



IRANIAN UNIVERSITY LEARNERS' ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING USING SYNONYMS AND L1 TRANSLATION

Husain Abdulhay

Payame Noor University of Qom

husainabdolhay@yahoo.com

Abstract

Vocabulary is part and parcel of learning a second or a foreign language. This study examined the effect of vocabulary learning through a translation of English words (Persian equivalents) and the use of English synonyms on the retention and retrieval of vocabulary. Static-group comparison design was utilized to scrutinize sixty EFL learners split into two groups. The experimental group was instructed on the memorizing strategies and the control one was left alone to memorize words presented in class in a week time span. The experimental group being taught coding, interim device, and visual imagery strategies was assayed on the spot by dint of written word recognition tests for their receptive knowledge of synonyms written on the board. The findings of the matching test tasks divulged that the learners' recognitions of synonyms than the first language equivalents were significantly higher. The experimental group significantly scored higher in the recognition test of synonyms than that of translation equivalents. Results have practical implications and applications for foreign language learning and teaching which are discussed.

Keywords: Foreign language learning, Recognition, Retrieval, Synonym, Translation, Vocabulary

To cite this article: Abdulhay, Husain. (2023). Iranian University Learners' English Vocabulary Learning Using Synonyms and L1 Translation. *Journal of Research on Language Education*. Vol. 4 No. 2 2023, 1-10

INTRODUCTION

Language learning invokes nothing more than vocabulary learning (Kaufmann, 2020) for beginner and even advanced students. Nation (2001) believes in the complementary connection of vocabulary knowledge to language use. However, most foreign learners have no cognizance of the effectiveness of tactics facilitating word learning and ensuing longevity (Rezvani Kalajahi, 2012). Teachers may be unsure of what practices work the best and uncertain at times about the point where to begin to form an instructional emphasis on word learning (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). To reconcile learners, especially adult ones, with foreign language learning, which has proved to haunt them as a daunting job, is to provide them with enough evidence that the task at hand is not as monstrous as they think as to be able to obviate the fear of waging into the practice of foreign language learning.

As Boulton and De Cock (2017) put it, the most common tool for foreign language learners is the use of a dictionary with either the mother tongue translation or target language definition or bilingual one, likewise. Vocabulary has been recognized as the single greatest source of problems for second language learners (Meara, 1980). However, new to the task of foreign language learning, most novice EFL learners are not certain which definition is more appropriate for a word in a monolingual dictionary. The research and findings apprise ardent followers and hesitant students of foreign language learning of the recent developments in a way to set aside their misconceptions about difficulty in language learning and instead introduce the most productive ones and acquaint them with the tools from which to choose.

According to Havy and Zesiger (2017), children reliably enjoy more visible speech modalities while foreign language learners need to find and build their concrete sceneries and abstract schema as recourse for their new learning. Attitudes to foreign vocabulary learning pose a challenge to foreign language learners to wage into new learning and affect the absorption and retention of words. As a teacher, the best way to alleviate the burden of new learning of words that command learners' appraisal of their utility is to impart the optimal means of acquisition (Hong, 2008).

Albaladejo, Yvette, and Julio (2018) put in the limelight the significance of word exposure in the augment of chances to recollect and eventually produce vocabulary. Care should be exercised as to present vocabulary in EFL classrooms to ensure its relevance for FL learners (Wong Kwok Shing 2006) and to multiply the interaction chance. A good indicator of the frequency of lexical items is the times when teachers start selecting vocabulary for teaching in their classrooms, where the provision of higher-frequency items allows learners to acquaint themselves with basic communication situations, despite their very limited vocabulary sizes (Segura, Barón, & Roquet, 2022).

Harnessing interim devices is a tactic to accrue word knowledge and retrieval for future vocabulary use. Teachers help students learn through teaching tactics for creating vivid scenarios and associative scenery in their minds paves the way for better retention and retrieval of vocabulary. Harley (1995) purports that the mother tongue can efficaciously facilitate the learning of a new lexical item. He proclaims that first language reference provides useful strengthens L2 vocabulary learning.

According to Laufer (1990), among seven inter-lexical factors, synonymy can reduce the chances of vocabulary acquisition since it makes go astray in the appropriate use of collocation and that simple words alleviate the need to learn unknown second language meanings for advanced learners. However, according to Nation (2001), learning a synonym is easier than that of a non-synonym, because of the learning load paradigm. The pattern connotes that the learning burden is dwindled for words that represent patterns and knowledge with which the learners are already familiar. However, the learning burden is very light for the words similar in native sounds and spelling and for the loan words having roughly the same meaning and grammar with similar collocations and constraints (ibid).

Neuner (1992) believes that teaching germane entries saves time in learning a word set. According to Aitchison (2003), semantic activation of words processed in memory through mental structures which are called nodes enables the establishment of mutually connected links to other associated concepts which such associative networks assist learning of words. Channell (1981) adds that foreign language words presented in semantic clusters as word groups provide a comingling semantic field.

