

The Role of the Mother Tongue in Learning English as a Foreign Language Vocabulary by 10th Grade Students at Al Safi Secondary School for Boys

Ali Al Bwat

Dept. of English Language and Literature, Mu'tah University, P.O. Box: 7
Mu'tah, Al Karak, Jordan

Abstract

The goal of this paper is to investigate the role of the mother tongue in learning English as a foreign language vocabulary by 10th Grade students at Al Safi Secondary School for Boys. The sample of the study consists of 30 students. The researcher used random sampling process to select the sample of the study. The age of the students ranges between 14 to 16 years old. They were homogenous in terms of their age, gender, educational system and mother tongue (Arabic Language). This experimental study used English language texts. The researcher implemented One Reading Comprehension Test and One Vocabulary Test to elicit data from the informants. The research used descriptive analysis to process the collected data. The findings of the research showed that students (Group1) who received the mother tongue translation of new vocabulary revealed more appropriate performance on the vocabulary test compared to other students (Group 2). This study recommends that much research be conducted in the area to enhance EFL students vocabulary learning.

Keywords: Mother Tongue, Learning, Vocabulary, Secondary, 10th Grade.

1. Introduction

Scholars in the field of English language propose that in any language vocabulary source is the single biggest component. Vocabulary are used in every aspect in the language. That is a language system can never be completed without vocabulary and logical message to be conveyed is abide to failure. Even in second language, one can not ignore the significance of vocabulary; it is known to both learners and instructors of English language that how important vocabulary is (Cohen et al: 1980). Without words to convey a wide range of communication, interaction is not applicable in any meaningful manner, no matter how effectively a learner uses other areas of language. Vocabulary was considered to be marginal and structure received primary attention (Krashen, 1981a). However, after 1910 vocabulary received a primary concern. Lately, the concern has become is how to teach vocabulary and not whether it is significant or not. Scholars and researchers suggested many different methods to teach vocabulary. This includes dictionaries, translation, context use, word list and other relevant ways. Much research in this areas advocate the use of context for learning vocabulary to be more specific by using the guessing technique in one hand. On the other hand, a lot of past research studies were against the use of context as a way of looking up words' meaning. Mondrina and Wit-Deboer (199: 262) in their study to examine the influence of contextual factors on the guessing and retention of words' meaning found out that contextual factors appeared not to be conducive to words' retention and conducive to words' guessing. Similarly, Jenkins et al. (1984: 769) stated that vocabulary learning from the context requires a lot of explanation.

2. Literature Review

In the area of language teaching and linguistics, scholars and specialist in the area are very much concerned with the investigation of different areas of language but it is unfortunate to state that role of vocabulary in language learning is not given much attention. As a result, the present research is concerned to investigate the role of the mother tongue in learning English as a foreign language vocabulary for 10th Grade students at secondary school stage / Southern Aghwar Directorate of Education in southern Jordan. Many research studies have been conducted to investigate English as a foreign language vocabulary learning.

Sanaoui (1995) conducted a research to investigate the relationship between vocabulary strategies use and success in acquiring and retaining vocabulary items. The findings of the research showed that second language adult learners' vocabulary were probably to be classified into two categories. Also, the results showed that students who used a structured learning approach were very effective in retaining the vocabulary items taught in their classrooms than learners who employed an unstructured approach. Also, Macaro (2003) carried out a study to investigate teaching and learning a second language. The findings of the research indicate that vocabulary learning plays an important role in learning and teaching second language. MacWhinney (2005) demonstrates that the second language is parasitic on the first language with regard to vocabulary learning. This is due to the large amount of interference from the first language to the second language. At the early stages of learning the second language system whether at the phonological, semantic or grammatical level, the language learners do not establish a detached structure but depend on the first language forms to access second language vocabulary

meanings. Similarly, Lomicka (1998) stated that students' strong reliance on the first language definitions when vocabulary meanings were unfamiliar. Also, Laufer (1989) and Nation (2001) noted that language learners whose vocabulary deposit helped them comprehend the meanings of 95% of the vocabulary meaning in the reading text were effective in establishing an appropriate level of understanding. Assuming that learners are able to use contextual presumption strategies for vocabulary learning, Laufer (1997) and Nation (1993) proposed that a 5,000 vocabulary of general English is not enough for concluding this 95% criterion in general texts. In this connection, the present research aims at investigating the role of the mother tongue in learning EFL vocabulary by 10th Grade students at Al Safi Secondary School for Boys at Southern Aghwar Directorate of Education in Jordan.

3. Statement of the Problem

English is taught as a foreign language at all stages of education (Al Khotaba et al, 2010). School students are required to learn English at school stage to prepare them for securing better future career. They are encouraged to master all the language skills but they still face difficulties in learning EFL vocabulary. Their teachers state that one of the problems that we face when teaching EFL students at secondary school stage particularly 10th Grade students, is vocabulary. This may be related to various factors. As a result, this research intends to investigate the role of the mother tongue in learning EFL vocabulary by 10th Grade students at Al Safi Secondary School for Boys at Southern Aghwar Directorate of Education in Jordan.

4. Research Objectives

This research aims at achieving the following objectives:

- i. To investigate whether there are significant differences in comprehension through using mother definitions within a reading context.
- ii. To examine whether there are significant differences in understanding meanings of new vocabulary in EFL when affording mother tongue definition in the learning context.

