

ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES
AMONG MALAYSIAN SECOND LANGUAGE
TERTIARY STUDENTS

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**ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES AMONG MALAYSIAN
SECOND LANGUAGE TERTIARY STUDENTS**

by

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**STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN PERBENDAHARAAN KATA BAHASA
INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA DI KALANGAN PELAJAR
INSTITUSI PENGAJIAN TINGGI MALAYSIA**

oleh

AHMAD AZMAN MOKHTAR

Tesis yang diserahkan untuk
memenuhi keperluan bagi Ijazah
Doktor Falsafah

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ASS	Using Association
AE	Auditory Encoding
AS	Activation Strategies
ASY	Appearance Similarity
AWL	Academic Word List
ANOVA	One-way Analysis of Variance
BEL	Basic English Language
CE	Contextual Encoding
CRL	Cumulative Rehearsal
CUC	Complex Use of Context
CAVT	Controlled Active Vocabulary Test
CSE	Coefficient of Stability and Equivalence
DS	Dictionary Strategies
DAIS	Diploma in Accountancy and Information System
DIA	Diploma in Accountancy
DCS	Diploma in Computer Science
DIC	Diploma in Industrial Chemistry
DICE	Diploma in Civil Engineering
DIB	Diploma in Banking
DPIM	Diploma in Plantation and Industrial Management
DSG	Diploma in Geometrical Science
DIIA	Diploma in Investment Analysis
EDS	Extended dictionary strategies
ES	Encoding Strategies

ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
FAVT	Free Active Vocabulary Test
GS	Guessing strategies
GSL	General Service List
IM	Using Imagery
LUS	Looking-up strategies
LFP	Lexical Frequency Profile
L2	Second language
L1	First language
MR	Metacognitive regulation
MONT	Meaning-oriented note taking
MNC	Mnemonic
M	Mean
NTS	Note-taking Strategies
NS	Native speaker
OR	Oral Repetition
PAR	Paraphrase
PVT	Passive Vocabulary Test
RS	Rehearsal strategies
RRS	Reading of Related Words
SI	Self-initiation
SA	Selective attention
SE	Semantic Encoding

SRL	Simple Rehearsal
SPE	Spelling
SUF	Suffix
STN	Sentence Translation
SUC	Simple Use of Context
SLK	Sound Link
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
SD	Standard Deviation
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
TPR	Total Physical Response
TES	Testing
UBK	Using backward knowledge
ULC	Using linguistic cues
UDSC	Using dictionary strategies for comprehension
UONT	Usage-oriented note-taking
UWL	Using Word List
UiTM	Universiti Teknologi Mara
UWL	University Word List
VLS	Vocabulary learning strategies
VR	Visual Repetition
VE	Visual Encoding
VP	VocabProfile
VLT	Vocabulary Levels Test

VLQ	Vocabulary Learning Questionnaire
WS	Using Word Structure
WWM	Writing of Word and Meaning
WCN	Word Classification

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**STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN PERBENDAHARAAN KATA BAHASA
INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA DI KALANGAN PELAJAR INSTITUSI
PENGAJIAN TINGGI MALAYSIA**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini mengkaji hubungankait antara strategi pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata dan tahap penguasaan perbendaharaan kata. Dua kaedah pengukuran digunakan untuk mengumpul data. Kaedah kuantitatif menggunakan “Vocabulary Learning Questionnaire” dan “Vocabulary Levels Test” untuk mengkaji penggunaan strategi dan penguasaan perbendaharaan kata pelajar. Kaedah kualitatif pula menggunakan instrumen berbentuk penulisan diari dan temubual. 360 pelajar dari lima program diploma dipilih sebagai sampel kajian dan dari jumlah tersebut enam pelajar kemudiannya diambil sebagai responden bagi kaedah kualitatif. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan dalam pencarian makna perkataan, beberapa strategi perbendaharaan kata digunakan secara meluas oleh majoriti pelajar. Strategi-strategi yang gemar digunakan ialah rujukan kamus, penekanan makna perkataan secara rambang, penggunaan regulasi kognitif, pengulangan, dan penterjemahan. Bagi tahap pengetahuan perbendaharaan kata, majoriti pelajar gagal mencapai markah minimum dalam ujian “Passive Vocabulary Test” dan “Controlled Active Vocabulary Test”. Dalam analisis “Lexical Frequency Profile” pula, peratusan bagi tahap 2000-perkataan dalam penulisan esei mereka adalah kecil. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan tahap pengetahuan dan penggunaan perbendaharaan kata pelajar-pelajar adalah di tahap yang rendah. Secara terperinci, bagi tahap penggunaan perbendaharaan kata, pelajar-pelajar tidak mempunyai masalah

