



ISSN: 0976-3376

Available Online at <http://www.journalajst.com>

ASIAN JOURNAL OF
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Asian Journal of Science and Technology
Vol. 11, Issue, 04, pp.10920-10923, April, 2020

RESEARCH ARTICLE

ENGLISH VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE: LEARNING STRATEGIES AND LEVEL OF COMPETENCY IN IDENTIFYING BRITISH AND AMERICAN TERM EQUIVALENTS

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 17th January, 2020
Received in revised form
20th February, 2020
Accepted 19th March, 2020
Published online 30th April, 2020

Key words:

Vocabulary knowledge, Learning strategies, Level of competency, British and American English.

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to find out the vocabulary knowledge with regard to the learning strategies and level of competency in Identifying British and American term equivalents among Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (ABELS) students at the Visayas State University (VSU). The first set of respondents composed of forty-two (42) participants answered a survey questionnaire about how often they apply the indicated vocabulary learning strategies. The research followed a descriptive method using a research instrument adopted from Medhi and Brick's study (2010). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results showed that 52% of the vocabulary learning strategies were "often" applied by the respondents. This was followed by 32% "sometimes", 11% "always", 2% "rarely", and for the least, 1% "never". The study concluded that vocabulary learning is vital to all language learners as they continue to learn more about the form and meaning of the words in the English language. It is, therefore, necessary to develop effective teaching and learning strategies for the learners to know more about the current usage, word structure, and evolution of word meanings. The second set of data was gathered from forty (40) ABELS students at VSU. The respondents answered a Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) test from Wesche and Paribackht (1996) for the pre-test followed by a post-test in which they were to identify British and American term equivalents. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. To determine the relationship between the two variables, Wilcoxon test statistic method was used. Findings revealed that from 73% during pre-test results, there were 3% fair-scaled respondents in post-test. Using the Wilcoxon test of means, 18% of the respondents remained to be in good scale. Test results showed an increase of very good scale from 0% during pre-test to 68% in post-test which entailed that there is a positive relationship between the respondents' vocabulary knowledge and their level of competency in identifying British and American term equivalents. This means that having a high vocabulary knowledge can be helpful and can highly contribute to the level of one's competency in identifying British and American term equivalents. While as a whole, the students have a positive attitude toward the use of their vocabulary knowledge, there is still a need to develop further develop their vocabulary learning strategies to improve their level of vocabulary competency.

Citation: Annie A. Parmis, Angela N. Castillo and Sarah Mae D. Pacanan, 2020. "English vocabulary knowledge: learning strategies and level of competency in identifying British and American term equivalents", *Asian Journal of Science and Technology*, 11, (04), 10920-10923.

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning is an essential part in foreign language learning as the meanings of new words are very often emphasized, whether in books or in classrooms (Berne and Blachowlez, 2008). It is also central to language teaching and is of paramount importance to a language learner. The more vocabulary a student learns, the more successful he or she is to learn the language. The aim of learning vocabulary is not to memorize the word but to use the word in different contexts where it is needed. Vocabulary learning and vocabulary learning strategies are two of the most fundamental elements in the language learning process. English is divided into several into several varieties spoken in different parts of the world such as Australian English, South African English, Indian English, Filipino English, and so on.

All of these English varieties are intrinsically just as worthy of study and use as British and American English (Algeo, 2010). British and American English have significantly different vocabulary and usage (Maxwell, 2010). In their language repertoire, there are different words for the same concept, or the same word has different meanings. More than a thousand words have different meanings or usages in British and American English. British English is the ancestor of all other forms of English while American English is becoming as one more dialect of the world Englishes and it has exercised greater influence on world English than any other variety. This research was focused on the different vocabulary learning strategies of the respondents. It is aimed to find out the level of the respondents' vocabulary status in terms of their vocabulary learning strategies. Moreover, this study also tackled on the respondents' vocabulary knowledge in relation to their level of

competency in identifying British and American English term equivalents and how it would provide sufficient ground for improving their language use.

Objectives of the Study

This research was developed to investigate the English vocabulary knowledge of the First Year ABELS students at VSU with regard to their vocabulary learning strategies and level of competency in identifying British and American English term equivalents. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Assess the respondents' vocabulary learning strategies;
2. Survey the respondents' vocabulary knowledge;
3. Determine the respondents' level of competency in identifying British and American English term equivalents; and
4. Determine the relationship between the respondents' vocabulary knowledge and their level of competency in identifying British and American English term equivalents.

