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DAFTAR ISI

Editorial

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The Roles of Songs in Improving Student' Pronunciation

Tanti Malike

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VOCABULARY STRATEGIES

Gunawan Suryoputro*

Introduction

It goes without saying that vocabulary will determine the success or the failure of students in learning both spoken and written English. For informal conversation, for example, the students have to acquire more or less three thousand productive words or phrases. For comprehension of a text, they have to learn at least a receptive vocabulary of ten thousands words. Even it is estimated that the best English L1 and L2 college and university students should have a receptive vocabulary of between 100,000 words to 200,000 words in order to be able to read academic texts (see Celce-Murcia and Olstain, 2000: 76).

The question is how to acquire that amount of both productive and receptive vocabulary and what strategies should be used to acquire them. Although the students may not realize them, they may already use a certain strategy when they speak or read. For example, in some reading they use their dictionary whenever they find new and unknown words in the text. In other cases, they can guess and tell a word's meaning from context. In short, every student may approach these unfamiliar words in many different ways. This article will introduce the notion of learning strategies and discusses some strategies for understanding vocabulary.

What is a Vocabulary Strategy?

Before presenting the notion of vocabulary strategies, it is necessary to know what language learning strategies mean. The term of language learning strategies has been associated with the four basic skills such as, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It also deals with other skill areas as well. For example, there are strategies associated with vocabulary and translation. But what are actually language learning strategies?

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Language learning strategies have been defined by some scholars. Cohen and Dornyei (2002:178) define language learning strategies as “the conscious and semi-conscious thoughts and behaviors used by learners with explicit goal of improving their knowledge and understanding of a target language. More specifically, Oxford (2002: 124) defines language learning strategies as “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internationalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language.” The notion implies that learners are aware of what strategies used to achieve their goals though some learners’ strategies may or may not effective. Why does this happen? To respond it, Oxford (ibid: 126) shows the difference between less skilled learners and skilled learners. The less skilled learners usually apply the strategies in a random though they are aware of their strategies. The skilled learners apply the strategies systematically and know why they employ them. For this reason it is necessary to train the language learning strategies to students in order to be skillful language learners.

In the light of the above notion, vocabulary strategies can’t refer to conscious, intentional, and purposeful steps or techniques in understanding new words in foreign language. These strategies can facilitate students to develop and acquire new FL vocabulary. The process of using strategies can include new word memorization, recalling new words, and making use of new vocabulary (see Cohen and Dornyei, 2002: 183).

Memorizing new words does not mean only recognize the meaning of unknown words but also have to analyze words to identify the structure and meaning of a part or several parts of them. For example, students have to recognize suffixes “or” and “er” which have the meaning of the “doer,” when they are combined with the root (verb) as *director*, *provocateur*, *driver* and *writer*.

Next, recalling new words that students find in the text is another process of vocabulary strategies. This makes students make any effort to remember the situation where the words was seen in writing, if written, and try to remember the page or sign.

The third process is making use of new vocabulary. Students use words just learned in order to see if they work. They also use new words in different combinations to make new sentences. All these efforts seem to force students have to retain new vocabulary in their memory for a long period of time.

All these strategies seem to have been introduced and reinforced to students. They might or not have positive effects to some students' vocabulary development. The ineffectiveness of these strategies may due to the fact that every student has different strategies in learning vocabulary. Thus, he or she has to be introduced and taught other vocabulary strategies in order to make him or her develop his or her new vocabulary.

Some Vocabulary Strategies

Every student may have different strategies when they find unfamiliar words while listening and reading. He or she approaches the new words in many different ways. For example, in conversations, they ask for clarification the meaning of unknown words from his or her interlocutors. In some readings, they can guess the meaning of unknown words from contexts. In this section, students will learn some strategies for understanding unknown words when they are reading economics texts. These strategies include using context clues such as, definitions, restatements, synonyms, contrasts, examples, and other contexts.

Using Definition

Very often if writers think a word may be difficult, they will help readers by defining the word in the text. To recognize this, readers have to be familiar with the verb "to be" (e.g. is, are) which is often used to identify the meaning of the subject as:

- (1) Transport or transportation *is* the moving of goods from where they are plentiful to where they are scarce.

