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MNEMONICS AS A VOCABULARY LEARNING AID

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ABSTRACT

Teaching vocabulary to the L2 students is a continuous process and it is through the process of 'read', 'review' and 'revise' that the teachers teach their students to acquire L2 vocabulary. It means that students are first introduced a word, then the word is exposed to them in different contexts and gradually the students start understanding the meaning of the words and then the words are stored in their long term memory. The method of teaching vocabulary through mnemonics helps the students in recalling words which can be any word related to studies, work, or just a subject of interest. The use of mnemonics not only helps the students in learning a word; it also assists them in remembering a word by associating it with some common or known words, phrases or incidences which may aid the learners in vocabulary development in an easier and effective manner.

Keywords: memory, mnemonics, recollection, visualisation, vocabulary

Abbreviations

L2- second language

YL- young learners

Introduction

Vocabulary learning can sometimes be an unrewarding and tedious process if only rote learning method is involved in teaching. Hence, after the introduction of a new word or words, different methods help in storing the newly acquired words in the long term memory of the learners. There are an assortment of techniques of learning and remembering the words and concepts such as the use of pictures, realias (real objects), reading, visualization, activities like role play, group and pair work, riddles, crossword puzzles, repetition of words in different contexts and mnemonic devices.

The current paper discusses methods of vocabulary acquisition through mnemonics and the importance of mnemonics in recollection of words in general.

The Concept of Vocabulary

Harmer defines "vocabulary" by and large a summary of words or their combinations in a particular language. Vocabulary teaching is one of the most important components of any language class. The main reason is the fact that it is a medium, which carries meaning; learning to understand and express the meaning is what counts in learning languages. Vocabulary is not only confined to the meaning of words, but it also includes how vocabulary in a language is structured, how people use and store words and how they learn words and the relationship between words, phrases, categories of words and phrases (Harmer, 1993). Graves

portrays vocabulary as the entire stock of words belonging to a branch of knowledge or known by an individual (Graves 2000).

Ur remarked that one item of vocabulary can consist of more than one word. E.g. 'post-office' consists of two words and still expresses one idea (Ur 2000: 60). Sedita states that vocabulary encompasses all the words we must know to access our background knowledge, express our ideas and communicate effectively, and learn about new concepts (Sedita, 2005). Harmer adds that an ability to manipulate grammatical structure does not have any potential for expressing meaning unless words are used. Harmer argues that at the basic level, knowing a word involves knowing its form and its meaning while at a deeper level, it means the abilities to know its meaning, usage, word formation, and grammar. Speaking would be meaningless and perhaps impossible having only structure without vocabulary (Harmer 1993). Nation, on the other hand, claims that acquiring a word means knowing its form (spoken, written and word parts); meaning (concepts and associations); and use in terms of grammatical functions, collocations and constraints (Nation, 2001). With regard to the effective use of a foreign language, vocabulary is central to language and of great importance to typical language learner (Zimmerman, 1998).

As Oxford (1990) states that language learners have a serious problem remembering the large amounts of vocabulary necessary to achieve fluency. Hence, the role of vocabulary is determinative in language classes in terms of enhancing learners' use of L2 fluently.

What is meant by mnemonics?

The word "mnemonic" is derived from the Ancient Greek word *mnēmonikos*, meaning "of memory, or relating to memory Mnemonic (ni-monic) is a method of learning a new word and remembering it. It helps in the retention of the word the way brain understands it.

Definition

Mnemonics can be defined as a system such as a pattern of letters, ideas, or associations which assists in remembering something. According to another definition, the concept of mnemonics is defined as the study and development of systems for improving and assisting the memory.

The Process of Recollection

According to Martin, the process of memorising information can be split into four distinct stages. These are:

- 1) The registering of information by the five senses – sight, hearing, smell, touch and/or taste.
- 2) The interpretation by the brain of the impulses that are generated by the five senses. This is what is termed understanding.
- 3) The temporary storage of the information in the so called short-term memory.
- 4) Finally, the transfer of the information from the short term, to the long-term memory. This is where a (theoretically) permanent record of the memory is stored. (Martin).

All of the above stages are important and all of them can be used by most people far more efficiently than they generally are. This efficiency may be accomplished with the aid of the many mnemonic techniques

Long and Short Term Memory

Long term memory refers to events, facts or experiences that were laid down weeks, months or even years ago whereas remembering what you ate for breakfast this morning, or the TV show you watched last night constitutes short term memory. It is sometimes called primary or active memory. Short-term memory has a fairly limited capacity and can hold items for only short periods of time while long-term memory can store unlimited amounts of information indefinitely. The more that short-term memory information is used or repeated, the more likely it is to become part of the long-term memory.

Memory Strategies

To be successful in studies or work, learners need to use active learning strategies that help them store information and retrieve it afterwards and mnemonic devices can be used as an aid in it. In order to remember information, one has to first find it somewhere in their memory. Mnemonics are methods of remembering information that one tends to forget and is difficult to recall. The idea behind using mnemonics is to recall information that is easier to remember.

The two most common types of Mnemonic Devices are Acronyms and Acrostics

Acronyms

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, an acronym is a word or name formed as an abbreviation from the initial components in a phrase or a word, usually individual letters (as in NATO or laser) and sometimes syllables (as in Benelux).

The following is an example of a popular mnemonic acronym:

HOMES: Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior (Names of the Great Lakes)

Acrostics

A composition usually in verse in which sets of letters (such as the initial or final letters of the lines) taken in order form, a word or phrase or a regular sequence of letters of the alphabet.

Example:

Planets in order from the sun- My Very Educated Mother Just Sent Us Nine Pizzas

Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto

Creation of Mnemonics

Students or other people who need to learn new words and remember them, whereas teachers to make their teaching effective and fun can create their own mnemonics. It can be done according to their own level and needs or the level and needs of the students. While teaching spellings of the words, students can be given some tips to remember the confusing spellings. For example, our English teacher taught us that in the spelling of 'independence' there is no 'dance' whereas it is there in the spelling of 'attendance'.

A word like 'equipoise' can be remembered by breaking the word into two parts, 'equi' + 'pose' = i.e. if one holds equal weight in both hands he will have a 'better pose' or 'balance'. The word 'parsimonious' can be retained in the long term memory in a humorous way by recalling the first syllable of the word which sounds like the word 'purse' and hence a parsimonious person is the one who does not like to open his/her purse and is 'miserly'.

Teachers and learners can find the mnemonics by referring to various books, websites or even prepare them according to the level and needs of the learners.

Conclusion

Vocabulary functions as a foundation without which any language cannot exist. As vocabulary learning is an important aspect of language acquisition, so is retaining the acquired vocabulary in the long term memory. There are various methods which help in memorising words. One such method discussed in this paper is 'mnemonics'. The use of mnemonics may aid in learning words and phrases in a fun and effective way. Mnemonics can be found ready-made on various websites as well as can be made by the teachers and learners according to the needs of the learners.

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