In the same vein, Dunbar (1992) adds that retrieval of related words is much easier and allows for the perception of knowledge organization. Schmitt and Schmitt (2009) proclaim that organized material makes learning easier in an utterly short space of time. Hashemi and Gowdasiaei (2005) evidenced that the students reported acceptable gains of lexical sets than semantically unrelated ones for vocabulary depth and breadth knowledge. Conversely, the *distinctiveness hypothesis* posed by Hunt and Elliot (1980), allows for the ease of learning through the facultative effect of the organization of unlike concepts.

Schneider, Healy, and Bourne (1998) documented that learning related words was easier than learning unrelated ones, although long-term recalling difficulty was reported in the retention test. The study done by Zheng, Kang, and Kim (2009) substantiated the efficiency of semantically related clusters viz. hypernymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and holonymy in vocabulary learning and retrieval. Higa (1963) and Hoshino (2010) evidenced that coordinates or categorical sets (i.e., hyponyms) are beneficial and conducive to learning. However, Erten, and Tekin (2008) denoted that the presentation of new related sets of words interfered with learning and word retrieval.

The crucial aspect of language learning is the teaching of the words on which every language is dependent (Thornbury, 2002). The need to be au courant with and abreast of quotidian research advancement in language teaching and learning strategies calls for students and teachers to acquaint themselves with the theories and studies in the field (Hanks, 2018). From the very outset of a teaching course, students should be encouraged to communicate and take part in the class activity by producing their language even an incomplete one. Thus, an adroit teacher should exploit and harness all the resources available to pave the way to a constructive intake.

Papathanasiou (2009) exhibited that the introduction of unrelated vocabulary to beginner adult help more in learning new L2 words than germane one. As part of teaching practices, it is incumbent upon teachers to introduce learners to the strategies that are conducive to optimal learning. To that end, to ascertain how translation and use of synonyms become more productive for learning vocabulary the following null hypotheses were built on the assumption that word learning through semantically related synonymous sets makes no better recall for the students than their L1 translations. Specifically, the present study endeavored to find answers to the following questions: 1) Does translation equivalent help students recognize new English vocabulary better than synonyms? 2) Are synonyms for unknown words easier to learn than their L1 translations? and 3) How do L1 translations vs. synonyms affect the recognition of new words?

LITERATURE REVIEW

As Cook (2010) argues, for most contemporary learners, translation should be taken as a major medium and aim of language learning and measure of success. Cook (2010) rationalizes exclusive monolingual language teaching as non-scientific, commercial, and political based on subjective reasoning and untenable evidence,

disregarding needs of learners and teachers. Laufer and Girsai (2008) showed that the contrastive analysis and translation group significantly outperformed the other groups on all tests. However, Cook (2010) almost notifies non-existence of research on translation as a device for vocabulary learning.

Higa (1963) examined the effects of synonymy on word learning, finding that pairs of synonyms took more to learn than pairs of irrelevant words. The results implied that learners are more probable to perplex words that are resembled in meaning than words that do not have proximate semantic links. Higa (1963, 1965) argues that the more in vicinity semantic nexus between words, the harder they learn of the words in a set. Tinkham (1993) and Waring' (1997) studies, likewise, indicate that learning words that are not linked by meaning is easier than learning sets of semantically related words. These studies imply that learning synonyms together may decrease the acquisition probability. However, for teaching words through synonyms, the easier and familiar pair was introduced as a definition of the targeted word.

Kroll and Stewart (1994) propose that translation from L1 (Dutch) to L2 (English) semantically-related words is difficult. Tinkham (1997), in a comparison study of the effect of thematic and unrelated words, evidenced that using thematic cluster for presenting words facilitate vocabulary learning than the introduction of words in categorical and unrelated word- clusters. Gairns and Redman (1986) and Sea (1991) proclaim that presenting words in semantic or grouping of words by meaning reinvigorates word learning and assist learners to understand the words through noticing their subtle differences. Hoshino (2010) examined the relative effectiveness of five kinds of word lists (synonyms, antonyms, categorical, thematic, _ and_ arbitrary) in facilitating L2 vocabulary learning in a classroom setting. _ the study indicated that by comparing the effectiveness of the type of word lists on learners, presenting new vocabulary in categorical list enhances word learning. Tinkham (1993) and Waring (1997) evidenced that presenting words in categorical word form does not facilitate vocabulary learning.

Laufer and Hadar (1997) investigated the differential effects of using three different types of dictionary monolingual, bilingual, and “bilingualized” dictionary for the comprehension and production of new words by EFL learners. Fifteen low-frequency words were examined for their comprehension and ability to use these words in their own sentences, of which five were presented with definitions from a monolingual learner's dictionary, five with translations from a bilingual dictionary, and five with hybrid “bilingualised” definitions that included both the bilingual translations and the monolingual definitions.

