



**UNIVERSIDAD DE JAÉN**  
Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación

Trabajo Fin de Grado

**ACQUISITION OF VOCABULARY  
FOR SPANISH SECONDARY  
SCHOOL STUDENTS OF  
ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE**

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Table of Contents

0. Abstract and <i>Resumen</i> .....	3
1. Introduction.....	4
2. Objectives.....	5
3. Methodology.....	5
4. Different degrees of knowing a word.....	6
4.1. Receptive knowledge.....	6
4.2. Productive knowledge.....	7
4.3. Types of word knowledge.....	7
5. Learners.....	9
5.1. Students’ individual variation that may influence in the way they learn.....	10
5.2. Relationship between memory and vocabulary acquisition.....	11
5.3. Learners’ previous experience.....	12
6. Teachers.....	13
6.1. How to teach vocabulary.....	13
6.2. Agreement between learners and teachers.....	14
7. Strategies for learning vocabulary.....	15
7.1. Examples of vocabulary learning strategies.....	17
7.1.1. Strategies for the discovery of a new word’s meaning.....	17
7.1.2. Strategies for consolidating a word once it has been encountered.....	18
7.2. Effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies.....	19

8. Activities.....	20
8.1. Different types of activities.....	20
8.1.1. Direct vocabulary learning.....	21
8.1.2. Indirect vocabulary learning.....	21
8.2. Examples of vocabulary activities.....	22
9. Conclusions.....	24
10. References.....	27

## **0. ABSTRACT AND RESUMEN**

**Abstract:** This project presents a bibliographical revision of many different methods and strategies to teach vocabulary to Spanish students of English as a foreign language nowadays. It also includes explanations about the whole meaning of “knowing a word” and the different perspectives by which vocabulary is learned; this means the learners’ and the teachers’ perspective. Included in this explanation, we will analyze the differences we may find in the process of teaching vocabulary to Secondary School students of English as a foreign language, differences in our students that will be of great importance at the time of teaching English to them. Teachers’ perspective is also considered in this project. And finally, we present strategies and some examples of activities that may be very practical at the moment of teaching English vocabulary to Secondary School students of English as a foreign language.

**Key words:** (L2): *second language*, (L1): *first language*, *receptive knowledge*, *productive knowledge*, *target-language community*, *EFL: English as a foreign language*, *ESL: English, as a second language*, *VLS: vocabulary learning strategies*.

**Resumen:** Este proyecto lleva a cabo una revisión bibliográfica de muchos de los métodos y estrategias que hay hoy día para enseñar vocabulario a los estudiantes españoles de inglés como lengua extranjera. También incluye explicaciones sobre el significado global de “conocer una palabra” y las diferentes perspectivas en las que el vocabulario se aprende; refiriéndose a la perspectiva tanto de los estudiantes como a la de los profesores. Incluida en esta explicación, analizaremos las diferencias que podemos encontrar en el proceso de la enseñanza de vocabulario a los estudiantes de secundaria de inglés como lengua extranjera, diferencias en nuestros alumnos que serán de gran importancia a la hora de enseñarles vocabulario. La perspectiva de los profesores también será revisada en este proyecto. Y finalmente, presentamos estrategias para el aprendizaje de vocabulario y algunos ejemplos de actividades, que pueden ser muy prácticos cuando estemos enseñando vocabulario en inglés a los alumnos de secundaria que están estudiando inglés como lengua extranjera.

**Palabras clave:** (L2): *segunda lengua* (L1): *primera lengua*, *conocimiento receptivo*, *conocimiento productivo*, *comunidad del idioma de destino*, *inglés como lengua extranjera*, *inglés como segunda lengua*, *estrategias para el aprendizaje de vocabulario*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This project reflects many of the different forms in which Spanish students of English as a foreign language may learn new vocabulary in a practical and enjoyable form. It is really important to know different techniques and strategies to teach our students to learn new vocabulary, and it is even more important to help our students to be able to use those techniques and strategies by themselves, obtaining as result their own capacity to learn that new vocabulary. In this research, we will review relevant studies about the acquisition of vocabulary for students of a foreign language and the different processes students may undergo to get to know a new word definitely. In this project, I will try to explain some of these processes and the differences that may appear between students for several different reasons. Beyond memorizing, like it has been typical during much time, teachers can use techniques, methods and even their own imagination to make their students learn vocabulary in a more enjoyable way, and to get good results from the students.