dalam ejaan tetapi masih lemah dalam tata bahasa dan semantik. Ujian korelasi pula menunjukkan, sebelas strategi mempunyai korelasi yang signifikan dengan perbendaharaan kata pasif dan sepuluh strategi dengan perbendaharaan kata “controlled active”. Bagi tahap peningkatan penguasaan perbendaharaan kata, terdapat peningkatan dalam konteks pengetahuan perbendaharaan kata pelajar tetapi pada kadar yang minima. Bagi konteks penggunaan perbendaharaan kata pula, pelajar tidak mempunyai masalah dalam ejaan tetapi mereka tidak menunjukkan sebarang peningkatan dalam aspek tata bahasa dan semantik.

ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES AMONG MALAYSIAN SECOND LANGUAGE TERTIARY STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

This study was correlational in nature where the relationships between vocabulary learning strategies and vocabulary knowledge were studied. The study was also developmental where the cross-sectional method was employed. Two approaches were used in data gathering. In the quantitative approach, the Vocabulary Learning Questionnaire and the Vocabulary Levels Test were used to examine the students' vocabulary learning strategies and vocabulary knowledge respectively. As for the qualitative approach diary writing and interview protocol were the research instruments. 360 students from five different diploma programs were selected as the samples. Six students were then chosen to participate in the qualitative approach. The research findings revealed that dictionary work, guessing, metacognitive regulation, rehearsal, and translation were the most frequent strategies used in learning English vocabulary. In vocabulary knowledge, majority of the students failed to achieve the passing level in the Passive Vocabulary Test and Controlled Active Vocabulary Test and obtained low percentages at the beyond 2000-word level in the lexical frequency profile analysis. The students, therefore, had poor breadth of vocabulary knowledge. *Their depth of vocabulary knowledge was also analyzed.* One noticeable feature was the students did not have much problem spelling out the target words. Secondly, their grammatical knowledge was erratic indicating that they knew some word classes better than others. Finally, the students had only partial meaning knowledge and in fact was

nowhere near full productive mastery. In correlational analyses, eleven vocabulary learning strategies had significant correlations with the passive vocabulary knowledge where association had the greatest positive influence, followed by activation strategies, self-initiation, linguistic cues, selective attention, contextual encoding, background knowledge, and word structure. Meaning-oriented had the greatest negative influence, followed by visual repetition, and word list. The correlational analyses also showed that there were ten vocabulary learning strategies which had significant positive correlations with the controlled active vocabulary knowledge where oral repetition had the greatest influence, followed by association, self-initiation, backward knowledge, selective attention, word structure, linguistic cues, activation strategies, and contextual encoding. In terms of vocabulary development, the students' breadth of vocabulary knowledge did develop although slow. As for the depth of vocabulary knowledge, one noticeable feature was that no obvious changes occurred to the students. The students did not seem to have much problem spelling out the target words. Their grammatical knowledge was weak. The condition was similarly expressed in their meaning knowledge.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

It seems almost impossible to overstate the power of words. Our ability to function in today's complex social and economic worlds is mightily affected by our language skills and word knowledge. Perhaps, therefore, the greatest tool English teachers can give their students for succeeding, not only in their education but more generally in life, is a large, rich vocabulary and the skills for using those words.

The nature of lexical knowledge, the question of what it actually means for a language learner to “know” a word, lies at the very heart of second language (L2) vocabulary acquisition. Many researchers agree on the following levels of word knowledge: (1) unknown (“I have never heard that word before”), (2) knowledge that the word exists (“I have heard that word before”), (3) partial knowledge (“I have a vague or general understanding of the word”), and (4) complete knowledge (“I am comfortable enough with the word's meaning that I can use the word in my own speaking and writing in many different ways”) (Stahl, 1999). This continuum highlights the difference between receptive (“words I can understand when I see them in print”) and productive (“words I use in my own speech and writing”) vocabulary.

Receptive knowledge of a word is what one needs to know in order to understand a word while reading or listening (receptive channels). Productive knowledge, on the other hand, is traditionally defined as what one needs to know about a word in order to use it while speaking or writing (productive channels). The terms receptive and productive apply to a variety of kinds of

language knowledge and use. When they are applied to vocabulary, these terms cover all the aspects of what is involved in knowing a word. Generally, knowing a word involves form, meaning, and use.