The verb "is" acts as a signal to help a reader to guess the meaning of *transport*, which means *the moving of goods*. Besides "to

be”, the verbs such as, *mean* and *define*, are also used to identify the meaning of the subject as:

- (2) Value pricing can *mean* many things to marketers. To some, it *means* price cutting. To others, it *means* special deals such as, providing more products at the same time. And still to others, it *means* a new image— one that convinces consumers they’re receiving a good deal.
- (3) Production, in contemporary economic theory, is formally *defined* as the process of creating economic goods, including material goods and personal services. To businessmen, production means growing something.

In (2), the meaning of *value pricing* can be *price cutting, special deals* and *new image*, and in (3) *production* means *the process of creating economic goods*. These meanings can be identified after recognizing the verb *mean* and *define* in each sentence of each paragraph.

Using Restatements

Sometimes authors restate the meaning of the word in the text when they think a word may be difficult. They restate the meaning of the word by using adjective clauses which are usually introduced by the words *that, who, which, whose*:

- (4) An emporium, *that is a large shop*, sells a lot of different things.
- (5) Increments, *which are regular automatic increases in salary*, are very much expected by every dedicated worker.

The meaning of *emporium* and *increment* can be identified by looking at the clauses *that are a large shop* and *which are regular automatic increases in salary*. In other words, by recognizing the clause,

we know that *emporium* and *increment* mean a large shop and regular automatic increases in salary respectively.

In other contexts, authors also restate the meaning of a word by using appositives, which are nouns or noun groups which follow nouns and are set off by commas.

- (6) Underwriters, *firms assisting other firms to raise capital through the issuance of stocks and bonds*, make a profit on the difference between the price at which they buy the securities and the price at which they sell them.

The meaning of *underwriter* in (6) can be guessed by recognizing the appositive used in this text: *firms assisting other firms to raise capital through the issuance of stocks and bonds*.

Using Synonyms

It is also common in readings that authors do not want to repeat the same word. To avoid this word repetition, they often use synonyms to show the meaning of the word that may be difficult for readers. Here is an example of the synonyms in the text.

- (7) There is a close relationship between *workers* and their *companies* in Japan. *Employees* work hard and overtime without extra payment in order to make their *firms* efficient.

In (7), instead of repeating the same words, the words *employees* and *firms* are used to mean *workers* and *companies* respectively. Of course, sometimes it is not too easy to recognize the synonyms in the text since the authors often put them scattered over the text as:

- (8) McDonald's continue to pursue opportunities to *serve* new customers around the globe. It recently opened its largest restaurant in Beijing, China. The 28,000 square foot restaurant has 29 cash registers and seats 700 people. Through this huge Beijing outlet, McDonald's expects to

treat more than ten thousand costumers each day to its special brand of customer care.

To find out the synonym of *serve* in (8), readers have to look at the words around it which is scattered over the text. After looking for several times, they can guess that the word *serve* mean *treat* (in sentence 4). Even it will more difficult when the synonyms scattered in the text which contains several paragraphs. But it does not mean that it is impossible for students to use this strategy. The important point to remember is that very often authors use the synonyms to avoid word repetitions in the text. For instance, the words *largest*, *restaurant* and *consumers* in (8) have the closest meaning to *huge*, *outlet* and *customers* respectively.

Using Contrasts

Sometimes the meaning of words can be guessed because they are in contrast to another word or phrase in the sentence. To understand how unknown words may be contrasted to others, we should recognize and look for words such as, *but*, *however*, *instead*, *on the other hand*, and *on the contrary*.

- (9) Our marketing managers report that in the past the goods were *sellinglike crazy*, but now they are *hard to sell*.
- (10) Production at the Technido cooperation is completely *automated*. However, production at the Mechanindo cooperation is *done by hand*.

In (9) and (10) the words act as a signal and help us to figure out the meaning the words *selling like crazy* and *automated* are *but* and *however*. By recognizing these signal words, we can figure out that *selling like crazy* has the opposite meaning to *hard to sell*. And the opposite meaning of *hard to sell* is *easy to sell*. Thus we can guess that the meaning of *selling like crazy* is *easy to sell*. With the similar strategy, we can figure out that the word *automated* mean *not done by hand*. And the phrase *not done by hand* in this context can mean *done by machine*.