Apart from teachers' role, learners' role is also important. They may have different reasons for learning, they may learn in different contexts, they may be different also, their social and cultural background, their motivation and responsibility for learning may also influence in the way they learn. At this moment students of different ages are learning to speak English around the world, but the reasons that each student may have to study English do not have to be all the same. Some students may only learn English because it is on the curriculum at their Secondary School, but for others, studying this language may reflect their own choice.

It is also interesting to appreciate the different stages in which students learn new vocabulary, because words are not learned instantaneously by adult second language learners, but gradually learned after a period of time and with numerous exposures. In a first stage we can recognize and understand a word, but we are not able to use it in our own in a conversation, and after this period we will be able to use that word by ourselves, this will mean that we will be on the next stage.

Apart from teaching to them this new vocabulary, we cannot forget the importance of providing activities to consolidate their knowledge, because if our students learn new words but they do not use them anymore, then we run the risk that they forget all that new vocabulary. And I also present a couple of examples of the type of activities we can use with our students in order that learners can memorize those new words we are trying to teach to them.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

The goal of this project is to explain the different possibilities teachers have to make their lessons productive, bearing in mind the necessities and situation of every student. The more the teacher bears in mind the characteristics of every learner, the more the student may learn. The main objectives of this project are:

- To define the different levels of knowing a word.
- To explain the learners' and teachers' role. (Learners' attitude, purposes, etc...).
- To analyze the different types of material and activities teachers can use to get good results from the students.
- To list the different strategies learners may use in order to acquire vocabulary more easily.
- To exemplify the theory with some activities.

## **3. METHODOLOGY OF THE PROJECT**

It is also important to know the methods followed while developing this project. The project is divided in five parts. To start, some general terms to understand what really means knowing a word are provided, and the different levels that this implies. There are some arguments of different linguists about this topic.

In the second part, the learners' perspective is discussed, the main differences in students (personal, academic, etc...) that may influence in the way they learn a new language. And again, the perspectives of different linguists will be discussed. In the third part, the discussion will be focused in the teachers' role. Some different mechanisms used by teachers will be analyzed and comparisons of opinions between different linguists will be revised too.

In the fourth part different strategies for learning vocabulary will be listed and commented. And finally, in the fifth part, the main topic is the practice part of the process of learning vocabulary: the activities. First of all, I explain some of the different activities that we can use in class, and after it some examples of activities are provided.

#### **4. DIFFERENT DEGREES OF KNOWING A WORD**

The word knowledge implies many facets in the word itself. Knowing a word does not mean that we understand totally its meaning and that we are able to use it by ourselves, that process has different degrees and it works in a gradual way. At the beginning of the process we get to understand the word but we may not be able to use it by ourselves, afterwards and after some exposures to that word, we may be able to use it in conversations for example. There may be exceptions, of course, but in general terms that is the way the process of acquiring and learning a new word works.

##### **4.1. RECEPTIVE KNOWLEDGE**

According to Schmitt (2000:4),” *the mechanics of vocabulary learning are still something of a mystery, but one thing we can be sure of is that words are not instantaneously acquired, at least not for adult second language learners.*” That new vocabulary is gradually learned over a period of time and after some exposures. And this explanation is reflected in our everyday life with several examples. We have all had the experience of being able to recognize and understand a word when we see it in a text or hear it in a conversation, but not being able to use it ourselves. According to Schmitt (2000:4):

*“this common situation shows that there are different degrees of knowing a word. Being able to understand a word is known as receptive knowledge and is normally connected with listening and reading. If we are able to produce a word of our own accord when speaking or writing, then that is considered productive knowledge (passive/active are alternative terms).”*

But as it usually happens with rules, there are always exceptions and that is what occurs with this theory too. It may happen that we are able to produce a word perfectly in an oral context but that we are not able to recognize it when we find it in a written text. This would show that a person may develop his or her productive skills (using that word in any conversation) before his or her receptive skill (not recognizing that word in a written text for example).

#### 4.2. PRODUCTIVE KNOWLEDGE

The typical process is supposed to work this way: people learn words receptively first and later achieve productive knowledge. That means that people would first recognize a word (listening or reading) and after that step, and after some exposures to that new word, we would then be able to reproduce that new word (writing or speaking). The productive knowledge is supposed to be more difficult and it needs more knowledge and attention by the learner. A person that is able to produce a word by her/himself is in the “next step”, I mean that s/he has passed already the receptive step and has achieved the productive level. There may be exceptions, as I have already explained above.