Since vocabulary is so vital in our lives, the issue of vocabulary acquisition is important to English teachers who have to make various decisions about ways of enriching English language learners' vocabulary. Some teachers always think that vocabulary learning is easy but language learners always have a serious problem remembering the large amounts of vocabulary necessary to achieve fluency. "Vocabulary is by far the most sizeable and unmanageable component in the learning of any language, whether a foreign or one's mother tongue" because of "tens of thousands of different meanings," according to Hague (1987, p. 219).

It is well known that second language (L2) learners use certain vocabulary learning strategies to acquire this vocabulary. 'Vocabulary learning strategies' refers to a wide spectrum of strategies used as part of an on-going process of vocabulary learning (Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995). According to Schmitt (2000), there are five major groups of vocabulary learning strategies: determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies.

From the initial handling of a new word such as guessing, postponing, or abandoning, to finding out the meanings, usages, and examples of the word and taking down notes about it, to committing the word to memory, all the way to putting the word to use, L2 learners differ in almost every step they take in learning vocabulary. Individual learner differences are a crucial aspect in vocabulary learning strategies, as good learners in particular vary enormously in their choice of strategies and tend to use a wide variety of strategies in

combination (Gu & Johnson, 1996). Which particular strategies used depend heavily on the learner type and individual differences in learning style (Heimbach, 1993). Although each strategy contributes to success or failure, consistent employment of certain types of strategies forms an approach to vocabulary learning that may influence considerably the outcomes of L2 vocabulary learning (Sanaoui, 1995).

Despite the fact that vocabulary is central to language and extremely important for L2 learners, lexis has always been forgotten in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. This shows a sharp contrast to the fact that lexical errors are the most common among L2 learners, as evidence from large error corpora (Meara, 1984). Moreover, not only do vocabulary errors seem to be the most serious ones for students but the most disruptive ones for native speakers in terms of interpretation (Politzer, 1978). As Gass (1988) observes, grammatical errors still result in understandable structures, whereas vocabulary errors may interfere with communication.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the above discussion, it is no secret that acquiring vocabulary knowledge is a significant process in the acquisition of L2. Vocabulary knowledge enables language use, language use enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of the world enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge and language use and so on (Nation, 1993). However, some problems exist in the present situation.

In a previous text, Beck et al. (1987 p.106) draw the research-based conclusion: "All the available evidence indicates that there is little emphasis on

the acquisition of vocabulary in school curricula.” Many language course instructors especially those who work with adult literary learners are unaware of the importance of developing vocabulary knowledge. The Basic English Language (BEL) courses for diploma students in Universiti Teknologi Mara for Semester 1, 2, and 3 diploma students for instance, do not give emphasis on vocabulary development. None of the course syllabi state vocabulary learning strategies as a compulsory skill to be mastered. Due to this, vocabulary strategy is not taught and vocabulary knowledge is simply not assessed and monitored the way other important components such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Rosinski, 2004).

While English teachers may have good assessment information about learners’ other skills, they rarely have reliable information about vocabulary knowledge. Hence, L2 learners’ vocabulary knowledge deficiencies may go unnoticed. As a result, for many students, poor vocabulary knowledge may hinder their progress in other areas. For instance, vocabulary knowledge contributes significantly to achievement in the subjects of the school curriculum, as well as in formal and informal speaking, writing, listening, and reading. This is due to the fact that there is a common sense relationship between vocabulary and comprehension where messages are composed of ideas, and ideas are expressed in words (Lieberman & Lieberman, 1990).

Next, L2 students can acquire a great deal of vocabulary knowledge as they pick up the meanings of words from context as they read widely in appropriately challenging texts. Context allows the students to see how the meanings of words relate to the words around them. They also have the chance to understand how the meanings of words shift and change as they are used in

different contexts. However, the benefits of context are primarily long-term, a matter of gradually accumulating partial information about words as they are encountered repeatedly. Thus the chance of learning the meaning of any particular word from one encounter with that word in context is rather slim (Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987). In this regard, all students can benefit from vocabulary instruction, especially if that instruction is tailored to individual strengths and needs.

Such word knowledge research may lead to a better understanding of the movement of vocabulary from receptive to productive mastery. This movement actually is still a mystery. Researchers are not even sure whether receptive and productive knowledge forms a continuum as Melka (1997) argued or whether it is subject to a threshold effect, as Meara (1996) has suggested. Thus, research into the underlying receptive/productive word knowledge states should prove informative about learners' overall ability to use words in a receptive versus productive manner.