The results of an ANOVA for comprehension task and a task using the target words to create an original sentence evidenced significant differences in word learning across all three of the dictionary types. The study showed that skill in using a dictionary varied widely, asunder from the level of proficiency of participants. However, the most popular method of using dictionary is to simply have the translation and carry on. “Bilingualised” dictionaries help the reader fully understand words by providing monolingual definitions and example sentences. Provision of native and target languages might be a potent factor to help learn words through the interaction of combining languages than the translations or monolingual definitions alone (ibid, 1997).

Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) proposed an involvement construct for analyzing vocabulary learning tasks in terms of motivation and cognition. They aimed to operationalize traditional terms like noticing, attention, elaboration, and motivation into features of specified tasks. The framework evaluates three factors: 1) how much a task is necessity the urgency to learn a word, 2) the need for *search* for meaning, and 3) the *evaluation* to make sense of the messages for comprehension and production. According to these criteria, a lower involvement load for glossed words in the margin in a reading comprehension task as it does not necessities a need for search will be reported than look for words in a dictionary. Similarly, a fill-in-the-blanks cloze exercise accompanied by a list involves a moderate level of evaluation, but in a similar task with no words provided requires a higher level of evaluation.

Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) deployed their proposed framework, in a study, comparing the impacts of the learning of a triad of tasks with diverse involvement loads: 1) reading comprehension provided with marginal glosses, 2) reading comprehension-cum-fill-in and 3) writing a composition exploiting the target words. The assumption was made that task one would have the lowest scores for retention as induced a moderate need while no search or evaluation, and that Task two would be more effective as the need was the same but the fill-in element provoked moderate levels of evaluation. The most effective hypothesized to be Task three since it induced a potent evaluation factor as learners needed to assess ways to use the target words for crafting an original text. The studies corroborate that the more involvement invested, the better retention expected.

Camo (2014) investigated the effect of L1 translation on storytelling of young Spanish learners. Forty male and female students aged between 10-11 years participated in the study. The control group was assigned to English-only class whereas the experimental group was exposed to explicit vocabulary teaching of the L1 translation of the chosen lexical items through storytelling to appraise the use of mother tongue in vocabulary learning in respect of retention and access to new words. The young learners pre-tested on twenty key items from the story.

The same format was implemented for the post-test for both groups to assess the vocabulary gain compared to the pre-test. The findings denoted that provision of the L1 equivalents of the lexical items culminates in

retaining more lexical items, greater ease at accessing them, and a longer time span recalling. Ridha (2014) established that Iraqi EFL learners leaned heavily on the translation method in English learning. Milton and Masrai (2015) posit that mapping the existing L1 meaning onto L2 words is critical in vocabulary learning. Boustani (2010) evidenced that the majority of the 258 Tunisian students use their mother tongue in English vocabulary learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

Two male groups of non-English learners, all majoring in the engineering field, were recruited for the study. They were sixty freshmen going through their first grades studying at a private university in Iran. These students had studied the general English courses, integrating four skills, designed by Iranian experts in EFL material development monitored by the Ministry of Education, throughout three years at secondary school and successive four years at high school, as part of the requirements for the fulfillment of schooling system in Iran, for two hours per week. They had also taken a general English sub-test of the nationwide assessment for admission to the university, syndicated by an Iranian education assessment organization. Furthermore, the subjects were homogenized and distributed in the experimental and control groups based on their scoring on the paper and pencil version of the Oxford Quick Placement Test, which pigeonholed them at the breakthrough level, before the main study was implemented.

Instrument

The instrument applied in this study for data elicitation and collection was a set of the same tests administered to two groups of subjects. To evaluate vocabulary recognition and retrieval, the test was given to the participants in the classroom after two-week exposure. The group undergoing the treatment was solicited to match synonyms and the control group to match L1 equivalents for the words written on the whiteboard on their answer sheets during their classroom time. Their answer sheets were collected and scored by the teacher and transformed into SPSS software to be computationally put to the test for the descriptive and inferential analyses. Moreover, Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) (2004) was administrated before the main phase of the study to make sure of their homogeneity in order to reduce variations and ensure the reliability of data for the intended analyses.

Data Collection Procedure

The students were interviewed on whether learning synonyms or translation equivalents of English words are easier for them or not. Among them, all the students who had not any professional English learning background strongly declared that Persian equivalents are easier for them than synonyms. Static-group comparison design with the post-test-only group was adopted to carry out the study. The participants were randomly assigned to two learning conditions.

In one condition, the experimental group named Group A, the participants were given the synonyms of the target words written on the blackboard, and in the other, the control group, named Group B, the participants were offered the meanings of the target words in their Persian language. The participants were given a two-week time to be prepared for the recognition test by memorizing all 50 target words.

The treatment group, Group A, however, received instruction on memorization strategies of the synonyms by exploiting clues like orthography, imagery memory, association, and coding. A recognition test was administered divided into two parts; part A measured students' abilities to recognize Persian equivalents of English words and in part B students were asked to check for the synonyms of the words.

