

## **Vocabulary Acquisition through Frequency Exposure via Reading**

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### **Introduction**

Since the 1990s the study of L2 vocabulary has received wide attention in L2 acquisition theory and research (Hu, 2013). The most important part in the process of language learning is vocabulary which makes the highest trouble for foreign language learners. Some teachers paid attention on vocabulary learning through suitable context, many of teachers stick to repetition and vocabulary lists. Incidental vocabulary learning occurs when learner efforts to get the meaning. (Vosoughi & Mehdipour, 2013). As Waring (1997), Nation (2001), and Pigada and Schmit (2006), mentioned when learners are exposed to large amounts of material within their linguistic competence, this pleasurable process called extensive reading. Learning vocabulary through extensive reading facilitates learner autonomy, provides learners with the chance to encounter with the TWs in their context of use, and increases sight vocabulary, in a pleasant and motivating way.

Therefore, this paper provide a brief literature review of vocabulary acquisition while reading English passages.

### **Vocabulary**

In recent years, researchers and commentators seriously emphasized the importance of vocabulary acquisition, they believe that vocabulary acquisition plays an essential role in the process of second language acquisition (Alemi & Tayebi, 2011). As Bintz (2011) mentioned today vocabulary could be considered as a hot topic.

According to Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 255) "vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write. Without on extensive vocabulary and strategies for acquiring new vocabulary, learners often achieve less than their potential and may be discouraged from making use of language learning opportunities around them such as listening to the radio, listening to native speakers, using the language in different contexts, reading, or watching television."

Vocabulary can be classified as words we understand when others use them (receptive) or words we use ourselves (productive) (Graves, August & Mancilla-Martinez, 2012). The ability to comprehend a word when it is heard or seen is refers to as receptive vocabulary knowledge while productive knowledge of vocabulary is the knowledge to produce a word when one writes or speaks. Vocabulary knowledge should be viewed as a continuum on which a word grows from receptive to productive status because it is believed that words are known receptively first and only after intentional or incidental learning they become available for productive use (Zhou, 2010). Vocabulary can also be classified as whether oral or written. Thus, we have four vocabularies which are overlap but are not the same, and the relationships among them change over time: words we understand when we hear them -receptive/oral-, words we can read -receptive/written-, words we use in our speech -productive/oral-, and words we use in our writing -productive/written- (Graves, August & Mancilla-Martinez, 2012)

Vosoughi and Mehdipour (2013) define vocabulary in two ways: the first is according to the orthographic definition, in which a word is defined as any sequence of letters (and a limited number of other characteristics such as hyphen and apostrophe) bounded on either side by a space or punctuation mark. Its flaw is not only its limitation to the written language, but the fact that it is formalistic, inconsistent and incomplete because it neglects differences in meaning and the issues of polysemy, homonymy, grammar functions, etc. The second definition is based on semantics, in which a word is defined as the smallest meaningful unit of language. There are several components in the field of knowledge of a TW which is characterized by several dimensions of word knowledge such as phonological and orthographic, morphological, syntactic and semantic and by knowledge of conceptual foundations that determine the position of the lexical item in our conceptual system. Finally, it inevitably includes the ability of productive use, such as efficient retrieval of the lexical item for active use.

Richards & Renandya (2002, pp. 258-264) mentioned three approaches of vocabulary learning as incidental learning, explicit instruction, and independent strategy development. They called these three approaches as the systematic framework for vocabulary development which provide seven teaching principals as follows: in incidental learning the teacher need to provide learners with the opportunities for extensive reading and listening. Explicit instruction also involves identifying the words learners need to know, giving these words for the first time, explaining word knowledge, and developing fluency with the known word. Independent strategy development involves practicing guessing the meaning of unknown words from context (once learners choose a word as a worth guessing word, they might follow a five-step procedure as follows: determine the part of speech of the unknown word, look at the immediate context and simplify it if necessary, look at the wider context. This entails examining the clause with the unknown word and its relationship to the surrounding clauses and sentences, guess the meaning of the unknown word, and check that the guess is correct.), and finally training learners how to use dictionaries.

Incidental learning is defined as the process of learning one thing while planning to learn another thing. Incidental learning is said to be an effective way of learning vocabulary from context in the field of language acquisition. Incidental vocabulary acquisition researches has confirmed exposure to texts have positive effects to L2, and also L1 vocabulary growth (Shahzad & Derakhshan, 2011). In the process of free reading when the learners picking up new words with no aim of doing, this is the time when learners acquire new words from context without having the intention of doing this process is called incidental learning of vocabulary. But when a learner studies a list of target words or completes activities in a workbook while working to learn a set of new target words. In this time they are planning to acquire new words this process is refer to as intentional vocabulary learning (Barcroft 2009, p. 85).

Schmitt (2000) also mentioned two main approaches to vocabulary acquisition as implicit learning and explicit learning. You (2011) focused on implicit learning and explicit learning as two differing sides about L2 vocabulary learning. The implicit vocabulary learning theory includes learners subconscious vocabulary acquisition during reading which has positive results in learners' vocabulary acquisition than explicit learning through purposeful vocabulary exercises because in an implicit vocabulary learning the learner's conscious focus is on the story, not on the items to learn. Ellis (2008) defines implicit knowledge as conscious, declarative, anomalous, and inconsistent and generally accessible through control processing in planned language use. Implicit knowledge similar to any kind of factual knowledge is potentially learnable at any age.