Theoretical Background

Qian's (2002) framework, developed on the collective strength of earlier models of vocabulary knowledge, claimed that vocabulary contains four intrinsically connected dimensions: (a) vocabulary size; (b) depth of vocabulary knowledge; (c) lexical organization; and (d) receptive-productive use. Quing's study (2014) on a contextualized study of EFL learners' vocabulary learning approaches emphasized that students have different vocabulary learning strategies that they also acquired in their daily activities especially when they are exposed in reading and writing. Moreover, Miller and Gildea's (1987) study revealed that knowing a word by sound and sight and knowing its definition in dictionary are not the same as knowing its usage correctly and understanding it when it is heard or seen in various contexts. When a learner intends to learn a foreign language, he or she has to learn the vocabulary of the target foreign language first.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the first set of respondents composed of forty-two (42) First Year ABELS students, the researchers used a survey questionnaire on vocabulary learning strategies adopted from Medhi and Brick's study (2010). For the second set of respondents composed of forty (40) First Year ABELS students, they were asked to answer a Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) test from Wesche and Paribackht (1996) for the pre-test followed by identifying British and American English term equivalents for the post-test. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. To determine relationships among variables, the Wilcoxon test statistic method was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On vocabulary learning strategies, results showed 52% of the vocabulary learning strategies were "often" applied by the respondents. To articulate, the respondents would often meet new words in textbooks, in classroom learning activities, in vocabulary lists arranged in alphabetical order, in vocabulary lists arranged by meaning, during English conversations with

others, and when using or surfing the Internet. Often, they would learn English vocabulary during the semester in the classroom and in the library. Respondents also indicated that when meeting a new vocabulary item, they would often try to guess the meaning from the context and when they read "English-only" dictionary. They would often regard pronunciation, affixes, root-words, example sentences, and word's relationship with other words as aspects to study when learning a vocabulary item. When memorizing vocabulary, they would often say the word aloud and look at the word several times, do vocabulary exercises, link the word to its similar meaning words and its opposite meaning words as well as link the word with words they already know and have similar pieces, compare words that are similar in meaning and study them together, and make up a phrase or a sentence containing the word. In reviewing vocabulary, they would often say the new words two or three times the first day and would test new words on their own. Also indicated in the findings, 32% among the vocabulary learning strategies were "sometimes" applied by the respondents.

During the semester, they would sometimes learn English vocabulary in their dormitories. When meeting a new vocabulary item, they would sometimes ask a classmate or teacher for the meaning and study the word's affixes and root-words for the meaning. When putting in order the information in learning new vocabulary item, they would sometimes write down the information on a piece of paper, put in order the information in a vocabulary notebook, make vocabulary cards, and use the vocabulary lists in the textbook. When memorizing vocabulary, respondents would sometimes group the words in order, place the word in a context, make up rhymes to link words together, practice words by acting them out, try to imagine what the words look like among other words, try to imagine what the words look like in their head/mind, and remember the affixes and root-words of new words. Only 11% among the vocabulary learning strategies were "always" applied by the respondents. They would always meet new words when reading English materials and when singing English songs or watching English movies /TV shows. Also, they would always consider spelling, English explanations, and the way the word is used as aspects to study when learning a vocabulary item. Furthermore, only 2% among the vocabulary learning strategies were "rarely" applied by the respondents. Results showed that when meeting a new vocabulary item, they would rarely listen to a tape recording /CD of the words and draw pictures to illustrate the meaning of new words. When reviewing vocabulary, they would rarely read the new words the first day, but later after than that. The remaining 1% indicated that the respondents answered "never" to the item indicator "When meeting a new vocabulary item, I pay no attention to it and never go back to it".

In other words, when meeting a new vocabulary item, they would pay attention to it and go back to it for review. To sum up, results showed that respondents have a good view and practice of their vocabulary learning strategies and that they consciously or subconsciously adopt different vocabulary learning strategies. On the other hand, the respondents had undergone pre-test and post-test to determine the vocabulary knowledge in relation to their level of competency in identifying British and American term equivalents. From 83% during pre-test results, there were 3% fair-scaled respondents in post-test. Using the Wilcoxon test of means, 18% of the

respondents remained to be in good scale. Test results showed an increase of very good scale from 0% during pre-test to 68% in post-test which entailed that there is a positive relationship between the respondents' vocabulary knowledge and their level of competency in identifying British and American English term equivalents. It can also be noticed that the average score had increased from 1.18 in pre-test to 2.65 in post-test. This implies that when one has high vocabulary knowledge background, it follows that he or she has also a high level of competency in whatever test of vocabulary knowledge they may encounter.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the prevalence of the result that the respondents vary but somehow showed common vocabulary learning strategies, it can be concluded that vocabulary learning is vital to all language learners as they continue to learn more about the form and meaning of the words in the English language repertoire. It is, therefore, necessary to develop effective teaching and learning strategies for the learners to know more about the current usage, word structure, and evolution of word meanings. In this way, a language learner will be more aware that language is not only dynamic but is also subject to one's interpretation depending upon the context. This study also has come to conclude that the breadth of vocabulary knowledge facilitated the understanding of the meaning of words, while the depth of vocabulary knowledge provided a better predictive power for understanding the in-depth meaning of the words and making it easier for learners to associate the meaning of words with background information which might provide a helpful vocabulary knowledge repertoire.

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