#### 4.3. TYPES OF WORD KNOWLEDGE

According to Schmitt (2000:5), “*we also need to consider the various facets of knowing a word*”. Of course, we all know that we have to learn and know the meanings of words before we use those words. Apart from this, “*there is the practical matter of mastering either the spoken or the written form of the word before it can be used in communication*”.

People may think that vocabulary knowledge consists only of these two facets (meaning and word form) but the potential knowledge that can be known about a word is rich and complex. Nation (1990:31) proposes the following list of the “*different kinds of knowledge that a person must master in order to know a word*”.

- *The meaning(s) of the word*
- *The written form of the word*
- *The spoken form of the word*
- *The grammatical behavior of the word*



- *The collocations of the word*
- *The register of the word*
- *The associations of the word*
- *The frequency of the word”*

These are known as types of *word knowledge*, and most or all of them are necessary to be able to use a word in the wide variety of language situations one comes across. But these different types of word knowledge are not necessarily learned at the same time. Being able to use a word in oral discourse does not necessarily entail being able to spell it. Similarly, a person will probably know at least one meaning for a word before knowing all of its derivative forms. Each of the word-knowledge types is likely to be learned in a gradual manner, but some types of word knowledge may develop before than others and at different rates. For all these reasons, vocabulary acquisition must be incremental, as it is clearly impossible to gain immediate mastery of all these word knowledges simultaneously.

The different kinds of word knowledge are quite interrelated. According to Schmitt (2000:6), “*for example frequency is related to formality (part of register) in that more frequent words tend to be less formal, and less frequent words tend to be more formal*”. So we have to bear in mind that a word is not only build up of its form and meaning, but there are many other sides of that same coin that play an important role in the use and construction of them.

## 5. LEARNERS

It is important for teachers to appreciate the differences we can find between learners. There may be characteristics in each student that may influence in the way they learn a foreign language; English in this case. These characteristics may be related to their different background, necessity of learning the language, how much they like the language they are learning or even to their own personality. We must know that all students will not learn at the same rhythm and that, of course, they will not learn the same quantity of vocabulary although they are all in the same classroom, during the same time and exposed to the same activities or classes. According to Nation (1990), the learning process of a word depends on three things:

1. The learners' mother tongue and their previous experience of English.
2. The way in which they learn and the way in which that English word is taught.
3. The difficulty of the word itself.

All these characteristics will influence in the way students learn any English word.

According to Jeremy Harmer (2007), what makes a big difference between a type of learner and other is mainly if the student lives in a target-language community (a place where English is the national language) like Britain or Canada, or also a country where English is one of the co-official languages (like India or Nigeria). And the other possibility is the one we are going to concentrate on, and the one I am trying to describe in this project, that is when the students live in a country where English is neither official nor national language and they study this language as a foreign language. This will affect greatly the way a person learns a language, because depending on the purposes the student has to learn the language, the student will need different methods from teachers, and the results may be different also. It is different how a person who really needs to speak a language for any reason (for traveling, working etc...) learns that language, from another person who is learning that language just because it is on the curriculum of their Secondary School. Their learning process will differ absolutely, their attitude may also be different because they do not have the same necessities and this will affect the way they learn. For all these reasons, and if ourselves as teachers want to get good results from our students, we will have to make a special effort with learners in our classrooms.

At this point, I think it is important to have clear in mind the difference between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The former refers to the English that is taught in countries where English is a co-official language –India, Canada-

(like it occurs here in Spain with Spanish and Catalan for example), and the second one is related to the English that is taught in countries where English is not an official language - Spain for example-. In this case and after having these definitions clear in our minds, we have to concentrate on English as a Foreign Language, that is the one we are going to talk about to explain how Spanish Secondary School students of English may learn this language, and more concretely the vocabulary.

If we think about Spanish Secondary School students, we know that their way to learn a foreign language, it will greatly differ from the way native children would learn that language. It would be important and interesting to try to make our students learn in a similar way as native people do, we should try to prepare our classes to be as natural as we are able, in order to make students learn in a similar way. We also run the risk that our students concentrate only on their final exam and they do not really learn what we are trying to teach them, but instead they are just concentrated on memorizing the contents that will appear in the exam, and consequently they would forget much of what they had already learned.