Group B was instructed on memorization strategies including coding, interim device, and imagination for remembering words. Forty synonyms were introduced to the students extracted from the new lesson imparted by the research himself. All the synonyms were written on the boards and students were given twenty minutes to look at and remember them while directions on how to correspond the synonyms and put them into memory having recourse to sounding resemblance, the outward appearance of the words. For Group B, the translation equivalents of the target words were written on the blackboard and students were asked whether they know the meaning of them or they have any reservations on them. Those words with which the majority of the students declared were familiar were consequently excluded from the posttests.

All of the learners did a posttest on vocabulary recognition, matching synonyms, and translation equivalents. A set of target words, fifty low-frequency words with high-frequency synonyms were introduced to be learnt. The target words were learned in two ways: learning word pairs and learning de-contextualized stand-alone translations of the words. Using L2 target words with high-frequency synonyms allowed the participants

the possibility of gaining L2 knowledge from their L1 translations, their L2 synonyms. The teacher himself was at the helm of collecting and rating of the learners' answer sheets.

For the target words without high-frequency synonyms, their L1 translations were given for Group B to be memorized and only gain knowledge of their L1 translations of those words was evaluated. The tests were designed to measure receptive knowledge of orthography and form. Disguised words were chosen to eliminate the possibility that the learners find the target words. Students were granted one week time to memorize the words and were measured upon retrieval of the English equivalent for Persian words.

Scoring procedure

The classroom teacher, who was at the helm of implementing instruction as the researcher and administering the tests to the learners, rated and scored the participants' answer sheets, likewise.

Data Analysis

For this study, descriptive statistics were used, likewise. To make certain whether there is statistically significant differences in the mean scores of the learners on the study variables across proficiency level, scores were imported into the SPSS and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Means and standard deviations were derived to gain initial analyses of the data collected. An independent-samples t-test was computed. For computing descriptive and inferential statistics, SPSS 22 was exploited to compute independent samples *t*-tests as to see into the scores on the variables.

RESULTS

The initial analysis of the data was achieved through SPSS, computing descriptive and inferential statistics including percentage distribution, frequency distribution, mean, standard deviation, and *t*-test. Results are evinced in the following subsections.

Control and Experimental Group Demographic Characteristics

Demographic datum, like the number and overall percentage of control and experimental groups, was computed in descriptive analysis. Results are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Overall Percentage of Control and Experimental Participants

	N	Percentage
Experimental group	28	46.66
Control	32	53.33

Table 1 evinces sixty male learners in total, distributed in experimental and control groups, making 46.66 and 53.33 percent, respectively, participated in this study.

Results of Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed to gain a grip on learners' descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviations concerning the subjects' scores on the recognition test 2. The results are depicted in the following tables.

The scores on the recognition tests were appraised for the mean and standard deviations to initially grasp the data gleaned. The mean scores and standard deviations of the participants in the control group and the experimental group are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean and Standard deviation of the experimental and control groups

Statistic	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	
Control	32	11.6016	.70191	3.97059	15.766
Experimental	28	16.7946	.79204	4.19107	17.565
Valid N (listwise)	28				

Concerning the outcomes of descriptive statistics for mean and standard deviation scores, tabulated in Table 2, the experimental group was found to have the mean score of 16.79 for Iranian EFL learners' performance on the recognition test.

To ensure if the difference between the experiment and control groups was statistically significant or not, one sample test was computed. Table 3 demonstrates the results.

Table 3. *Group Comparison on One-sample Test*

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental Group	28	16.7946	4.19107	.70191	21.204	27	.000
Control Group	32	11.6016	3.97059	.79204	16.529	31	.000

Note: $p \leq 0001$

Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the participants in the experimental group ($M = 16.79$, $SD = 4.19$) and the control group ($M = 11.60$, $SD = 3.97$). the experiment and control groups differ in respect of the means for test scores, with the experiment group significantly higher. As seen, the mean score of the experimental groups was significant at the alpha value of 0.000. It is patent that the subjects in the experimental group outperformed the control group on the test. This means the two groups are different in the level of vocabulary acquisition, suggesting that using L1 has no significant effect on short-term vocabulary acquisition of Iranian university EFL learners.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to discern Iranian L2 learners' recognition of synonyms and L1 translation of English words. The findings showed that the mean score of the experimental group on the test was greater than that of the control group. The test administration results exhibited that there was a significant difference between the two groups on the ratings of tests on vocabulary recognition. The experimental group outperformed and scored better in the vocabulary recognition test task than the control group test task. Thus, using synonyms rather than L1 translation had a significant effect on the participants' vocabulary recognition. The study indicated a stronger influence of teaching synonyms than L2- L1 translation on vocabulary recognition. However, some research shows that the provision of L1 translations ends up in better learning of L2 words (Celik, 2003; Ramachandran & Rahim, 2004; Liu, 2008; Latsanyphone & Bouangeune, 2009), whereas other studies (Joyce, 2018) didn't evidence suchlike.

