Idea Sharing

Do Students Learn Better Through a More Entertaining Way? The Case of Taiwan EFL Students

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Abstract

This article aims at sharing with the readers two ways of English vocabulary learning based upon a small-scale study conducted in Taiwan. The participants of this study were one hundred and three university students randomly chosen from universities in Taiwan. They received questionnaires and vocabulary teaching videos through e-mail or Facebook. The distributed questionnaires contained demographic questions and vocabulary pre-tests and post-tests. The videos were composed of two different modalities of vocabulary teaching. In modality one, the vocabulary was presented with an explanation of the roots of the words, similar words, and related words. In modality two, the vocabulary was exhibited with a short play introducing the Chinese assonance of the target word and a short funny story using that

sound. The results indicated that the participants received higher vocabulary post-test scores when watching the modality two videos.

Keywords : video learning, learning methods, vocabulary, learning strategies

Introduction

Vocabulary size can influence foreign language learners' ability to listen, speak, read, and write in the particular target language they are learning. For English language learners in Taiwan, finding an efficient way to learn vocabulary is very beneficial to foreign language learning. To get the speakers' concepts across, correct use of vocabulary is considered to be more important than the speakers' accurate grammar use (Schmitt, 2000). Hence, learning vocabulary effectively is a priority task for second language learning. This article aims at sharing two ways of learning English vocabulary based on a small-scale study conducted in Taiwan.

Literature Review

It might be suggested that incidental vocabulary learning through reading, having a conversation with a native speaker, or watching TV or movies is a good way to enhance second language learners' lexicon. However, second or foreign language learners should know at least 2000-5000 word families to be able to execute this kind of vocabulary acquisition through authentic language materials (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000). Elgort (2013) explored that Russian intermediate EFL learners scored higher on a vocabulary size test with L1 definitions than with a monolingual English vocabulary size test. Elgort also asserted that students scored higher when the vocabulary items tested were cognates. Cango Alonso and Arribas Garcia (2014) searched for the reason why 10th grade Spanish students were unable to understand written and spoken English. By using Nation's Productive Level Vocabulary Test, they found that these 10th graders knew fewer

than 1000 words, which resulted in their difficulty in English communication. Due to the aforementioned research, it would be reasonable to help second or foreign language learners uncover a more efficient method of target language vocabulary learning.

Dansereau (1985) and Rigney (1978) stated that learning strategies are comprised of learners' measures utilized to assist in the process of acquiring knowledge, storing and retrieving information, or in the application of knowledge. Rubin (1981) reported that vocabulary learning strategies can help L2 learners effectively learn words. Oxford (1990) affirmed that vocabulary learning strategies are beneficial in terms of recalling words. Researchers have tried very hard to pinpoint the role of these strategies for aiding language learning (Fan, 2003; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Kojic-Sabo & Lightbown, 1999). Huang, Yang, Chiang and Su (2016) found in their study that students learned vocabulary better when they used mobile devices while being in a context-related situational teaching environment. These young students used the following five stages to learn vocabulary; "encountering," "getting," "comprehending," "consolidating," and "using."

Schmitt (1997) stated that there are two kinds of vocabulary learning strategies: discovery and consolidation. Discovery strategies refer to the determination strategy and the social strategy. Consolidation strategies include social, memory, cognitive/metacognitive, picture/imagery, related/unrelated word, grouping, and the word's orthographical and phonological form strategies. In total, there were 58 different vocabulary-learning strategies.

Kiram, Sulaiman, Swanto and Din (2014) found that Malaysian pre-university students actually applied vocabulary learning strategies and they used more meta-cognitive learning than the others. However, their data showed that the overall learning strategy use and the level proficiency were not correlated.

Ou Yang and Wu (2015) undertook a study investigating four different English learning strategies, MyEVA in preference mode, MyEVA in basic mode, using Internet dictionaries, and using traditional dictionaries. The results indicated that the mixed

modality with the preference mode outperformed the other groups in terms of vocabulary acquisition and retention. In this mode, the students chose the strategy they like to use for learning each target word.

Similar research results were revealed by Tight (2010). One hundred and twenty-eight English native speakers learning Spanish as a second language participated in the research. Their learning styles were assessed, and the findings indicated that the visual modality was the most preferred learning style, followed by the auditory and tactile learning styles. No matter what kind of learning style students used, their vocabulary learning outcomes were similar while the different types of instruction methods did affect the students' vocabulary learning outcome. Mixed-modality instruction engendered the best vocabulary learning outcome. The second best method was instruction in the students' more preferred modality, followed by instruction in the students' less preferred modality. No instruction modality was found to bring about the lowest vocabulary learning scores. Other research also generated analogous results concerning learning style matching (Gull, 1990; Lee, 1992; Tight, 2005; Yeh & Wang, 2003).

In Alshaiji's (2015) study comparing the English vocabulary retention of female kindergarten children, he asserted that there was a positive effect on children's vocabulary learning when using video games.

With all of the research mentioned above, there is still a need to understand the effectiveness of mixed modality on vocabulary learning. In the present study, the strategies embedded in the vocabulary learning film were mainly selected from the consolidation strategies.