#### 5.1. STUDENTS' INDIVIDUAL VARIATION THAT MAY INFLUENCE IN THE WAY THEY LEARN

Every student has his or her own personal situation, age; their amount of exposure to English may also be different. Students' background (cultural and educational mainly) also influences in the way they learn a foreign language. They may come from a home where education is something of a great importance, but some others may come from homes where education is not so valued. Also the help that parents may offer to these students will influence totally in the way they learn; learners that receive more help from their parents may learn more and easily than others that do not receive any help at home. Another difference that may influence the way they learn is the different background that student may have from his/her teacher and classmates. If their backgrounds are not the same at all, these differences will influence in the way these learners may understand any topic explained in class, their responses could be totally different to the ones expected by teachers or by the writer of the textbook. All these variables will affect the way they acquire the foreign language. According to Nation (1995: 5):

*“there isn’t an overall theory of how vocabulary is acquired. Our knowledge as mainly been built up from fragmentary studies, and at the moment we have only the broadest idea of how acquisition might occur. We certainly have no knowledge of the acquisition stages that particular words might move through. Additionally, we don’t know how the learning of some words affects how other words are learned. There are still whole areas which are completely unknown”.*

This is not an exact science where we can explain certainly how words are acquired by the learners. It would be necessary the explanation of neurologists to understand how words trace in the brain, but until that moment takes place we will not know exactly how this process works. This is not so easy to happen because there are not many studies about the acquisition of vocabulary.

## 5.2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEMORY AND VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

The memory plays an important role in vocabulary acquisition, that is something we all know. But according to Schmitt (2000) words do not have to be learned in a linear way necessarily because learners also forget some of the material they learned previously. But forgetting is also part of this process of learning. Forgetting is something totally natural that may occur more frequently if a person does not use those words often, although it also happens with people who use those words several times. Schmitt (2000: 131), contemplates the difference between *short-term memory* and *long-term memory*: *“long-term memory retains information for use in anything but the immediate future. Short-term memory is used to store or hold information for only a matter of seconds”*. The purpose of the process of the acquisition of vocabulary is the transfer from a short-term memory to a long-term memory. This will mean that the word has finally been acquired and fixed in the learner’s brain and that will not be forgotten anymore.

### 5.3. LEARNERS' PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

According to Nation (1990), there is a lot of evidence of the influence that a first language vocabulary has in the process of learning foreign language vocabulary. After many studies about the topic, linguists conclude that it is almost impossible to keep two languages apart. A word in one language irremediably evokes its corresponding form in the other language; this means that it is not true that both languages are totally independent in our brains.

Another point to discuss according to Nation (1990: 34), is that *“the effect of first language vocabulary on second language vocabulary learning may result in some meanings becoming fossilized; that is, learners always keep a first language meaning for a second language word”*. This may provoke that learners have an incomplete knowledge of the meaning of words in English, because if Spanish Secondary School students of English always think about a corresponding word in Spanish when they are learning English, words there will be some moments when the total correspondence is impossible and it will appear that lack of knowledge. Some examples come to my mind like *outlet*, very typical and often used lately; an example of English words without a complete corresponding form in Spanish. Most of the words will be easy to learn because most of the words have their correspondent forms in Spanish.

The similarity in the sounds of the learners' mother tongue with English will also facilitate the learning process. With words which sound is similar in both languages it will be easier for students to pronounce and to learn, and the same will occur with the grammatical patterns; it will be not difficult for our Spanish Secondary School students of English as a foreign language to understand the “-ing” gerund form for example, because in Spanish we use the same grammatical pattern to express the gerund form.

In general, what may result more difficult for students could be the pronunciation, which is the English pattern that may differ more from Spanish language, because in terms of grammar or words with meaning correspondence in English and Spanish, both languages are quite similar because we have similar societies too.

## 6. TEACHERS

All teachers around the world do not share the same opinion about how to teach vocabulary to students of a foreign language. They all do not agree in using the same techniques, but instead each of them will have her or his own ways or tricks, and they will follow their favorite techniques in order to get the results they want.

### 6.1. HOW TO TEACH VOCABULARY

According to Nation (1990: 1), some teachers may think that learning vocabulary should be *“left to take care of itself”*. That means that those teachers think that students will learn vocabulary in a natural way better than if we would concentrate consciously on it. In this term Nation agrees with Schmitt (2000) when he referred that the most important point to learn new vocabulary depends on the amount of exposures the student has to those new words. So, we can get to the conclusion that learning vocabulary without being conscious that we are learning it is possible, according at least, to these two linguists. Many teachers around the world may share this opinion; they let the new vocabulary appear and just wait until students finally learn it, without making their learners studying long lists of words totally out of context.

