reasons behind this fear of speaking English is that learners are not used to practice speaking English in their everyday life. This may come from the lack of opportunities to use it. This state is assured by Nunan who stated that many of the learners that he taught were reluctant speakers. This reluctance is partly due to their prior learning experiences and also the opportunities of learners to speak are severely limited and speaking was simply not encouraged. To pass this obstacle, learners have to take part in a successful speaking activity. In the next chapter (speaking tasks for learners), the characteristic of successful speaking activity will be given.

3- Forgetfulness of vocabulary. Ten students found that the difficulty of speaking comes from forgetting the words during speaking, such as:

Student (3) "But if there is a speaking exam or a person who come from..... I forget about vocabulary, grammar, word patterns".

Student (10) "I'm not very good at speaking English. Whenever I speak English, I'll get very excited. I forget all words. I tried various way to calm myself when I speak. But it doesn't seem to work".

Forgetting some words during speaking is something can be normal especially for the words that are not used frequently in everyday conversation. For this reason, teachers can advise learners that the much use of a word, the less they forget it.

4-The lack of vocabulary comes from the lack of ideas. The analysis also shows that nine students faced the difficulty of finding a topic to speak about as a practice, such as:

Student (4) "But I have some problems about speaking. One of them, I can't find anything to say when I speak someone".

Student (22) "Unfortunately, I cannot speak fluently. Because I couldn't think suddenly and in the this case I couldn't keep speaking".

As the above statements showed, choosing the topic is a big problem for the learners of a second language. In everyday conversation, speakers show their interest in some topics that they like, For example; for young learners speaking about sports or films is more interest than speaking about history or politics. For these reasons, teachers can choose some topics that suit the

age of the learners in the class. The more interest topic leads to more participation and more ideas.

5- Difficult vocabulary in difficult topics. Seven students showed that speaking about abstract concepts is one of their problems. They need a concrete concept to speak about, such as:

Student (6) "For example, there is a picture. I look it and I mention to see. Generally, I focus on what is there. I explain it in detail. I tell pictures of background such as colour. I have information about the topic. Otherwise, I don't speak very effective".

Student (18) "I can give details and talk about a film, a book, an event, or a news. I can ask my friend their thought and invite them into the discussion".

Another problem for learners is speaking about abstract concepts. It is difficult for learners to use a second language to give their opinions or describe their feelings about any topic especially when these topics are abstract. Besides, it will be easy for learners to speak about concrete things or concepts. It may be a simple task if a student is asked to describe a picture or retell a story or a film. Thus, teachers can help learners in developing their ability in speaking by focusing on describing things that are found in the class or after they show them on a video or a recorder. After this stage, the teacher can move to more difficult topics until he ensures that learners are ready to speak about any topic.

Recommendations for learner training

After analysing the data collected from students, this paper suggests and recommends the following steps for learner training; first, learners have to develop their **strategy** knowledge, second, they have to develop tasks and awareness about speaking skill, and third, they have to know the kinds of vocabulary that are necessary in learner training and be taught these kinds according to their levels. These three steps will be discussed in detail as the following:

1- Strategy knowledge for learners of ESL

Before giving the importance of strategies, it is essential to start with giving some of their definitions. Strategies are the mental and communicative procedures learners use to learn and use language (Nunan1999). In other words, strategies may refer to ways of thinking about developing one's self learning. Any learner has to know these strategies to achieve his/her aim in learning. Oxford (1990) had argued that strategies are important for two reasons. First, strategies "are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Secondly, learners who have developed appropriate learning strategies have greater self-confidence and learn more effectively. So, knowing the suitable and useful strategies of learning help the learners to be independent in their learning because not all the learners know which strategy work better with them during learning. Nunan during his research had shown that not all

learners automatically know which strategies work best for them (Nunan 1999).

Learners also have to know the kinds of strategies that are explained by Oxford who distinguishes between direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include such things such as memorizing, analysing, and reasoning, and guessing intelligently. Indirect strategies, on the other hand, include things such as evaluating one's learning and cooperating with others. It is important to assure here that these strategies must be given in related classes and not given separately. Nunan explored a mistake when he visited schools and found that strategies are presented separately from the language lessons. This is seen as a mistake because it makes it harder for learners to see the relevance of the strategies (Nunan1999).

Another mistake or lack found by Nunan is that most learners don't have the desire to speak inside classes and many of the learners that he taught were reluctant speakers. This reluctance is partly due to their prior learning experiences and also the opportunities of learners to speak are severely limited and speaking was simply not encouraged. So learners need to be motivated and here in the field of learning motivation refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes towards learning the language.

Learners sometimes try to find a way or a strategy that helps them in their learning. Cohen and Apeh (1981) found that most students simply tried to memorize the words which they did not know. Another strategy explored by O' Malley et al who found that repetition was the most common strategy (McCarthy 1997). It is important here to mention a widely used instrument for learners to identify strategies is Oxford's (1990a) Strategy

Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). It is a questionnaire that has now been tested in many countries and translated into several languages. The SILL's fifty items, divided into six categories, each one presents a possible strategy (i.e. " I use rhymes to remember new English words) which responders must indicate on a five-point scale of "never true of me" to "always true of me" (Brown 2007).