The study aimed to assess vocabulary gains of the learners asunder from the utility and context appositeness of the instructed target words as it was felt that the learners at this stage of learning development need to accrue to their size of stocks so that they in later stages would be able to elicit exact meaning through strategies found in their course of studies using translation strategies like exploiting context clues and generic devices. However, strategies do not become vieux jeu. Rather, they are subject to disuse with the passage of time to the extent that even old-timer foreign language learners forsake them based on the proficiency stage which they are in, hubris of the fact that they are cognitively developed and intelligent enough to learn items squarely without harnessing an interim device.

However, Joyce (2015) evidenced that Japanese foreign language learners matched the English vocabulary to L1 translations significantly higher than L2 definitions on the recognition test. Udaya (2019) evidenced the effective learning of L2 vocabulary through L1 use in language classrooms. Liu (20028) found that Chinese EFL learners' memorization of new words could be effectively facilitated by proper application of L1 translation, which is welcomed mostly by them and should not be completely rejected, especially for adults, for ensuring L2 learners' understanding of word meaning.

The findings of the present study corroborate the study done by Sotoudehnama and Soleimanifard (2013), evidencing better ST vocabulary gains and achievement quantitatively by the learners from the synonym sets group. The results, also, are consistent with the research carried out by Higa (1963), showing that synonym word presentation culminated in better vocabulary learning. Furthermore, the findings substantiate recent research testifies the use of retrieval tactics, namely, looking up words in the dictionary, matching translations, and self-quizzing, with translation mechanism as their underlying for building vocabulary (McDaniel, Pressley & Dunay, 1987; Folse, 2004; Pyc & Rawson, 2007; Nation, 2011).

The findings of this study relate to EFL teaching pedagogy. The use of synonyms for the frequency effect in vocabulary expansion and learning evidenced in this study is substantiated by the study done by Segura, Barón, and Roquet (2022). Exploitation of synonyms in recognition tasks as found to be efficacious for the participants of the study could be acknowledged as a drastic strategy in the FL field. Vocabulary learning can be facilitated at the very early stages by zeroing in on higher-frequency words, as being small in amount, which allows for basic communication.

As it is known that reception proceeds before production when it comes to vocabulary learning, more studies of this type are needed in which the age, course of the study, the context of learning, especially in foreign

one, and other determining variables be controlled for the groundbreaking results. In a similar vein, Alexiou (2015), analyzing the word frequency effect in EFL context evidenced that the acquisition of higher-frequency words occurs before and is easier than lower-frequency ones. Additionally, Shaban (2013) argues that higher-frequency lexical items enjoy more concrete referents.

The findings substantiate the results of the study done by Tajik (2018) evidencing that teaching synonyms and antonyms allows language learners to bolster their memory for semantically-related words. Synonyms enact as a tow stringing a compendium of words together and not allowing one bead to be lost. The results of this study showed that the learners in the synonym group outperformed the translation one exploiting their accessibility to the semantically entrenched concepts of the word meaning in the recognition test. This fact that learners acted better in the recall of synonyms than translation equivalents of the target words conveys that the curing systems are anchored better than equivalent semantic concepts in recognition tasks.

For foreign language learners, who are short of availability of experiencing concrete words, the best tactic to cocoon the set of related words against loss and attrition is to have recourse to a chain that moors the store of vocabulary to the memory. Synonym also helps memory anchor and retrieve the plummeted set of related words to reach the targeted one. It also amalgams a neighboring purlieu which helps members maintain their shreds of connection which preempts them from being lost and forsaken. The findings yield that learners are on the way to building a separate compartment for newly encountered foreign words and forming corresponding concepts.

However, the recognition tasks are different from the production, each one seeking its own concomitant practice. They also have their pros and cons in diverse situations. Since the gaining of vocabulary learning was examined through recognition tasks, many other elements that affect supremacy in performance should be controlled to balance the leverage for the production skill. Word type effect can be controlled as a factor affecting retrieval and recognition of words on the teaching tasks. The findings of this study are consistent with the studies carried out by Shaban (2013) and Alexiou (2015) that higher-frequency items are more concrete and typical and are more prevalent in our daily lives, respectively.

Overall, the outcome of this study ensures and informs EFL teachers to implement equivalent strategies when it comes to vocabulary learning, too. The current findings help teachers and learners adopt translation strategies at the outset of their study and teaching career, confident that it brings about the desired result. The importance of translation studies and practices, once again, is highlighted as the result of this study, echoing the significance of the mother tongue in second and foreign studies and education. The findings have contributed to international and intercultural communication, into the bargain, in that, it insists on the alacrity of the learners for the use of synonyms as recognition means to acknowledge and expand their vocabulary sizes.