According to Schmitt (2000) teachers have to prepare their classes to be interesting and even funny for students, that way they will learn better and more. We are conscious that we cannot change the text books that Secondary Schools provide and teachers have to adapt to them, but if we want to make our students enjoy our classes we will have to use our imagination in many occasions, to make our classes more interesting and to make our students learn more. The more they enjoy and entertain in our classes, the more they will learn. In my opinion, I think that what Secondary School students would enjoy more (at least I did when I studied at Secondary School) are songs or movies. Every teenager likes music or films and we have lots and lots of songs and films in English, so it is really easy for us, just to prepare something we know they will like and make them learn some new vocabulary. We could choose the song or the film depending on the topic of the text book that we have already explained in class, we should try to look for songs or movies, where some of the words that we have seen in our text book appear, and that way we can repeat the use of those new words, obtaining as result that our learners finally know the vocabulary we want to teach to them.

But also according to Schmitt (2000: 145), “*in any well-structured vocabulary program there needs to be the proper mix of explicit teaching and activities from which incidental learning can occur*”. It is easy to understand that learners need a basis. If we begin just playing songs and films, then the process will not work. Teachers could make a mix of both, first to expose students to the material we want them to learn, and after the exposure we can provide students with activities to fix the new vocabulary. They will not memorize everything, but at least they will memorize much of what we have tried to teach to them.

## 6.2. AGREEMENT BETWEEN LEARNERS AND TEACHERS

Another point to bear in mind and to comment, I think, it is the importance of the agreement between learners and teachers about the techniques or system used in class to learn this vocabulary. If learners do not get the results expected by teachers, then maybe teachers should study and check where the problem may be to try to solve it and prove new techniques with students, because the most important goal that a teacher has is to get the best results from her or his students. If after all our efforts and ideas we would not get the goal we want in our students, then we could maybe add some vocabulary learning strategy to our vocabulary program for Secondary School students, these strategies may help them to learn more vocabulary and to memorize it in an easier way.

## 7. STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING VOCABULARY

According to Schmitt (2000: 132), “*one approach of facilitating vocabulary learning that has attracted increasing attention is vocabulary learning strategies (VLS)*”. The interest in VLS has originated a movement in which not only the teachers’ perspective is appreciated, but also how these strategies may affect the way learners acquire language.

According to Nation (1990), there is a large number of low-frequency words, and because of their irregular appearance in texts or conversations it is important to teach our students strategies to learn these words better than teaching the words themselves.

It seems that many learners do use strategies for learning vocabulary, especially when referred to language tasks that include several linguistic skills (e.g., oral presentation that involves composing the speech content, producing comprehensible pronunciation, fielding questions, etc.). The acquisition of new vocabulary may become in a very mechanized and boring activity if we only try to memorize words by hard, if we do not use any of the strategies. Using these strategies will help learners to memorize easier the vocabulary they are studying or they are trying to learn and will also help teachers to prepare their classes and to facilitate their work.

Many people still believe that the common VLS used may be simple repetition, memorization or taking some notes, but these mechanical strategies have changed and become in more complex ones like inferencing, imagery or Keyword Method.

It may seem that learners often prefer relatively “shallow” strategies, even though they may be less effective than “deeper” ones. Indeed, research into some “deeper” vocabulary learning strategies, such as forming associations like Cohen & Aphek (1981) reflect, and using the Keyword Method according to Hulstijn (1997), have been shown to keep retention better than rote memorization. However, even rote repetition can be effective if students are accustomed to using it. Secondary School students can benefit from the context usually included in deeper activities.

Better than being used individually, multiple VLS are often used simultaneously, more than one at the same time. Good learners will be able to use more than one strategy at the moment and they will also be aware of the semantic relationships between the known words previously and the new words of the foreign language they are studying. This means that they are conscious that they are learning and they can even participate to regulate this system by which they are actually acquiring the vocabulary.



Before recommending a concrete type of vocabulary learning strategy to our students, we have to consider the whole learning context. There are many different variables that will affect the effectiveness with which strategies will be used by the learners and will also affect the way we teach those strategies.

There is a list of variables in which we can see some of the different characteristics that may influence in a positive or negative way in the learning process of our students. According to Schmitt (2000: 133), in these variables we can include:

- *“The proficiency level*
- *L1 and culture of students*
- *Their motivation and purposes for learning the L2*
- *The text and task being used*
- *The nature of the L2 itself”*

We have to consider all these variables before trying to teach or recommend any new strategy to our students, because learners and teachers will be affected by all these variables and also the form in which we teach the strategies to learners, or even which concrete strategies we choose to recommend to our students will depend on all the variables listed above.