With such issues existing, it is apparent that a problem has presented itself to those concerned with vocabulary learning strategies and vocabulary knowledge. It is this concern that has driven the researcher to draw on the idea of designing this study to examine the vocabulary learning strategies used by diploma students in Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Perlis to acquire English vocabulary knowledge and to clarify the complex relationships of different types of vocabulary learning strategies and vocabulary knowledge.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify vocabulary learning strategies used by Semester 1, 2, and 3 diploma students in Universiti Teknologi Mara Perlis to acquire English language vocabulary. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) to identify the respondents' levels of English language vocabulary knowledge
- 2) to identify vocabulary learning strategies used by the respondents to acquire English language vocabulary
- 3) to identify the efficiency of the respondents' vocabulary learning strategies in acquiring new English language vocabulary

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research questions are formulated to gather the necessary information. The research questions are arranged based on the sequence of the above research objectives. The research questions are:

- 1) The respondents' levels of the English language vocabulary knowledge
 - a) What are the respondents' levels of the passive vocabulary knowledge?
 - b) Is there any difference in the levels of passive vocabulary knowledge between respondents in Semester 1, 2, and 3?
 - c) What are the respondents' levels of the controlled active vocabulary knowledge?
 - d) Is there any difference in the levels of controlled active vocabulary knowledge between respondents in Semester 1, 2, and 3?

- e) What are the respondents' levels of the free active vocabulary knowledge?
- f) Is there any difference in the levels of the free active vocabulary knowledge between respondents in Semester 1, 2, and 3?
- g) What are the respondents' levels on the knowledge of spelling, grammatical information and meaning?

2) The respondents' vocabulary learning strategies

- a) Among a spectrum of vocabulary learning strategies, which strategies are prominent?
- b) Is there any difference in the choice of vocabulary learning strategies between respondents in Semester 1, 2, and 3?
- c) What vocabulary learning strategies do the respondents use when encountering new English words in their reading?
- d) How frequently are those different vocabulary learning strategies used?

3) The efficiency of the respondents' vocabulary learning strategies

- a) What is the correlation between the respondents' vocabulary learning strategies and their passive vocabulary knowledge?
- b) What is the correlation between the respondents' vocabulary learning strategies and their controlled active vocabulary knowledge?
- c) What is the correlation between the respondents' vocabulary learning strategies and their free active vocabulary knowledge?
- d) What is the correlation between the respondents' passive vocabulary knowledge and their controlled active vocabulary knowledge?

- e) What is the correlation between the respondents' passive vocabulary knowledge and their free active vocabulary knowledge?
- f) What is the correlation between the respondents' controlled active vocabulary knowledge and their free active vocabulary knowledge?
- g) What developments occur in the three types of vocabulary knowledge after three semesters?
- h) What are the relationships between the vocabulary learning strategies used and the knowledge of spelling, grammatical information, and meaning?

1.5 Rationale of the Study

The rationale behind the study could be viewed from two angles namely the vocabulary learning strategy and English vocabulary point of views. Knowing the students' vocabulary learning strategies could guide the English teachers in planning and selecting suitable teaching techniques to enhance the learning process. The students should be encouraged to go beyond their 'comfort zone' by being provided opportunities to experience alternative learning styles to challenge and stimulate them (Oxford & Ehrman, 1983). Hopefully, after being introduced to varieties of vocabulary learning strategies, the students will be more active in acquiring new knowledge and indirectly develop learning independence, an essential pre-requisite in today's world.

Another advantage of knowing the students vocabulary learning strategies is having the idea on how to mould them to be 'good language learners'. One way to help L2 students becoming 'good language learners' is that English teachers can assist them to develop their metacognitive strategies

by allowing them to identify their own vocabulary learning strategies. Metacognitive strategies provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process. Thus, being metacognitively sensitive can be interpreted as being sensitive to our own learning strategies. Being sensitive to our own learning strategies can affect the effectiveness of our learning and retention. Students who are fully aware and know how to capitalize on their individual learning strategies and compensate for weaknesses with appropriate study approaches will be equipped with both the self-knowledge and the tools to learn within a wider range of educational contexts (Brown, 1994).

Besides vocabulary learning strategy perspective, the rationale could also be seen from the English vocabulary perspective. Generally, vocabulary is directly related to knowledge acquisition. Words both express and allow speakers to extend their understanding of the world around them. In addition, words afford access to completely new worlds. Whatever a student's achievement level in a particular area of study, be it minimal, moderate, or advanced, vocabulary superiority will promote further learning (Brett, Rothlein, & Hurley, 1996).