To sum up, the findings showed that the learners who apply word association within the target language are superior in the recognition tasks than those mapping words into their first language. In total, switching between the target language and the mother tongue for finding the meaning of the words appeared to be more disadvantageous for EFL learners than using within-language devices for matching the words. Using synonyms to associate meaning within the target language facilitates word recognition more than the corresponding meaning in the first language.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

This study provides several pedagogical implications, specifically, for the EFL university learners and teachers. The results of this study imply the feasibility of providing a translation medium for vocabulary teaching in Iranian EFL university context. Other implications also seem to be relevant to the EFL university context. Translation can be used by teachers to teach a large number of foreign words to the learners but it might not be a certain technique for learners to recall and extrapolate their L2 equivalents to other contexts. According to Gekoski (1980), learners with lower L2 proficiency level use L1 mediation to translate their thoughts into second language. A significant factor affecting the learners' vocabulary learning is the low proficient learners' overreliance on translation learning which is inevitable, because of the established conceptual/semantic L1 system (Jiang, 2000).

It's implied that EFL learners need to be acquainted with word recognition devices for accelerating vocabulary retention and retrieval and building foreign language concept formation. This study calls for the language teachers to exploit word knowledge, including semantic and syntactic information, to enable learners to engage in the task of foreign language learning, without any fear or procrastination. The findings of this study can contribute to EFL context reassuring language teachers of the provision of various activities in classroom. The results endorsing the accessibility to the synonyms better than translation equivalents will be worth attending for EFL syllabus designers to exploit this coding system strategy for expediting foreign language learning. This study contributes the field of teacher education highlighting the use of synonyms as a teaching approach and learning strategy in EFL context.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the possible effect of using Persian translation of English words and their synonyms in the recognition tasks. The results of the test tasks showed significant differences between the two groups on vocabulary recognition tasks. The study depicted in the recognition test task that there is a significant difference between the two groups of participants. The experimental groups that received the treatment on learning through synonyms performed better than the control group exposed to translation of the words from English into Persian. Experimental Group A showed a noticeable achievement over Group B. However, this study included a small sample size of the participant and only focused on recognition test tasks.

The study redounds to Iranian EFL syllabus design and curriculum development to incorporate more teaching of synonyms than that of first language equivalents and consecutively the introduction of strategies for memorizing vocabulary. It also reminds Iranian pre-university teachers of the significance of teaching strategies to learn and enhance long-term memory retention, an issue that is reportedly neglected by pre-university teachers in Iran. Most Iranian EFL learners are remiss of the worth of learning vocabulary through synonyms and wonder if the translation of foreign words or their semantically related synonyms is conducive to swifter and easier learning of vocabulary. This study benefits foreign language education and curriculum developers to exploit these findings in their future practices and to advance foreign language development in the Iranian context.

The precise semantic usage of words was not pursued as more time and frequency it needed for the students as to have more encounters and use. Knowing this fact that every kind of learning is prone to forgetting, especially, foreign language learning, the proficiency, personality type, and introvert and extrovert trends which summon their accompanying strategies, should be controlled to render a fairer rating of the group of more homogenous one in a set of more diverse test tasks to obtain a more reliable score. Segura, Barón, and Roquet (2022), contrasting the frequency effect of vocabulary in receptive and productive tasks, evidenced the significantly higher recall rate of higher-frequency words in receptive tests than productive ones.

Although this study opens up the nature of EFL learners' feasible vocabulary learning, some limitations warrant attention to the interpretation of the findings. The students in this study underwent this vocabulary learning experiment under the guise of a compulsory course as an introduction part to their future English for specific purpose credit. However, the process of word learning is not of a one-off type so this study focused more on the gains of isolated vocabulary than appropriate contextualized ones.

As part of the methodological limitations, reliance on the recognition test can be misleading when not accompanied by the production test task. The difficulty level of the target words can be controlled based on the proficiency of the participants. More control can be exercised over the experiment group. Time also can be controlled for recalling and retention practice of the L1 translation and meaning. According to Webb (2005), the effect of time on task on vocabulary gains in different learning conditions is inevitable. Task types when measuring the learners' responses to the test can influence the results, too. Thus, this study can be replicated using different testing tasks to assess the extent of retention and retrieval of the words.

Another limitation comes back to the method of the vocabulary learning assessment. This study only evaluated the retention and retrieval of the target words in meaning recall and synonym tests. It would be better to include different vocabulary tests to assess vocabulary knowledge. The extent to which learners could retrieve the L2 vocabulary and associate it with the L1 meaning can be further studied. Test-taking methods affect the reliability and validity of the findings when the extent of the recall of L2 synonyms is compared in tandem with L1 translation. Moreover, this study included male EFL learners' similar studies can be carried out including both male and female ones.

As concerned with research on vocabulary learning, there it feels a need for more studies to scrutinize the strength and extent of the retention and retrieval of synonyms vis-à-vis translation equivalents in productive test tasks. Other studies can bring to attention more classroom-based research investigating recognition tasks. Another avenue for future research will be to ascertain whether vocabulary understanding is facilitated using translation, antonyms, or synonyms. Future research may study vocabulary learning of EFL learners tested on different treatment and test tasks given to experimental and control groups across different proficiency levels. Future studies also might evaluate learners' receptive and productive word knowledge through matching of L2 dictionary definition and L1 to their English equivalent tests. This study also can be replicated using more participants whose gender differences are taken into account.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks go to the editors of the Journal of Research on Language Education for reading and giving comments on this work.