According to Schmitt (2000: 133), also *“it is important to gain cooperation of the learners”*, because in a study by O’Malley & Chamot (1990) it was shown that students who did not accept strategy training had more negative results than those who accepted that strategy learning process. It is really important to considerate the differences between cultures, because learners from different cultures will obviously have different opinions about the strategies they are taught, some students may agree with the usefulness of those strategies, meanwhile other students of different cultures may consider those strategies are not useful at all.

In another study realized by Cohen & Aphek (1981), proficiency level has been taken into consideration and it resulted to be quite important. In this study was showed how word lists were better for beginning students, and contextualized words were better for students with more advanced levels.

Considering Nation's opinion (1990), the frequency of the words in the target language is also relevant. More frequent words should be taught, and the best way to teach them may be using strategies for review and consolidation. By other side, words which are less frequent would be learnt incidentally when students find them in texts or listen to them in a conversation for example, this means reading or listening, and this process requires, at first at least, some strategies for learning the meanings of those words. These strategies could be guessing from context for example, or using a dictionary.

## 7.1. EXAMPLES OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

There are many different VLS, Schmitt (1997) provides us one list containing fifty-eight different strategies. He differentiates between those strategies "*for the discovery of a new word's meaning*", which are those strategies used to learn new words, and strategies "*for consolidating a word once it has been encountered*", which are those strategies used to consolidate the knowledge of words that have been known or used before, but that may have been forgotten.

### 7.1.1. *Strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning*

In this list we have some of the strategies provided by Schmitt (1997: 55):

- *Analyze part of speech*
- *Analyze affixes and roots*
- *Check for L1 cognate*
- *Analyze any available pictures or gestures*
- *Guess meaning from textual context*
- *Use a dictionary (bilingual or monolingual)*
- *Ask teacher for a synonym, paraphrase, or L1 translation of new word*
- *Ask classmates for meaning*

All these strategies would be perfect to use them when we are trying to learn new words, those ones that we did not know before.

#### *7.1.2. Strategies for consolidating a word once it has been encountered*

In this list we find some other strategies, but in this case for consolidating the knowledge of words we have already seen or studied before. This list is also provided by Schmitt (1997: 55):

- *“Study and practice meaning in a group*
- *Interact with native speakers*
- *Connect word to a previous personal experience*
- *Associate the word to its synonyms and antonyms*
- *Use semantic maps*
- *Image word form*
- *Image word’s meaning*
- *Use Keyword Method*
- *Group words together to study them*
- *Study the spelling of a word*
- *Say new word aloud when studying*
- *Use physical action when learning a word*
- *Verbal repetition*
- *Written repetition*
- *Word lists*
- *Put English labels on physical objects*
- *Keep a vocabulary notebook*
- *Use English-language media (songs, movies, newscasts, etc.)*
- *Use spaced word practice (expanding rehearsal)*
- *Test oneself with word tests*

- *Skip or pass new word*
- *Continue to study word over time”*

These strategies are appropriate to fix vocabulary that we have already studied but that we do not know totally. Using these strategies may help our students to consolidate the knowledge they already have, this means that it is a good way for them to memorize all that vocabulary and not to forget it.

## 7.2. EFFECTIVENESS OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

Schmitt (2000) considers that many learners do use strategies and that most of them find them helpful. This makes us think that we should incorporate strategy training in our classes, but the question of how effective such training is may appear in our minds. Research is not very conclusive on this point: some studies report a reasonable degree of success, whereas others report only limited success, or even student resistance that would mean a negative result, of course.

VLS can be really useful and productive in our learners, but we have to be aware of both sides; the positive and the negative one. Not all strategies may be appropriate for all students; we have to pay attention to our students' necessities and their differences, and considering all these facts, then we can incorporate VLS to our classes.

To sum up we can say that VLS that are well used may be a synonym of getting positive results from learners, but if the use we realize is not the right one, then the results will not be positive at all.

## 8. ACTIVITIES

Choosing the right activities for our students may be one of the most important steps in their process of acquisition of vocabulary. We cannot imagine a process of learning without activities to fix all that new knowledge, to remind what they may have forgotten, or simply to help them to learn some new vocabulary.