Specifically, the significance of knowing the students' vocabulary knowledge could be seen from the relationships between vocabulary knowledge and language skills namely reading, writing, and speaking. In L2 research, several studies (Laufer, 1996) have investigated the relationship between vocabulary size and academic reading comprehension. Laufer (1997) found good correlations between the vocabulary size tests and reading comprehension tests she used. The threshold hypothesis in reading comprehension (Laufer, 1997) postulates that, in terms of vocabulary size, there

is a threshold level below which the reader will be handicapped by a lack of comprehension and above which the reader will be able to apply his or her reading strategies to help comprehension and achieve better results. Laufer (1996) claims that a threshold of 95% lexical coverage of a text is needed for minimum comprehension. This 95% lexical coverage translates into around 3,000 word families, or about 5,000 individual word forms (Laufer,1997).

There are also some studies that show the students' vocabulary knowledge has great influences on their writing quality. For instance, Santos (1988) found that lexical errors were rated as the most serious in EFL students' writing by university professors. Laufer's (1994) study shows that university students generally show progress in this area by an increase in the amount of academic vocabulary in their academic writing. In addition, Leki and Carson (1994) found that second language learners see lack of vocabulary as the major factor affecting the quality of their writing. Comparison between native speakers' and second language learners' writing show not surprisingly that native speakers use a much wider range of vocabulary (Harley & King, 1989). Clearly, vocabulary plays a significant role in the assessment of the quality of written work.

In speaking, Pawley and Syder (1983) suggest that as far as vocabulary knowledge is concerned, learners need to have memorized large numbers of clauses and phrases which they can then easily retrieve and use. This allows them to speak in a fluent way sounding like native speakers because the words in the memorized chunks fit together well. There are several ways of looking at whether learners have enough vocabulary to carry out speaking tasks. The

Vocabulary Levels Test is a useful starting point. If learners' receptive vocabulary is very small, their productive vocabulary is likely to be smaller.

1.6 Significance of the Study

First of all, this study should shed light to L2 learners, educationists, English teachers and other interested parties into knowing the roles of vocabulary learning strategies in the process of learning English vocabulary. The English teachers especially should have some knowledge about their students' vocabulary learning strategies. Being aware of their students' various vocabulary learning strategies is crucial due to the fact that different students have different preferred strategies. Therefore, the best way here is the teachers can familiarize themselves with the potentials, interests, and aspirations of their students so that with proper pacing and a series of carefully structured activities, everybody can experience a measure of success. As the teachers become more knowledgeable about the personal characteristics of the students that may produce or inhibit the adoption of various learning processes, they will move more quickly towards the situation of helping students to become good English language vocabulary learners (Ely, 1989).

Second, this study should determine where the students are in their vocabulary development. The quickest and most direct way to determine where the students are in their vocabulary development is to directly test their vocabulary knowledge. Test like the Vocabulary Levels Test (Meara & Jones, 1987) can quickly indicate whether the students have sufficient control of the essential high-frequency words or not.

Third, findings might give ideas to English teachers to decide which words to teach. Nation and Hwang (1995) suggests that the most frequent 2,000 words are essential for any real language use, and so are worth the effort required to teach and learn them explicitly. The latest General Service List (GSL) (West, 2000) is a good source for these key words. Most of these extremely frequent words are polysemous, and the GSL has the advantage of giving information about the frequency of each meaning sense.

Finally, this study hopes to highlight the significant role of vocabulary knowledge in writing. In teaching of writing, many English teachers focus on the grammatical well-formedness of a composition. However, it seems that lexis may be the element requiring more attention. Research has shown that lexical errors tend to impede comprehension more than grammatical errors, and native speaking judges tend to rate lexical errors as more serious than grammatical errors (Ellis, 1994).

In summary, a better understanding of the relationships between vocabulary learning strategies and vocabulary knowledge can importantly help both pedagogy and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. It may help better understand the nature of lexical knowledge which in turn may have implications on vocabulary teaching.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Gathering data on vocabulary learning strategies using the vocabulary learning questionnaire is a form of exploratory study. Correlational results, therefore, suggest only strong or weak, positive or negative links between the

independent and dependent variables. Furthermore, as with any similar studies, one can argue how much self-reports reflect reality.

One question arises when looking at the Vocabulary Levels Test results is whether the individual scores for the four levels form an implicational scale. For example, if a student scores well at the 5000-word level, can we assume that that person has obtained good scores at the 2000- and 3000-word levels as well? We would expect this to be the case if vocabulary knowledge is cumulative across the frequency levels in the way that the test design assumes.