2- Speaking task for learners of ESL

Before starting the explanation of the speaking skill, it is necessary to give its difference of writing. A major difference between speech and writing is that speakers don't usually speak in sentences but in 'idea units' which are short phrases and clauses connected with 'and', or, but or that, or not joined by conjunctions at all but simply spoken next to each other, with possibly a short pause between them (Luoma 2004). Speaking is a difficult skill that requires instant thinking and fluency more than listening or writing. Learners would like to develop their speaking because speaking expresses the identity and the ability of the learner in controlling the language.

According to (Nunan 1999) there are three sets of factors affected the speaking task. The first set is the factors which relate to the data that learners are working with. This refers to the complexity of the texts that learners are required to process, i.e., how abstract or concrete is the content concerning the learners' experience, how much contextual support is provided. The second set of factors related to the task itself. This refers to how many steps are involved in the task, how relevant and meaningful is the task, how much time is available, what degree of grammatical accuracy is provided, how much assistance is provided. The third set of factors related to the speakers themselves. These factors refer to the level of confidence and motivation of

the learners, prior knowledge of content, degree of linguistic knowledge and skill and degree of familiarity with task type itself.

Teachers should choose suitable tasks for learners because the tasks which require speakers to describe concrete, static objects are easier than the tasks which require the description of objects whose positions relative to another are changing (Nunan 1999). In other words, this means that describing a picture is easier than describing an accident. Thus, teachers have to facilitate the task of speaking by using real and concrete description as a first step. Then teachers can use abstract concepts after they have ensured that learners are ready to speak about abstract things. Another way of developing speaking is extensive listening to the target language. Prior experiences as a listener help speakers improve their performance as a speaker (Nunan1999).

Characteristic of successful speaking activities

The following are the characteristics of the successful speaking activity that must be adopted by teachers to develop the speaking task in classrooms (Ur 1991).

- a. Learners talk a lot.** This means that the learners must have the opportunity to speak a lot in the class. Teachers can use more exercises for this purpose.
- b. Participation is even.** This means that all learners must have the opportunity to participate in classroom activities. Teachers must not give some students more roles than others.
- c. Motivation is high.** This means that all learners must be motivated to do the activity of speaking.

d. Language is of an acceptable level. The language must be suitable to the level of the learners. As it is explained before, teachers must use simple and concrete subjects to talk about in the classroom.

Problems with speaking activity

It is seen that learners may face a number of problems while practising speaking tasks in or outside classes, such as:

a. Inhibition. This means that learners are often inhibited to say things in a foreign language in the classroom because they worried about making mistakes or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts.

b. Nothing to say. This means that learners complain that they cannot think of anything to say, they have no motive to express themselves.

c. Low or uneven participation. Some learners speak a lot while others speak very little or not at all.

d. Mother-tongue use. Learners tend to use their mother tongue because it is easier and they feel that it is unnatural to speak to one another in a foreign language.

3- Vocabulary in speaking for learners of ESL

One may ask if knowing vocabulary is important in learning any language. There is no doubt that people who have large speaking vocabularies generally tend to have large listening, reading, and writing vocabularies. Vocabulary is important for learners of ESL if they want to have mastery over a language.

Learners of any second language would like to learn all the language, but even native speakers don't know all the words in their language. There are large amounts of specialist vocabulary in fields like medicine, law, or computer sciences...etc. Learning a language means "to know a language" and this doesn't mean that learners have to know all the words in the target language. For example, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, English has more than 250,000 words and it is very difficult to learn and use all of the words to control English.

To control the target language, learners have to follow some principles on which the selection of the vocabulary is based. The following principles can be useful for both learners and the teachers who would like to develop the ability of their students and may like to know which words should be taught. In deciding which words to be taught, it is helpful to think about "levels" of vocabulary that were suggested by Templeton (2004).

Level I Words refers to those words that are used most frequently in everyday speech. These words used in different kinds of contexts and familiar to learners. Examples of these words would be house, girl, cat, cup, umbrella, etc. Level II words refer to those words which are used in conversational speech. These words can be learned only through reading or through instruction. They are the vocabulary of educated persons as "academic vocabulary," and as "instructional vocabulary." Examples of those words are: perspective, generate, initiate, intermediate, calculation, etc. Level III words are words associated with a particular field of study. Examples of Level III words from the field of reading instruction include the terms: digraph, diphthong, schwa, meta-comprehension, etc. Level IV words are words that are interesting but so rare and they may not be useful even in most educational environments, and they are not associated with a field of

study or profession. Examples of this kind are; majuscule (a capital letter), Xanthodont (one who has yellow teeth like a rodent), noctuary (an account of what happens in a night).

Conclusion

This paper found some ways that are useful for students to follow in developing their ability in defining the suitable strategies for the learning. It also aimed to recommend ways to develop speaking skill and vocabulary in specific ways. From the data analysis, it was found that learners have some personal knowledge about their ability and proficiency. Learners face some difficulties in performing successful speaking and this paper has suggested suitable solutions for these difficulties. Additionally, some learners have general strategy knowledge about some strategies about how to develop their ability in the speaking task like; more practice in speaking with foreigners or reading more books about speaking task. After the data analysis and in the recommendation chapter, this paper had given some knowledge and explanation about the suitable ways that every learner has to follow. These explanations were in three steps. The first step was useful knowledge about the strategies and their characteristics and how the teachers can identify the necessary strategies for learners. The second step was about the speaking task and the factors that affect the speaking task and the characteristics of successful speaking activity. The third and last step was about the rule of vocabulary in learning and the principles on which the selection of the vocabulary is based and kinds of vocabulary that are necessary for every learner to know.

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