There are several types of activities that we can introduce in our classes, but the type of activity we finally choose will depend on our own opinion as teachers, or it may also depend on the type of students we have in class. We must consider both aspects to obtain good results and to try to make our learners learn as much as possible. Choosing the right activities for a concrete type of learners (Secondary School students in this case), may mean having successful results.

### 8.1. DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

There are as many different types of activities as our imagination can build, but I will comment some of them considering which of those activities would be the most appropriate for Spanish Secondary School students of English as a foreign language.

According to Jeremy Harmer (2007), at beginners levels use the typical procedures of explaining and practicing. For example, we can show our students pictures on flashcards showing people in different states (tired, sad, happy, etc...) and we say how that person is pointing to it (he is happy, she is sad and so on). After that we take another picture and we teach our students the next word (she is tired for example) and we make our students to repeat the words we are trying to teach to them.

We can assume that not all students will know the same lexical items. A way of taking some benefit from this is to help the class to build their own vocabulary list. For example, if students are working on an unit about sports, we can put a diagram on the board and they can add all the different sports they know. While they are adding words to that diagram on the board, we can help them for example with pronunciation or spelling, and when the diagram is completed by students, we can add any missing word that we think it is important.

Other typical activity in Secondary School is to fill gaps. We can prepare activities about any topic that we are studying at that moment, for example if we are learning vocabulary about clothes we can bring into a class a text about it and make our students fill gaps just by

inference by the context but I think that Secondary School students would definitely like more to fill gaps in songs. We can choose any song we find that they like and that has vocabulary we find interesting, or even about the topic we have been studying.

#### 8.1.1. *Direct vocabulary learning*

According to Nation (1990), it is useful and important to differentiate between “*direct vocabulary learning*” and “*indirect vocabulary learning*”. In “*direct vocabulary learning*”, as its proper name indicates, the focus of their attention is on activities and exercises of vocabulary. These activities, for example, would be guessing words from context, vocabulary games, learning lists of words, etc...

#### 8.1.2. *Indirect vocabulary learning*

According to Nation (1990) in “*indirect vocabulary learning*” the learners’ attention is not focused on vocabulary learning directly. Students are supposed to learn the vocabulary without knowing they are learning it. This means that the focus of attention will not be on the vocabulary itself, but even this way they will learn vocabulary in an indirect manner. But certain conditions must apply for such learning to occur.

1. First, the learners must be interested in understanding the message. From the point of view of vocabulary learning, this interest creates a need to understand the unknown words in the message.
2. The message should contain some items that are just outside the learner’s present level of achievement. These items, however, should be understandable from the context in which they occur. This includes both language and nonlanguage contexts.
3. The learners should not feel worried or threatened by their contact with the foreign language.

There is a place for both direct and indirect vocabulary learning activities. This is in fact another way of saying that contact with language in use should be given more time than decontextualized activities.

## 8.2. EXAMPLES OF VOCABULARY ACTIVITIES

According to Nation (1990), the two most commonly used ways of investigating vocabulary size involve the use of a dictionary or a frequency count. In the dictionary method, the investigator randomly chooses words from the dictionary. One method would be to choose the second word on every tenth page of the dictionary, depending, of course, on how many words were needed for the test. The learners are tested on these words. Various types of tests could be used with second language learners –for example:

✓ Multiple choice tests

- a tome*
1. a rough split
  2. a pain in the back
  3. a large, heavy book
  4. a type of horse

✓ Translation tests

*A tome* \_\_\_\_\_

✓ Instead of the tested word appearing alone, it could be put into a simple nondefining context:

*It is a tome* \_\_\_\_\_

In such a test it is important to use the biggest dictionary possible.

According to McCarthy & O'Dell (2001), there are many different topics to organize new words to be learned. For example some words in English originated by the names of people:

- ✓ *braille*: (name of a writing system used by blind people) derived from Louis Braille, the name of its French inventor.
- ✓ *nicotine*: (chemical present in tobacco) from the 16<sup>th</sup> century French diplomat, Jean Nicot, who introduced tobacco to France.

Some other words in English come from the names of its original place:

- ✓ *hamburger*: (famous American ground beef sandwich) named after the city Hamburg, Germany.
- ✓ *gypsy*: (member of a particular group of traveling people) from people who were once thought to have come from Egypt.

These are only some examples of words with interesting origins. There are some others like “*Sandwich*” that has an interesting origin. We can teach new vocabulary telling our students every story behind every new word, and after that we can make an activity using those new words. For example, they have to list the words in two columns, grouping them correctly.