In this study, besides the vocabulary learning questionnaire, the self-completed diary is used as a means of qualitative data collection for vocabulary learning strategies. However, there are a number of limitations with this technique. Diaries are especially prone to errors arising from respondent conditioning, incomplete recording of information and under-reporting, inadequate recall, insufficient cooperation and sample selection bias. To be specific, it is routinely found that the first day and first week of diary keeping shows higher entries than the following days. The effects are generally termed "first day effects". They may be due to respondents changing their behaviour as a result of keeping the diary (conditioning), or becoming less conscientious than when they started the diary. Recall errors may also extend to 'tomorrow' diaries. Respondents often write down their entries at the end of a day and only a small minority is diligent diary keepers who carry their diary with them at all times. Furthermore, all methods that involve self-completion of information demand that the respondent has a reasonable standard of literacy. Thus the diary sample and the data may be biased towards the population of competent diary keepers.

The intensive and detailed one-to-one interview employed in this study, to collect data on vocabulary knowledge qualitatively, should have produced a valid measurement of the various word knowledge types as is now possible. However, there are some possible weaknesses in the procedure. First, even with repeated probing, it is sometimes difficult to determine the students' knowledge of the subtle differentiation between similar meaning senses without actually giving away those differences (e.g., abandon = "leave" or "desert and not return" vs. "leave because of danger"). Second, the researcher is the only rater; this inevitably involves a certain amount of subjectivity in scoring. Third, this study has given some indications of the manner in which the three types of word knowledge are acquired concurrently and the effects of the vocabulary learning strategies on their acquisition. It is not designed to isolate all the factors affecting this acquisition.

1.8 Terms of Reference

Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Vocabulary learning strategies are strategies that the students use to find the meanings of unknown English words encountered. In this study, vocabulary learning strategies contain 91 learning behaviors divided into two major parts namely Metacognitive Regulation and Cognitive Strategies. Metacognitive Regulation has several strategies namely Selective Attention, Guessing Strategies, Dictionary Strategies, and Note-taking Strategies. Cognitive Strategies, on the other hand, are also divided into several strategies namely Rehearsal, Encoding and Activation Strategies.

Vocabulary Knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge refers to the receptive and productive aspects of a word. It comprises knowledge in terms of: (a) form, including spoken form, written form, and word parts; (b) meaning, including form and meaning, concept and reference, and associations; and (c) use, including grammatical functions, collocations, and constraints on use, such as register and frequency.

Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge

It is the basic vocabulary knowledge- understanding the most frequent and core meaning of a word such as 'solution' as in 'solution of a problem' rather than 'chemical solution'. Receptive knowledge is what one needs to know in order to understand a word while reading or listening (receptive channels).

Productive Vocabulary Knowledge

Productive knowledge of a word is defined as what one needs to know about a word in order to use it while speaking or writing (productive channels). There are two types of productive vocabulary knowledge namely controlled and free. Controlled productive vocabulary knowledge entails producing words when prompted by a task. An example is having to complete the word 'fragrant' in 'The garden was full of fra_____ flowers. Free productive vocabulary knowledge, on the other hand, has to do with the use of words at one's free will, without any specific prompts for particular words, as is the case of free composition. The distinction between controlled and free active vocabulary is necessary as not all learners who use infrequent vocabulary when forced to do so will also use it when left to their own selection of words.

Breadth of Vocabulary Knowledge

It refers to the number of words a learner knows. There is an approximate number of words that one is supposed to know at a certain level of learning English as a second language. University students know roughly about 17,000 to more than 200,000 words.

Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge

It relates to how well one knows a word. Knowing a word may involve four aspects: form of the word such as spelling and pronunciation, grammatical properties such as grammatical category of the word and its possible and impossible structure, lexical properties for instance word combinations and appropriateness, and meaning for example general meaning and specific meaning.

Second Language (L2) Acquisition

The process of learning another language after the basics of the first have been acquired. It includes learning a new language in a foreign language context such as learning English in Malaysia as well as learning a new language in a host language environment for instance learning English in the US or UK. In this research, there is a difference between the words 'learning' and 'acquisition'. 'Language learning' refers to conscious language development whereas 'language acquisition' refers to subconscious language development.

Second Language Students

They refer to students who are in the process of learning another language after the basics of the first language have been acquired.

The Cross-Sectional Method

This approach studies subjects of different age levels at the same point in time such as analyzing the vocabulary knowledge of Semester 1, 2, and 3 students from the July-October 2007 Academic Session. It would compare the statistics derived from the sample concurrently and draw conclusions about the growth of subjects with respect to the analyzed skill.

