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Learning new L2 vocabulary is one of the most difficult tasks when it comes to second or foreign language acquisition, especially after having developed a high vocabulary competence in L1. Individuals attempt to relate all of the new words they learn to their already acquired L1 vocabulary when languages actually tend to section reality in different ways. Furthermore, individuals tend to acquire their L1 vocabulary rather than learn it. Learning L2 vocabulary is a task anybody wishing to embark on second or foreign language instruction has to carry out. Therefore, L2 learners are confronted with two different missions; that of learning new words to increase their competence in the second or foreign language, and that of learning certain strategies that help them adsorb all the new lexical units they are presented with. Both of them are interwoven and cannot be regarded separately. This is the reason why students should be made aware of the strategies that help them develop appropriate learning skills according to their needs and personality, as well as other factors that determine their learning process.

Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Foreign Language Acquisition is key reading for those wanting to understand which actions are to be taken when they encounter new L2 words as well as the processes involved, that is, since words are read or heard for the first time until they are acquired and, therefore, included as an integral part of what is known as the “mental lexicon”. However, determining how this “mental lexicon” works is no easy task, especially if we bear in mind one of the most extended theories, which states that words belonging to L1 and L2 are stored in different compartments of the brain:

It is not easy to gather data on the organization and functioning of the mental lexicon. Some answers can be found by studying various speakers’ behavior, such as tip-of-the-tongue phenomena, slips of the tongue and problems manifested by people who suffer from aphasia (Aitchison, 1990) or by analyzing communication strategies used by L2 learners (Ridley, 1997). It is understandable, therefore, that many conclusions about the development and organization of the mental lexicon are based on assumptions.

Nevertheless, such studies have yielded results that significantly contribute to modeling the mental lexicon (p. 11).

The book is divided into five chapters. In the first one, titled “Factors Affecting Vocabulary Learning and Acquisition”, the author raises questions that play an important role in this research field, namely ‘The Influence of First and Other Languages’, ‘The Role of Memory in Vocabulary Learning and Acquisition’, ‘The Organization and Development of the L2 Mental Lexicon’, ‘Individual Learner Differences’, among others. Observation is the only and most reliable way to gather data on the way our minds store new lexical items, and although there are a great deal of theories surrounding L1 and L2 vocabulary acquisition, most of them are based on assumptions. In addition, as the author so aptly puts it, “Research on L2 mental lexicon is further complicated by the presence of at least one more language” (p. 13). Apart from this, vocabulary acquisition research has been conducted to a large extent on L1, despite there being scholars, as the author of this book herself, who advocate different mental lexicons, or a mapping, in the different acquired languages. The last important point the author covers in this chapter is the difference between “naturalistic approach vs. explicit vocabulary teaching”. She also establishes the differences between “unplanned teaching strategies” and “planned vocabulary teaching”.

In the second chapter, “Theoretical Anchorage”, we are provided with a thorough theoretical background concerning learning strategies. Firstly, and taking into account the theories and conclusions presented by other researchers, the author discusses the role that general language learning strategies plays in cognitive theory. Therefore, a four-stage process is established: selection, acquisition, construction and integration (O’Malley and Chamot, 1996). It is also described how, through this process, the information is transferred from the working memory (or short-time memory) to the long-term memory. Secondly, the author goes on to put forward a wide range of cognitive theories and models of SLA to provide a general perspective of language learning strategies and their role in L2 learning. Despite the fact that these methods show great differences, one can draw the conclusion that language learning strategies have great value both in L2 learning and teaching.

In the third chapter, “Survey of Research on Vocabulary Learning Strategies”, the author focuses on a three-fold dimension in vocabulary learning strategies. First, different vocabulary learning strategies are reviewed in a critical way; then, the training of vocabulary learning strategies is regarded, taking it as a potential tool for an optimum learning process and, lastly, various methods and instruments concerning vocabulary learning strategies are mapped out.

In the fourth chapter, “Studies on Vocabulary Learning Strategies”, three studies of vocabulary learning strategies carried out on elementary school learners of English as a foreign language are presented. The first study aims at developing a questionnaire for measuring the use of LLS models. The psychometric properties of the questionnaire are scrutinized, placing special emphasis on its construct validity and internal consistency reliability. The second study, on the other hand, concentrates on establishing the relationship

between vocabulary teaching and vocabulary learning strategies. The third study sets out to investigate the strategies that learners of two different foreign languages utilize to make their learning process more effective. In line with the author's opinion, we consider this study of paramount importance as it is a section of the discipline that needs further research.

In the fifth and last chapter, "Summary: Some Implications for Practice and Research, and Conclusions", we are provided with a summary of the main points covered in the foregoing chapters and the inference these might have for practice and future research. A body of appendixes with the materials utilized in the empirical research is also presented at the end of the book. These include: questionnaires, criteria and results.

An aspect worth mentioning is the fact that translation as a pedagogical activity to teach new vocabulary has a bad reputation among most scholars and L2 teachers because students tend to rely on the L1 vocabulary to explore and understand meaning in L2. Nevertheless, observation in the classroom clearly shows that this practice is quite common and almost inevitable. It is a practice students usually resort to when facing unknown words. Pavičič, citing Ringbom (1987), comments on this as follows:

The role of L1 in this process varies depending on the degree of equivalency between languages: although in some cases it may facilitate the acquisition or use of L2 lexical items, in others it will create an obstacle (p. 9).

It is unquestionable that if compared, linguistic systems present more differences than similarities. Componential analysis shows that all of the meanings and implicatures hidden behind L2 words do not usually tally with L1 words. In addition to the author's comment, we would like to add that students' needs are once again imperative here. It is not the same to impart a language course for translator trainees as a general English course. No method or strategy is better than the other. It has more to do with a question of reaching particular goals.

In summary, we can conclude that despite the fact that research into vocabulary learning strategies have been in existence for a long time and this is a fully-fledged academic discipline, there is no accepted theory yet and further research is needed. The world changes and so do strategies for language learning and teaching. This book is predominantly focused on the learning of vocabulary strategies. It aims to examine and explore what lies behind this phenomenon from a linguistic and psychological viewpoint. Undoubtedly, the teaching of vocabulary when learning a second or foreign language is a task that cannot be disregarded, since the possession of a high degree of competence in vocabulary gives students autonomy and independence to get by in both second and foreign language contexts.

NOTES

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