### **Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition through Reading**

Researchers concur with two major processes in the field of second vocabulary acquisition: these process called incidental and intentional (explicit) vocabulary acquisition (Heidari-Shahreza, Moinzadeh & Barati, 2014). The terms incidental and intentional learning in the literature goes back to the beginning of the 20th century and has been used in experimental psychology (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001). Intentional vocabulary acquisition occur through direct instruction of vocabulary and incidental vocabulary acquisition occur through exposure to context. Intentional vocabulary learning focus on the activities that aim at vocabulary development predominantly. But in the process of incidental vocabulary learning, TW is learned predominantly through extensive reading, with the student guessing the meaning of unknown TWs in which the major focus is not on vocabulary development (Shahrzad, & Derakhshan, 2011). As Kweon and Kim (2008) mentioned that the process of incidentally vocabulary teaching in which learners are engaged in extensive reading or reading for meaning and in inferring the meanings of unknown words is the most effective way in the field of second language vocabulary learning. Javanbakht and Yasuj (2011) also mentioned that for learners in all language proficiency levels the extensive reading is one of the major bases of incidental vocabulary learning. It is believed by many scholars that the main context of vocabulary development particularly in intermediate and advanced levels of both the L1 and L2 language acquisition is learning new vocabulary while reading passages (Khatib, & Nourzadeh, 2012). As Richards & Renandya (2002, p. 258) mentioned the process of incidental vocabulary learning requires that the teachers provide learners with the chance of extensive reading and listening. They also mentioned extensive reading as the major source of incidental TWs learning (p. 256). The result of many studies on acquiring vocabulary incidentally and incrementally through reading focus on vocabulary gains from frequent exposures to TWs showed that repeated exposure to the target words' surface phonological and orthographical features in both spoken and written input helps learners to identify and produce them subsequently (Joe, 2010).

In the field of language acquisition, incidental learning, is the process of learning something without the intention of doing so. Which is also learning one thing while intending to learn another thing, is one of the most important ways in the process of learning vocabulary from context (Brown, Waring and Donkaewbua, 2008). Incidental vocabulary learning involves learners' ability to guess the meaning of new words from the contextual clues encourages learners for extensive reading. Incidental vocabulary acquisition is the learning of vocabulary as the by-product of any activity not explicitly geared to vocabulary learning (Khansir, Mousavi Basri & Hajivandi, 2013). It is generally agreed by different scholars at knowledge of L2 vocabulary needs knowing different denotations and connotations of a word, together with orthographic, syntactic and pragmatic functions of that word in written and spoken situations both at the level of recognition and production (Khatib, & Nourzadeh, 2012). According to Kweon and Kim (2008) written text is the best way of vocabulary acquisition. Of course, learning word meanings through explicit instruction by focusing to form and meaning mappings is a positive way in vocabulary acquisition. There are some advantages in learning vocabulary through incidental vocabulary learning than direct instruction; first, reading and word learning occur at the same time. Second, a richer sense of a word is learned through contextualized input. Also incidental vocabulary learning not only acquires word meanings but also increases learners' chances to get a feel for collocations and colligations that are not easily learned by learners of English as a foreign language; therefore, learning can be facilitated by repeated exposure to words that go together.

#### **Amount of Word Exposure Needed for Effective L2 Vocabulary Acquisition**

Second language researchers agree that as language learners have repeated exposure to an unknown TW they have more chance to acquire it, but researchers have different opinions

from each other about the numbers of encounters to an unknown word a learner need to acquire it. Some of them believe that 6 times of encounters to an unknown word would be enough for a learner to acquire it, while some other researchers believe 8 encounters to an unknown word would be enough for a learner to acquire it (Horst, Cobb & Meara, 1998). Frequency has two separate implications in the literature: “one is what refers to the most frequent word in the target language. It is believed that the most frequently used words must be taught first. The second implication refers to “how often something is repeated by students”. In other words, it means to learn a word a learner has to use it several times” (Nowzan & Baryaji, 2013). It has been constantly highlighted that repeated exposure to a TW is needed for vocabulary learning process, previous studies in both L1 and L2 research have not shown agreement concerning how much exposure to TW is needed for effective vocabulary achievement (Huang & Liou, 2007). The results of different studies in the literature have shown that the incidental TWs acquisition strongly affected through extensive reading. But more exposure to TWs do not necessarily result in more learning. In the field of second language vocabulary acquisition we should focus on two important questions; whether the relationship between frequency and word learning is a monotonic one which means the more frequent a word is, the more possibility for the learner to learn it and learner have greater opportunity to learn, or whether there is a threshold effect operating which means a word has to be faced a specific number of times for being learnt by the learner. Knowing a word mean being able to give meaning so the minimum necessary repetition suggested around 7 exposure (Ellis, 1999).

#### **Topic/ content Familiarity on Incidental L2 Vocabulary Acquisition**

According to (Gorjian, Parviz & Aalipour, 2013) the lack of prior awareness about content familiarity seems to affect to the low-ability students but not the high-ability students. One possibility is that background knowledge helps readers at a certain proficiency level but not those at other levels. The other possibility is related to language ability effects; that is, the lack of prior knowledge seems not to hinder the high-ability students’ performance on the unfamiliar passages as their proficiency level compensates for this lack of familiarity and they perform better. Therefore, the knowledge of language including vocabulary and reading skills may help the high-ability students to overcome the unfamiliarity of topic and content. The language knowledge frees the learners’ cognitive resources to make effective use of the skills and strategies of their comprehension procedures. Swanborn and de Glopper (1999) suggested that age, reading skill, and a number of text, word characteristics, topic knowledge and familiarity with the concepts as different factors which playing essential roles in incidental vocabulary acquisition.

Unfamiliarity with the content of texts is a factor which make the process of inferring the meanings of TWs and retaining them in mind more cognitively difficult. Reading comprehension which is connected to familiarity with the content plays a facilitative role in the incidental acquisition of vocabulary. The learners will achieve a relatively lower level of incidental TWs learning by increasing the complexity of reading passages by making them less comprehensible (Mahdavy, 2011).

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