High-Frequency Words

They are words that cover a very large proportion of the running words in spoken and written texts and occur in all kinds of uses of the language. Usually the 2,000-word level has been set as the most suitable limit for high-frequency words. The classic list of high-frequency words is Michael West's (2000) *General Service List* (GSL) which contains 2,000 word families. About 165 word families in this list are function words such as *a*, *some*, *because*, and *to*. The rest are content words, that is nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. It is important to remember that the 2000 high-frequency words of English consists of some words that have very high frequencies and some words that are only slightly more frequent than others not in the list. The first 1,000 words cover about 77% and the second 1,000 about 5% of the running words in academic texts.

Academic Words

The Academic Word List (Coxhead, 1998) is a very specialised vocabulary for second language learners intending to do academic study in English. It consists of 570 word families that are not in the most frequent 2,000 words of English but which occur reasonably frequently over a very wide range of academic texts. The list of 570 word families is based on 3,500,000 token corpus of academic English which is divided into four groupings- Arts, Science, Law, and Commerce- with each grouping consisting of seven sub-groupings such as psychology, mathematics, history etc. The list is not restricted to a specific discipline which means that the words are useful for learners studying humanities, law, science or commerce. Academic vocabulary has sometimes been called sub-technical vocabulary because it does not contain technical words but rather formal vocabulary.

Low-frequency Words

These words occur very infrequently and cover only a small proportion of any text. Some of them are words of moderate frequency that did not manage to get into the high-frequency list. It is important to remember that the boundary between high-frequency and low-frequency vocabulary is an arbitrary one. Any of several thousand low-frequency words could be candidates for inclusion within the high-frequency list simply because their position on a rank frequency list which takes account of range is dependent on the nature of the corpus the list is based on. A different corpus would lead to a different ranking particularly among words on the boundary. Nevertheless, some low-frequency words are simply low-frequency words. That is, they are words that almost every language

user rarely uses. They may represent a rarely expressed idea; they may be similar in meaning to a much more frequent words or phrases; they may be marked as being old-fashioned, very formal, belonging to a particular dialect, or vulgar, or they may be foreign words.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter provides a platform to further explore the students' English vocabulary. Specifically, the students' levels of English vocabulary, their vocabulary learning strategies, and their mastery of the vocabulary would be analyzed and 19 research questions were formulated to guide the analysis. Moreover, the importance of vocabulary learning strategies in acquiring English vocabulary and the relationships between learners' vocabulary knowledge and several language skills provide evidence to rationalize the study; the contributions of the research to the present knowledge show its significance. However, the study also has certain limitations. The next chapter would discuss in detail the variables of the study namely the vocabulary learning strategies and English vocabulary.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In the last 25 years, the field of second language acquisition has seen the reemergence of interest in one area of language study, vocabulary (Meara, 1987), and the appearance of a newly recognized aspect, learner strategies. Appreciation of the importance of both these areas has led to considerable research in each, yet the place where they intersect, vocabulary learning strategies, has attracted a noticeable lack of attention. Learners not only need to know about the strategies, but need to have skill in using them because choosing and using correct vocabulary learning strategies can increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and vocabulary use (Schmitt, 1997).

In this chapter a general discussion on word corpora was first introduced. Vocabulary size and growth were then elaborated followed by the different types of vocabulary learning strategies. Next, vocabulary knowledge was discussed. The discussion on vocabulary knowledge revolved around the breadth, depth, and its incremental acquisition.

2.2 Local Research on Vocabulary

Not much research on vocabulary has been conducted in Malaysia. Nevertheless, there are some local studies which produce some interesting findings. Low (2004, cited in Zakaria, 2005: 2) for example says that ESL learners in Malaysia face challenges in coping with the four language skills mainly because they lack vocabulary. Various studies conducted at secondary schools as well as at institutions of higher learning show that lexical paralysis is

a major contributor to learners' incapacity to cope with the language skills of listening, speaking, writing, and reading (Naginder & Kabilan, 2007; Zakaria, 2005; Syed Aziz Baftim, 2005; Lourdunathan & Menon, 2005); Ramachandran & Abdul Rahim, 2004; Pillai, 2004; Abdullah, 2004; Malek, 2000). Furthermore, Hassan and Fauzee (2002) find that vocabulary exercises rank fourth, out of the nine language activities investigated on the frequency of use in an ESL lesson. Likewise, in the students' preference list, vocabulary learning is one of the lowest ranked language activities (Teh, 2004).