Therefore, we can guess that the meaning of the word *automated* is *done by machine*.

Using Examples

Sometimes authors use an example to indicate the meaning of a word in the text. Examples may be shown by words such as, *for example, such as, like, for instance*. The following short texts show how these words work:

- (11) *Financial intermediaries, like commercial banks, mutual saving banks, pension funds, and life insurance firms, transform financial claims in ways that make them more attractive to investors.*
- (12) *An entrepreneur advertises products or services of the firm through advertising media, such as radio, TV, and newspaper.*

The words that act as signals and help us to figure out the meaning of the phrases *financial intermediaries* and *advertising media* are *like* and *such as*. These words signalize that the phrase *financial intermediaries* means *commercial banks, mutual saving banks, pension funds or life insurance firms* and the phrase *advertising media* means *radio, TV, or newspaper*.

Using Contexts

Very often readers cannot find some context clues such as, definition, restatements, synonyms, examples, and contrast in the text. This will make very difficult for novice learners who still have a limited amount of vocabulary. Because in order to guess the meaning of unknown words in the context, they should have been familiar with more than 80 % of words. For example, if there are one hundred words in the text they do not know the meaning of words not more than fifteen. However, the beginner students can be trained and taught to guess unknown from the context. Let us illustrate how to guess words in the following text.

- (13) General Motors- and all the major car makers- is driving into Asia. The world's largest industrial company has found the environmental challenges considerable despite the lure of substantial market potential made possible by the growing middle class. In addition to distribution challenges and *aggressive* competition from other manufacturers, both local and foreign, the most frightening ones are *barriers* to free trade. For example, in Indonesia, GM faces competition from foreign car makers.

In order to figure out the meaning of *aggressive* and *barriers*, some steps can do as follows:

- (1) Look at the words around the unknown word. This can help us figure out its meaning. For example, the words around *aggressive* are *challenges*, *competition* and so on.
- (2) Associate or relate the unknown word with other words which are around it. For example, the word *aggressive* is related with *competition* and *barriers* with *to free trade*.
- (3) Based on the relation, find out familiar words that may have the closest meaning to the unknown words. For example, some possible words which have the closest meaning to *aggressive* are *argumentative*, *destructive*, *energetic*, *provocative*, *forceful*. And some possible meanings to *barriers* are *hindrance*, *difficulties*, *obstacles*, and *rules*.
- (4) Choose one of the words and pause if the word we know does not make sense. For example, We can figure out whether the words *argumentative*, *energetic*, or *forceful* can make sense if one of them goes together with *competition*. We can also figure out whether the words *hindrance*, *difficulties*, or *rules* make sense if one of them can co-occurs with *to free trade*. On the basis of this analysis, the word *forceful* and *rules* have the closet meaning to *aggressive* and *barriers* respectively. Thus, it seems to be natural in meaning in the above text to have the phrases *forceful competition* and *rules to free trade*.

It is necessary to note here, however, that students, especially novice ones, are advised to double-check their guesses by using the dictionary because of their low level of English proficiency.

Final Remarks

Developing vocabulary of English as a foreign language in Indonesia is very crucial for students, especially novice ones. To facilitate them, some strategies have been advocated and suggested by teachers or practitioners. But two things that have to be also taken into account are students' own strategies and exposure.

First, each student has his or her own strategies in solving their problems in understanding unknown words. Every student may apply one or more strategies that he think they are effective. However, they have to be trained to be sensitive to context clues such as, definition, synonyms, examples, contrasts, and so on.

The second point to be considered is the exposure. This means to what extend each student has opportunitites to expose him- or herself. Each student has to be given many exercise or practices in order to develop his or her vocabulary. In the reading, for example, he or she should be given not only intensive reading but also extensive reading.

At last, but not least, every effort to help students acquire vocabulary should consider many factors. They can include the teaching methods and techniques, the quality of the teachers, and the exposure given to the students.

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