5. Research Questions

In order to achieve the objectives of the research, this study addresses the following research questions:

- i. Are there any significant differences in comprehension through using mother definitions within a reading context?
- ii. Are there any significant differences in understanding meanings of new vocabulary in EFL when affording mother tongue definition in the learning context?

6. Research Methods

The sample of the study involved 30 male students doing their secondary schooling at Al Safi Secondary School for Boys / Southern Aghwar Directorate of Education. The overall population was 40 students. Their ages ranged between (14-16 years) old. 10th Grade students were selected because of their knowledge of English as a foreign language and the researcher's background in the area. The researcher selected the sample of the study randomly to provide an opportunity for all the informants to participate in the study. Students were encouraged to undergo a vocabulary and a reading comprehension test. The researcher pointed out the objectives of the research study after securing a permission from the school principal. Also, the researcher selected two reading comprehension test and a vocabulary test and 2 groups of students. The reading comprehension tests consists of three passages containing multiple choice questions (30 items). This included the translation of the meaning of new vocabulary. The vocabulary test included a matching-type questions involving 50 items. The researcher provided the translation of new vocabulary in English as a foreign language for the first group and in the second passage, the researcher provided mother tongue translation / Arabic of new vocabulary for the second group. Then, the findings of the tests of the two groups were compared.

7. Discussion and Findings

After confirming the distribution of the sample of the study based on their vocabulary knowledge proficiency, they were handled the multiple-choice reading passages. The first group consisting of 10 students were given the passage with no vocabulary meaning, the second group consisting of 10 students were also provided with the multiple choice reading passages and vocabulary tests with vocabulary meaning in the mother tongue / Arabic language. Then, they were requested to answer the multiple-choice items at the end of every passage. The findings of the analysis showed that there were no significant differences between the two groups of those reading passages and vocabulary tests of no words meaning in the mother tongue. Also, the results showed that there were significant difference between those participants (G1), who were provided a list with no words meaning in the mother tongue and those participants (G2) who were given words meaning in the mother tongue. It is a common belief that learning a foreign language is affected by the transfer of the first language or the

mother tongue which is found in the case of this research. The first language learners also influences the other language levels, respectively, vocabulary and grammar. This is may be not directly apparent, but a good number of language learners and teachers would give evidence for that. It is also a common presupposition that the role of the first language in the second language acquisition is negative. This means that, the first language impedes learning the second language. This shows that learning is obtained somewhat by the first language interferences as a habitual act to formulate new knowledge about the newly learn language system or the second language.

The current research indicates that helping language learners through giving them the definitions of the vocabulary of the foreign language / English language in the mother tongue is very constructive technique. The findings of this research reveals that the mother tongue has a contributive role for learning the vocabulary of the foreign language within a classroom setting. The mother tongue is very help for foreign language learners, particularly English language. This is because it helps them achieve an obvious view concerning the meaning of new vocabulary. This may advance their vocabulary learning deposits and help them use the language effectively.

8. Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the findings of the current research, it is noted that the mother tongue has an effective role in learning new vocabulary in English as a foreign language. That is, the findings of the study were interesting enough to investigate students with different language proficiency since this language investigated only intermediate level students. This indicates that attempting to investigate the role of the mother tongue in learning new vocabulary at different levels such advanced learners may help language learners and teachers arrive at a generalizable conclusion. This as a result encourages much research to be conducted in this regard.

References

- Cohen, A., and Aphek, E.(1980). Retention of second language vocabulary over time: Investigating the role of mnemonic associations. *System*. 8(3):221-35.
- Eissa Al Khotaba, Raid Al Jawarneh and Baker Al Tarawneh (2010). Performance Anxiety in English Language among Jordanian Postgraduate Students: Communication Discourse Perspective. *International Journal of Social Sciences, Language and Linguistics*, Vol.37, Issue.10, Singapore.
- Jenkins. J. R, Stein. N. L., and Wysocki, K. (1984). Learning Vocabulary through reading. *American Educational Research Journal*.21 (4): 767-78.
- Krashen, S.(1981a). *Second Language and Second Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Laufer, B. (1989). What percentage of text-lexis is essential for comprehension? In C. Lauren & M. Nordman (Eds.), *Special language: From humans thinking to thinking machine* (pp. 69-75). Clevedon,England: Multilingual Matters.
- Laufer, B (1997). The lexical plight in second language reading: Words you don't know, words you think you know, and words you can't guess. In J. Coady & T. Huckin (Eds.). *Second language vocabulary acquisition: A Rationale for pedagogy*. (pp. 20-34). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- MacWhinney, B., (2005). New directions in the competition model. In: Tomasello, M. and Slobin, D.I., eds. *Beyond nature nurture: Essays in honor of Elizabeth Bates*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 81-110.
- Mondria, J, and Wit De Boer, M.(1991).The effects of contextual richness on the guessability and the retention of words in a foreign language. *Applied Linguistic*.12:249-267.
- MACARO, E., 2003. *Teaching and Learning a Second Language*. New York: Continuum.
- Nation, P. (1990). *Teaching & learning vocabulary*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Nation, P. (1993). Vocabulary size, growth, and use. In R. Schreuder & B. Weltrens (Eds.), *The bilingual lexicon* (pp. 115-134). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Nation, P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sanaoui, R. (1995). Adult learner's Approaches learning vocabulary in second languages. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79 (1), 15 – 28