

The Effect of Selective Attention on L2 Vocabulary Learning in Pre-Listening Phase

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Abstract

This study investigated whether more selective attention with focus on presentation of highlighted and underlined new words through a reading text in pre-listening phase can improve vocabulary learning and retention of these words. The results of the study revealed that high level of selective attention to new words through a reading text in pre-listening phase was more useful than only presenting of a simple list of the new words. The findings have implications for students, teachers and curriculum developers who are to develop a curriculum compatible with the needs of language learners.

Keywords: meta-cognitive strategies, selective attention, vocabulary learning

INTRODUCTION

The issue of ease and difficulty in vocabulary learning is important to language teachers who have to make various decisions about ways of increasing and improving their language learners' vocabulary. Vocabulary has a great significance to language learners. Language learners always have a serious problem to remember vocabulary which they need. To overcome this problem, foreign language learners have to use vocabulary learning strategies. There is a wide spectrum of learning strategies.

One of the most important strategies is selective attention which is included in the category of meta-cognitive strategies. Gu and Johnson (1996) list second language vocabulary learning strategies as meta-cognitive, cognitive, memory and activation strategies. In Nation's (2001) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies, noticing is one of the strategies of "process category".

Meta-Cognitive Strategies

Meta-cognitive is a term used in information-processing theory to indicate an "executive function", strategies that involve planning for learning, thinking about the learning

process as it is taking place, monitoring of one's production or comprehension, and evaluating learning after an activity is complete (Purpura, 1997).

Selective Attention Strategy

Selective attention means that deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of language input or situational detail that will cue the retention of language input (O'mally et al., 1985). In this paper, selective attention means drawing learners' attention to target words in reading and listening texts and ensuring that they notice them, for example, by underlining, bold-facing the new words in reading and recurring them in listening ,it is a kind of "fully contextualizing" category of vocabulary teaching (Oxford & Crookall, 1990).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Most of the earlier studies concerning on effect of all meta-cognitive strategies in vocabulary learning rather than only effect of selective attention strategy. Mokhtar et al (2011) examined the relationship between meta-cognitive regulation and the acquisition of passive vocabulary knowledge. He found that two entities of meta-cognitive regulations namely selective attention and self-initiation expand one's vocabulary knowledge.

Ghazal reported a framework with different taxonomies of vocabulary learning strategies for training EFL learners in vocabulary learning strategies. In general he found that a fixed frame work for strategy training does not seem to be useful and teachers should think of ways to provide vocabulary learning and learners can overcome challenges of learning new vocabulary by having access to a variety of vocabulary learning strategies.

Shen (2003) examined the vocabulary teaching and learning strategies by considering contextual and de-contextual perspectives of getting access to and retaining vocabulary. He concluded that both de-contextual and contextual methods are necessary on different dimensions of vocabulary knowledge.

Since importance of application selective attention strategy to learn vocabulary more effectively learning and the paramount importance of pre-listening phase included a reading text the study is supposed to investigate the effect of selective attention on L2 vocabulary in the pre-listening phase. Vocabulary learning requires more than simply memorizing vocabularies in simple lists represented to foreign language learners and another important factor in vocabulary learning is the rate of the new words in learners.

This study can be useful in EFL & ELT based on the significance attributed to vocabulary learning strategies in the process of vocabulary learning and enhancement, the present paper strives to investigate the effect of one of the most learning strategies in vocabulary learning. If learners are equipped with these strategies, they can deal with new words on their own and access to a large number of target language words.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

As mentioned earlier, this study aims to investigate the effect of selective attention in vocabulary learning. Questions which need to be answered by the present study:

1. What is the correlation between use of the selective attention strategies and vocabulary learning?
2. Does the variable of students' proficiency level play a role on vocabulary learning?
3. Does the pre-listening phase with a kind of selective attention strategy for the new words play a role in better vocabulary learning?

In the light of the problem of the present study and the research questions that have been raised, it is hypothesized that:

H1. There is no systematic relationship between selective attention and vocabulary learning?

H2. There is no systematic relationship between proficiency level and using selective attention in vocabulary learning.

H3. There is no systematic relationship between pre-listening with a reading text included the new words and vocabulary learning.

METHOD

Participants

The samples were my intact classes and their age ranged from 14-20. They were all from the same region and they had the same socio-cultural factors. The sample randomly assigned to experimental and control group. The experimental group received two hours per week of reading texts in which the new words are underlined, bold-faced and they had to listen to two reports or listening texts related to the reading texts with the same new words in order to listen through attention but control group had only a list of the new vocabularies of the listening text without any selective attention strategies applied for experimental group and without reading text.

Instruments

The instruments used were two intensive reading and listening texts on the topic of Oxford University and UK's favorite foods.

Procedure

At the beginning of research sessions, participants of the experimental group trained underlined and bold-faced vocabularies in the reading texts as their pre-listening phase with some questions about the new words, after reading these texts, learners listened to a text on the same topics to that of in the reading text but involve a few new words as well as the same new words in listening texts but participants of control group had a

simple list of new words without underlined or bolded words in a reading text but they had the same listening text of the experimental group.

In order to control variable of the proficiency level of participants, I took an OPT and I became sure that students did not know the meaning of the words by taking a pre-test, of course, its reliability measured by Cronbach's alpha. At the end of the treatment a post test was taken from both groups and compared the groups' Performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section deals with data analysis, presentation of results and discussion and interpretation of these results. It strives to answer the research questions and tests whether the hypotheses of the study will be retained or rejected.

All data were analyzed by using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 21). The normal distribution of the two groups' scores on variables was tested in terms of skewness and kurtosis and this assumption is met (table 1). The statistical tests adopted in this study are the T-test independent sample used to show the difference in means between two independent groups. It is worth mentioning the significance level for these statistical measures was set at the conventional (0.05 and 0.01) levels.

Table 1. Frequencies

	Selective attention	Vocabulary learning
N	40	40
Skewness	-.424	-.377
Std. Error of skewness	.374	.374
Kurtosis	-1.919	-.364
Std. Error of kurtosis	.733	.733

Table 2. Independent Samples T-test

F	sig	t	Sig (2-tail)	Mean Difference
.786	.381	-2.680	.011	-1.83

As can be noticed in Table 2 there is no statistically significant difference in the variances of two groups and there is a statistically significant difference was between two groups of control and experimental where T-value=-2.680. The difference was in favor of experimental group's estimates of effect of selective attention and all null hypotheses of the study are rejected.

The study aimed to shed light on more use of selective attention in the pre-listening phase on vocabulary learning. The findings revealed that selective attention (in a

reading text) in pre-listening phase can play an important role in better vocabulary learning.

This can be attributed to recur more and more of these vocabularies in highlighted & underlined form and contextualization of the new words in both reading and listening texts rather than only in a simple list of new words. The activities in pre-listening phase function as a framework for listening so that learners do not approach the listening practice with no points of reference and one of these activities can be a short reading passage on a similar topic that can serve both functions of framework-setting and language-practice quite well (Macdonough & Shaw, 2005).

CONCLUSION

The study strives to find if there is any difference between giving more selective attention to new words in a reading text and presenting only a simple list of new words in a pre-listening phase and it is obvious that the results of the present study concerning the use of more selective attention in pre-listening phase. As such, it is highly recommended that before listening to a text included some new words be used and introduced in a reading text rather than in a simple list.

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