REFERENCES

- Abdul Ridha, N. S. (2014). Associations between EFL Learners' Beliefs about and their Strategy Use of Translation in English Learning: The Case of Iraqi Learners. *Journal of the College of Arts*, 70: 31–53.
- Aitchison, J. (2003). *Words in the mind: An introduction to the mental lexicon* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Alexiou, Thomai. 2015. "Vocabulary uptake from Peppa Pig: a case study of preschool EFL learners in Greece." In *Current issues in second/foreign language teaching and teacher development: research and practice*, edited by Christina Gitsaki, and Thomai Alexiou, p. 285–301. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Boulton, A., & De Cock Sylvie (2017). Dictionaries as aids for language learning. In P. Hanks & G.-M. de Schryver (eds.), *International Handbook of Lexis and Lexicography*. New York: Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-642-45369-4_25-1
- Boustani, Kamel (2019). The Correlation between Translation Equivalence, as a Vocabulary Learning Strategy, and Tunisian EFL Learners' Speaking Anxiety. *Languages*, 4(1), 19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages4010019>
- Camo, A. C. (2014). The effects of using L1 translation on young learners' L2 vocabulary learning. Unpublished MA Dissertation *Treball De Fi De Grau*. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
- Celik, M. (2003). Teaching vocabulary through code-mixing. *English Language Teaching*, 57(4), 361–369. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/57.4.361>
- Channell, J. (1981). Applying semantic theory to vocabulary teaching. *ELT Journal*, 35(2), 115-122.
- Cook, G. (2010). *Translation in Language Teaching: An Argument for Reassessment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dunbar, S. (1992). Developing vocabulary by integrating language and content. *TESL Canada Journal*, 9:73-79.
- Erten, I. H., & Tekin, M. (2008). Effects of vocabulary acquisition of presenting new words in semantic sets versus semantically unrelated sets. *System*, 36(3), 407-422.
- Folse K. (2004). *Vocabulary Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching*. Ann Arbor University of Michigan Press.
- Gairns, R., & Redman, S. (1986). *Working with Words: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gekoski, W. L. (1980). Language acquisition context and language organization in bilinguals. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 9, 429-449.
- Harley, B. (1995). Introduction: the lexicon in second language research. In Harley, B. (Ed.), *lexical issues in language learning*, (pp. 1-28). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Havy M and Zesiger P (2017). Learning Spoken Words via the Ears and Eyes: Evidence from 30-Month-Old Children. *Front. Psychol.* 8:2122. doi 10.3389/fps.2017.0212
- Hanks, J (2018) Supporting language teachers as they engage in research. In: Xerri, D and Pioquinto, C, (eds.) *Becoming Research Literate: Supporting Teacher Research in English Language Teaching*. ETAS Journal. ETAS, pp. 52-57.
- Hashemi, M. R., & Gowdasiaei, F. (2005). An attribute-treatment interaction study: Lexical-set versus semantically-unrelated vocabulary instruction. *RELC Journal*, 36(3), 341-361.
- Higa, M. (1963). Interference effects of intra-list word relationships in verbal learning. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 2(2), 170–175.
- Higa, M. (1965). The psycholinguistic concept of "difficulty" and the teaching of foreign language vocabulary. *Language Learning*, 15, 167–179.
- Hong, Y (2008). On teaching strategies in second language acquisition. *US-China Education Review*, 5(1), 61-67.
- Hoshino, Y. (2010). The categorical facilitation of L2 vocabulary learning in a classroom setting. *RELC Journal*, 41(3), 301-312.
- Hulstijn, J., & Laufer, B. (2001). Some empirical evidence for the involvement load hypothesis in vocabulary acquisition. *Language Learning*, 51(3), 539-558.
- Hunt, R. R., & Elliot, J.M. (1980). The role of non-semantic information in memory: orthographic distinctiveness effects on retention. *Psychol Gen*, 109, 49-74.
- Jiang, N. (2000). Lexical representation and development in a second language. *Applied Linguistics*, 21, 1, 47-77.
- Joyce, P. (2015). L2 vocabulary learning and testing: the use of L1 translation versus L2 definition. *Language Learning Journal*, 46(3), 217-227.
- Kaufmann, Steve (2020, 23 January). Language learning is mostly about learning words [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch>
- Kroll, J. F., & Stewart, E. (1994). Category interference in translation and picture naming: Evidence for a symmetric connection between bilingual memory representations", *Journal of Memory and Language*, 33, pp. 149-174.
- Latsanyphone, S., & Bouangeune, S. (2009). Using L1 in teaching vocabulary to low proficiency level students: A case study at the National University of Laos. *English Language Teaching*, 2(3), 186–193.
- Laufer, B. (1990). Words you know: How they affect the words you learn. In J. Fisiak (Ed.), *Further insights into contrastive linguistics* (pp. 573–593). Amsterdam: John Benjamins
- Laufer, B., & Hulstijn, J. (2001). Incidental vocabulary learning in a second language: The construct of task-induced involvement. *Applied Linguistics*, 22(1), 1-26.
- Laufer B, Girsai N. (2008). Form-focused Instruction in Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition: A Case for Contrastive Analysis and Translation. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(4), 694-716.
- Laufer, B., & L. Hadar. (1997). Assessing the effectiveness of monolingual, bilingual, and "bilingualized" dictionaries in the comprehension and production of new words. *Modern Language Journal*, 81, 189-196.
- Liu, J. (2008) L1 use in L2 vocabulary learning: facilitator or barrier? *International Education Studies*, 1(2), 65-69.