2.3 Corpus of Words

Corpora or *corpuses* (singular: *corpus*) are simply large collections or databases of language, incorporating stretches of discourse ranging from a few words to entire books (Schmitt, 2000).

Some of the earliest corpora began appearing in the first third of the 1900s. Two good examples of corpora at this point of development are the Brown University Corpus (Kucera & Francis, 1967) focusing on American English, and its counterpart in Europe, the Lancaster-Oslo/ Bergen Corpus (LOB) (Johansson & Hofland, 1989) focusing on British English. Decades before these two efforts, Thorndike and Lorge (1944) combined several existing corpora to build an eighteen million-word corpus, which was colossal at the time.

It was when texts could be quickly scanned into computers that technology finally revolutionized this field. Now there are 'third-generation' (Moon, 1997) corpora that can contain hundreds of millions of words. Three important examples are the COBUILD Bank of English Corpus, the Cambridge

International Corpus (CIC), and the British National Corpus (BNC). The Bank of English Corpus has more than 300 million words, and the CIC and BNC each have more than 100 million. These corpora are approaching the size at which their sheer number of words allows them to be reasonably accurate representations of the English language in general. This is partly because their larger size means that more infrequent words are included.

Numerical size is not everything in corpus design, however, there is also the important question of *what* goes into the corpus. To be truly representative of such global language, a corpus must be balanced to include all of the different genres of a language such as sermons, lectures, newspaper reports, novels etc. in proportions similar to that of their real-world occurrence. At the moment, this idealistic goal is unattainable, because no one knows exactly what those percentages are. The best that can be done is to incorporate large amounts of language from a wide range of genres, on the assumption that this diversity will eventually lead to a sample of language representative of the whole.

There are other issues in balancing a corpus as well. With a worldwide language such as English, one must consider what proportions, if any, to include of the various international varieties of English such as North American, British, Australian, Indian etc. But a more important issue is that of written versus spoken discourse. It is technically much easier to work with written text and this has led to most corpora having a distinct bias toward written discourse. This has inevitably led to smaller percentages of spontaneous spoken data compared to written (e.g. approximately 11% for the BNC, 6% for the Bank of English Corpus).

By carefully considering the issues above, corpus linguists have succeeded in developing modern corpora that are arguably reasonably representative. Still, it must be remembered that no corpus is perfect, and that each will contain quirks that are not typical of language as it is generally used in the world. Thus, one must maintain a critical eye and a certain healthy skepticism when using this and other language tools.

2.3.1 Application of Corpora

Once a corpus has been compiled, it needs to be analyzed to be of any value. Two major kinds of information could be extracted from a corpus are how frequently various words occur and which words tend to co-occur, and how the structure of language is organized.

2.3.1(a) Frequency

Probably the most basic thing that can be learned from studying the language contained in a corpus is how frequently any particular words occur. Word counts have provided some very useful insights into the way the vocabulary of English works. One of the most important is that the most frequent words cover an inordinate percentage of word occurrences in language. For instance, considering that estimates of the total size of the English language vary from 54,000 word families (Nation & Waring, 1997) to millions of words (Bryson, 1990), it is found that a relative handful of words do the bulk of the work, while the others occur rather infrequently. Although this data is for English, other languages would yield similar figures. Because these very frequent words are so widely used, it is essential that they be learned if

one is to be able to use language. However because the most frequent content words are also the most likely to be polysemous, students must learn more than 2,000 meaning senses if they are going to have control over this important vocabulary. In addition, these words make up the majority of tokens in any discourse, so if they are not known, language users will be unable to make accurate guesses about the meanings of the remaining less frequent words, many of which are likely to be unknown.

A second insight is that the most frequent words in English tend to be *grammatical words*, also known as *function words* or *functors* (words that hold little or no meaning, and primarily contribute to the grammatical structure of language). This stems from the commonsense fact that such grammatical words are necessary to the structure of English regardless of the topic. Articles, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, forms of the verb *be*, and so on, are equally necessary whether someone is talking about cowboys, botany, or music. In contrast to grammatical words, however, content words (ones that do carry meanings) are affected by the type of corpus.

The third insight is that spoken and written discourse differ considerably. The first difference is that spoken language makes frequent use of interpersonal phrases, single-word organizational markers, smooth-overs, hedges, and other kinds of discourse items that are characteristic of the spoken mode (McCarthy & Carter, 1997) which rarely occur in written language. A second difference is that the same word may take different meanings in the two modes.

A third difference is that comparing typical written text and typical spoken conversations, the spoken discourse usually uses a smaller variety of individual words. An analysis of the *Oral Vocabulary of the Australian Worker* (OVAW)