Another type of activity we can realize with our students is the one in which we provide some concrete topic in class, they can choose some of them and we make a list about the topic chosen. Some examples of these topics are the following:

- a) personal identification
- b) house and home
- c) trade, profession, occupation
- d) free time, entertainment
- e) travel
- f) relations with other people
- g) health and welfare
- h) education
- i) shopping
- j) food and drink
- k) services
- l) places
- m) weather



This list was produced for use in a given context. It is not exhaustive, nor would it necessarily be appropriate in other contexts.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

After all the revisions made about the acquisition of vocabulary by students of English as a foreign language, we can appreciate several conclusions. First of all, the different levels of knowing a word are listed and analyzed, and after that process, we can finally understand the different ways in which we can know a word, since the receptive and productive knowledge are different degrees in the process, being the receptive one the first that appears (at least in most of the cases), and the productive knowledge later.

We also get to know the importance that individual variation of each student may have on the process of learning a new language, including their different social backgrounds, and how this may influence positive or negatively in how they learn.

Concerning to teachers, it is very important that they bear in mind the individual necessities of their students, and it is also important to try to make the classes as interesting and entertaining as possible, since the best way to teach vocabulary is trying to seem that they are not studying or learning, but instead it should appear to be a natural process, and having fun in class may mean learning without being conscious that they are learning.

According to vocabulary learning strategies, we have to recommend to our students which ones are more appropriate for every learner, but we have to consider the whole learning context, and depending on the number of the variables commented on the project, the results and usefulness of these strategies will be better or worse in each case.

And finally, we cannot forget the importance of vocabulary activities to help in the process of learning those new words, or maybe just to remind them some of the vocabulary taught already, just to make sure that they do not forget it. We have to choose between “direct vocabulary learning” or “indirect vocabulary learning” activities, or maybe use a mix of both to teach that new vocabulary. But the most important point is to keep our students interested and entertained with activities, so it would be a right option to use songs they may like to make them fill some missed words in gaps for example, or any other type of activity that may result interesting for learners, that way they will not get bored and consequently they will learn more and better.

## CONCLUSIONES

Después de todas las revisiones realizadas sobre la adquisición de vocabulario por parte de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, podemos apreciar varias conclusiones. Primero, los diferentes niveles en que se conoce una palabra son enumerados y analizados, y después de ese proceso, podemos entender finalmente las diferentes formas en las que podemos conocer una palabra, ya que el conocimiento receptivo y productivo son diferentes grados en dicho proceso, siendo el receptivo el primero que aparece (al menos en la mayoría de los casos), y el conocimiento productivo el que aparece después.

También llegamos a conocer la importancia que la variable individual de cada estudiante puede tener en el proceso de aprendizaje de una nueva lengua, incluyendo sus diferentes fondos sociales, y cómo esto puede influir, tanto de manera positiva como negativa, en cómo aprenden.

En lo que a profesores concierne, es muy importante que tengan en mente las necesidades individuales de cada estudiante, y también es importante intentar hacer las clases tan interesantes y entretenidas como nos sea posible, ya que la mejor forma de enseñar vocabulario es intentando que parezca que no están estudiando o aprendiendo, y que así parezca ser un proceso natural, ya que divertirse en clase puede significar aprender sin ser conscientes de que están aprendiendo.

En cuanto a las estrategias de aprendizaje de vocabulario, tenemos que recomendar a nuestros alumnos cuáles son las más apropiadas para cada uno de ellos, pero tenemos que tener en cuenta el contexto de aprendizaje completo, y dependiendo del número de variables comentadas en este proyecto, los resultados y utilidad de estas estrategias serán mejores o peores en cada caso.

Y finalmente, no podemos olvidarnos de la importancia de las actividades de vocabulario para ayudar en el proceso de aprendizaje de esas nuevas palabras, o quizá solo para recordar algo del vocabulario aprendido, simplemente para asegurarnos de que no lo olvidan. Debemos elegir entre actividades de “aprendizaje directo de vocabulario” o “aprendizaje indirecto de vocabulario”, o quizá usar una mezcla de ambas para enseñar nuevo vocabulario. Pero el punto más importante es mantener el interés de nuestros alumnos en las actividades, y también que les resulten entretenidas, así que una buena opción sería usar canciones que a ellos les gusten y realizar una actividad para rellenar los huecos que falten con vocabulario que nos resulte apropiado por ejemplo, u otro tipo de actividad que resulte interesante y

entretenida para los alumnos, de ese modo no se aburrirán y en consecuencia aprenderán más y mejor.

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