- McDaniel, M. A., Pressley, M., & Dunay, P. K. (1987). Long-term Retention of Vocabulary after Key Word and Context Learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 79(1), 87-89.
- Meara, P. (1980). Vocabulary acquisition: A neglected aspect of language learning. *Language Teaching and Linguistics Abstracts*, 13(4), 221-246.
- Milton, J., & Masrai, A. (2015). An investigation of the relationship between L1 lexical translation equivalence and L2 vocabulary acquisition. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 5: 1–7.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2011). Research into Practice: Vocabulary. *Language Teaching*, 44(4), 529-539.
- Neuner, G. (1992). "The role of experience in a content / and comprehension / oriented approach to learning a foreign language". In P.J.L. Arnaud and H. Béjoint, *Vocabulary and applied linguistics*. London: Macmillan.
- Oxford University Press, University of Cambridge, & Association of Language Testers in Europe. (2004). *Quick placement test: Paper*.
- Papathanasiou, E. (2009). An investigation of two ways of presenting vocabulary. *ELT Journal*, 63(4), 313-322.
- Pyc, M. A. & Rawson, K. (2007). (2007). Examining the Efficiency of Schedules of Distributed Retrieval Practice. *Memory and Cognition*, 35(8), 1917-1927.
- Ramachandran, S. D., & Rahim, H. A. (2004). Meaning recall and retention: The impact of the translation method on elementary level learners' vocabulary learning. *RELC Journal*, 35(2), 161–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003368820403500205>
- Rezvani Kalajahi, S. A. R. (2012). Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Vocabulary Size of ELT Students at EMU in Northern Cyprus. *English Language Teaching*, 5(4), 138-149.
- Segura, Barón, , and Roquet (2022). Productive vocabulary learning in pre-primary education through soft CLIL. *Open Linguistics*, 8: 297–327. <https://doi.org/10.1515/opli-2022-0194>
- Shaban, Muhammad. (2013). "Natural order of vocabulary acquisition." *European Academic Research* 1(5), 721–33.
- Schmitt, N., & Schmitt, D. (2009). Vocabulary notebooks: Theoretical underpinnings and practical suggestions. In P. Hedge, N. Andon, & M. Dewey (Eds.), *English language teaching: Major themes in education* (Vol.4, pp. 385-397). London: Routledge.
- Schneider, V. I., Healy, A. F., & Bourne, L. E. (1998). Contextual interference effects in foreign language vocabulary acquisition and retention. In A. F. Healy & L. E. Bourne (Eds.), *Foreign language learning: Psycholinguistic studies on training and retention* (pp. 77-90). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Schryver (eds), *International Handbook of Lexis and Lexicography*. New York: Springer, n.p. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-642-45369-4_25-1.
- Sotoudehnama, E. & Soliemanifard, F. (2013). The Effect of teaching vocabulary through synonymous, semantically unrelated, and hyponym sets on EFL learners. *Issues in Language Teaching*, 2(2), 27-56.
- Tajik, F. (2018). The Impact of Teaching English Synonym and Antonym Pairs Adjacently and Non-Adjacently on Iranian EFL Learners' Vocabulary Learning and Retention. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*, 8(3), 200-225.
- Thornbury, S. (2002). *How to teach vocabulary*. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Ur, P., (1998). *A course in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tinkham, T. (1993). The effect of semantic clustering on the learning of second language vocabulary. *System*, 21, 371–380.
- Tinkham, T. (1997). The effect of semantic and thematic clustering of the learning of second language vocabulary. *Second Language Research*, 13(2), pp. 138-163.
- Udaya, M. (2019). Use of L1 in Enhancing L2 Vocabulary. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 4(4), 202-215.
- Waring, R. (1997). The negative effects of learning words in semantic sets: A replication. *System*, 25, 261–274.
- Webb, S. A. & Chang, A. C-S. (2015). Second language vocabulary learning through extensive reading: How does frequency and distribution of occurrence affect learning? *Language Teaching Research*, 19(6), 667-686.
- Wong Kwok Shing, Richard. 2006. "Enhancing English among second language learners: The pre-school years." *Early Years* 26(3), 279–93. doi 10.1080/09575140600898456.
- Zheng, H., K, B., & Kim, H. (2009). Exploiting noun phrases and semantic relationships for text document clustering. *Information Sciences*, 179(13), 2249-2262.