Methods and Procedures

The subjects of the study were 250 students in universities of technology randomly selected in Taiwan. These university students had learned English as a foreign language since they were fifth graders. In the elementary schools, they learned English for 2 hours a week and 20 weeks per semester. From grades 7 to

12, they learned English for at least 3 hours a week and 20 weeks per semester. Although these subjects learned English for over 8 years, they were not interested in English and their English proficiency level was lower than CEFR B1. All of them received the questionnaire and the vocabulary teaching video through e-mail or Facebook. 103 students returned the completed questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS.

A pre-test containing 28 English words was administered first in the questionnaire after the students answered the background information questions to make sure how many words they knew. The students matched the English word with its correct meaning listed on the right hand side. Then the vocabulary videos were played on-line. These videos were composed of two different modalities of vocabulary teaching. In modality one, the vocabulary was presented with an explanation of the root of the words, similar words, and related words. In modality two, the vocabulary was displayed with playlets embracing the assonance of the target word and a short funny story using that sound. Fourteen words were presented in modality one, and the other fourteen words in modality two. A Latin square experimental design was implemented to make sure that the difficulty levels of the two sets of vocabulary as well as the English proficiency of the subjects were even. That means that the subjects in group one watched the videos of the first half of the target words in modality one and the second half in modality two; while the subjects in group two watched the videos of the first half of the target words in modality two and the second half in modality one.

A post-test was administered to the students immediately after the 28 videos were shown as with the pre-test in order to ascertain the vocabulary learning outcome of the students.

Results

The demographics of the students are shown in Table 1. 41 (39.8%) male students and 62(60.2%) female students participated in the study. Among them, 59 (57.3%) subjects were English major students, and 44 (42.7%) were not. 57 (55.3%) of the

students learned (including taking courses and self-studying) English less than twice a week; 30(29.1%) students learned English 2-3 times a week; 8(7.8%) students learned English 4-5 times a week; and 8 (7.8%) students learned English 6-7 times a week.

Table 1: The Demographics of the Subjects

	Frequency (N=103)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	41	39.8
Female	62	60.2
Major		
English	59	57.3
Non-English	44	42.7
Frequency of English Learning	57	55.3
Less than twice a week	30	29.1
2-3 times a week	8	7.8
4-5 times a week	8	7.8
6-7 times a week		

The pre-test results of the two vocabulary tests indicated that the subjects did not know any of the tested words before watching the vocabulary instruction videos. The post-test outcomes are displayed in Table 2. The number of the participants was 103.

The mean of the vocabulary test scores using modality one was 6.4078, whereas the mean of the vocabulary test scores using modality two was 8.1165.

Table 2: The Means of Modality One and Two Vocabulary Test Scores

	Mean	n	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Modality one	6.4078	103	4.08113	.40213
Modality two	8.1165	103	3.62535	.35722

Note. The total scores of the two modalities were 14.

Table 3: *t-test* Results for the Means of the Vocabulary Post-tests

	Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation			
mod1 - mod2	-1.70874	2.58817	-6.7	102	0.00

Note. **p<.01

Table 3 reveals the *t-test* results for the means of the vocabulary post-tests, t(102)=-6.7, p=.00 indicating that there was a statistically significant difference between the means of the modality one and two vocabulary test scores. That is, the students scored higher using modality two than they di using modality one to learn English vocabulary. The instruction of modality two combined the audio and visual techniques, and the assonance of the target words and a creative story to teach the target words. This method was apparently better than that of modality one in terms of the correct answer rates on the vocabulary post-tests. The reason might be that the technique of modality two aroused their interest in learning new words. These findings were in harmony with Tight's (2010) research results, which highlighted the fact that mixed modality instruction yielded the best learning results. In this study, the students apparently learned better with the more creative vocabulary instruction method. Because of their limited English proficiency, their vocabulary retention rates were not high in these two modalities. However, the retention rate in modality two was higher than that in modality one.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to collate the effects of two different methods of English vocabulary learning. One hundred and three university students randomly selected from Taiwan participated in the study. All of them received the questionnaire and the vocabulary teaching video through e-mail or Facebook. These videos were composed of two different modalities of vocabulary teaching. In modality one, the vocabulary was presented with an explanation of the root of the words, similar words, and related words. In modality two, the vocabulary was displayed with playlets embracing the assonance of the target word and a short funny story using that sound. The students received higher vocabulary post-test scores through watching the modality two videos. These findings suggest that foreign language teachers in Taiwan teach English in a more entertaining way. Combining the assonance of the target words with interesting stories played by students not only fire the students' enthusiasm for learning but also produces desired learning outcomes.

The limitation of the study was that the student participants were from a vocational educational system in Taiwan with low English proficiency. The retention rate of the learning effects with the two different modalities might have been higher if the students had been selected from "normal" universities. For future research, it is recommended that researchers select students from other kinds of universities. Based on the results of this study, EFL teachers can adopt the mixing of visual, audio, assonance, and contextual clue instruction in their classrooms to improve students' English vocabulary learning.

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Appendix A

Modality one – an example of teaching video using roots of the words and related words

Appendix B

Modality two – an example video uses L1 assonant and a funny story to teach target word "connoisseur."