SCIENCE CONNECTS PEOPLE

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL OF

2026 / No. 1(1)

Contemporary Pedagogical and Philological Research

DEVELOPING VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE THROUGH READING ARTICLES: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR B2-LEVEL ENGLISH LEARNERS

Qo‘ziboyeva Dilfuza

Uzbekistan state world language university, Department of English philology

+998 91 521 12 07

d.kuzibaeva07@gmail.com

Abstract. While reading is considered the most effective method for learning new words in addition to basic reading, vocabulary knowledge can’t be learned from reading alone. This article provides a brief overview of studies investigating the potential for vocabulary acquisition when students study English at B2 level using reading material. It reviews first the notion of lexical coverage thresholds, then looks at incidental learning, repetition, task involvement, and to five strategies: graded reading, extensive reading, deriving meaning from text, selective use of glosses and dictionaries, and audio-assisted reading. The evidence points to the acquisition of words by reading. The number of words acquired from a single text, however, is few and they are retained only briefly unless they are repeated and reinforced through other exposures. The article ends by saying that learners should have a programme that provides some challenging, well-levelled reading, as well as small chunks of carefully targeted word work instruction. Implications for philology students are discussed.

Keywords: vocabulary acquisition, reading, B2, extensive reading, lexical coverage are the keywords.

Introduction

Once a learner is past the beginner level, he or she encounters new words primarily through reading, but reading is not a skill that automatically teaches vocabulary. At the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001) learners can grasp the general meaning of complex texts.

However, their comprehension difficulties are frequently due to vocabulary. Words with which the reader is unfamiliar slow him down and force him to skim through the text, and if they are too many, he can't read the text without help.

How can articles be used to build B2 learners' vocabulary for long-term use? It is based on research literature on lexical coverage (Hu & Nation, 2000; Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010; Nation, 2006), incidental learning (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001; Waring & Takaki, 2003; Webb & Chang, 2015), and reading support (Hulstijn et al., 1996). There are 3 parts to the argument. The level of difficulty of a text should correspond to the student's vocabulary level. Secondly, a single reading yields relatively small and weak effects, which need to be repeated and expanded. Thirdly, intentional word processing after reading will make each hour of reading more productive. The final part is about the implications of this for philology students.

Coverage is the percentage of words in a text that the reader recognizes (first step in any reading-based vocabulary program). Hu and Nation (2000) gave learners 80%, 90%, 95% and 100% coverages of a text and tested their comprehension by means of a multiple choice question and a written recall question. Only most readers achieved the targets on both tests at 100% coverage, and a minority at 90% and 95%. Based on this evidence, Nation (2006) suggested that the target for unassisted reading is 98% or approximately 1 unknown word for every 50 words.

Nation (2006) estimated that 8,000-9,000 word families are required to be able to read 98% of written texts like novels and newspapers, and 6,000-7,000 for spoken texts. The same study demonstrated that for a graded reader of The Picture of Dorian Gray, coverage of approximately 3000 word families and the proper nouns accounted for 98% of the text. Laufer and Ravenhorst-Kalovski (2010) proposed 95% coverage (around 4,000 – 5,000 word families) and an optimum level of 98% (around 8,000 word families) and observed that there was a benefit to adding just a few more word families. The authors of Schmitt and Schmitt (2014) said that the 3,000 most frequent word

families should be learned and that until the word families in the mid-frequency band around 9,000 are acquired, students cannot use the language proficiently.

These numbers should not be a discouragement to the learners; they have a definite implication. The thresholds are higher than most B2 readers will have access to, and unadapted articles will typically have more than a reader will be able to cope with without assistance. Selecting and using texts that are suitable for students and providing textual supports, including glossing, are therefore essential; they make learning from texts possible. Nation (2006) also reminds us that the 98% target assumes that no dictionary is used.

Incidental learning is the learning mode that most often is given credit for the gains in word knowledge that readers obtain while reading for meaning. It has the potential, but also clear limits as Waring and Takaki (2003) have shown. Fifteen students from Japan's university read a graded reader of 400 headwords, 25 of which were target words that they probably had not previously encountered. On average, they could immediately recognize the form of 15.3 of these words, and translate 4.6. After 3 months their scores on the 3 tests were 8.4, 6.1, and 0.9. Low frequency words scored near zero and the authors made their estimate that they remembered about one low frequency word for every hour of reading. They also warned that multiple-choice exams have the potential of overassessing learning.

More promising results were found by Webb and Chang (2015) with a different design. One hundred and twenty-two Taiwanese learners of English were engaged in a reading program, in which they read and listened to ten graded readers. They improved approximately 44% right after the intervention and approximately 37% 3 months after the intervention. The number of occurrences of the target words was not significantly correlated with learning, so the authors did not take frequency into account as one of the factors. The two studies are not directly comparable, as they vary in the amount of reading, include audio versus no audio, and in the method of knowledge measurement.

SCIENCE CONNECTS PEOPLE

Overall, however, they indicate that the amount of reading and the guidance provided is as important as the content of any particular text.

The variable of repetition is significant. Hulstijn et al. (1996) had French learners from The Netherlands read a short story, a short story with marginal glosses, a short story with a dictionary, or a short story without any type of help. The two supported conditions resulted in more learning than the unsupported condition. Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) provided an explanation in the "Involvement Load Hypothesis". They believed that retention was directly related to the learner's involvement with a word, which involved need (does the task require the word?), search (will learner look for the meaning or form of the word?), and evaluation (will learner compare the word with others or check it against the context?). The greater the involvement load, the more one is expected to retain the task; therefore, it is expected that tasks with a greater involvement load will lead to improved retention rates than those in which a word is merely met.

The five strategies above are supported by the research. These are not mutually exclusive–rather the best programs do both. The evidence for coverage is to texts where 95% (and ideally 98%%) of words are known. For B2 learners this is reading most graded readers or articles that are slightly edited with the selective use of authentic articles. In this regard, Nation's (2006) example of The Picture of Dorian Gray demonstrates that a simplified text can result in using approximately 3,000 word families. According to Day and Bamford (1998), extensive reading is based on the assumption that learners should read a significant amount of text which is within their language competence. The argument is that the repeated, in-context exposure to words provided by volume is something that no single text can provide and the results in Webb and Chang's (2015) study were the result of such a program.

Ideally, learners should attempt to infer a word from context rather than seek it out, otherwise they will lose their flow and understanding of the passage. A guess is

SCIENCE CONNECTS PEOPLE

only as good as the context around it and Hulstijn et al. (1996) reported that readers sometimes pass over words or make incorrect inferences.

Since in Hulstijn et al. (1996) repetition seemed to be more effective with support, a teacher can highlight a limited number of relevant words in the text of an article, preferably those that will be central to the argument or that may recur several times. The data in Nation's (2006) 98% is calculated without the use of a dictionary; yet, used in this manner support can make an otherwise difficult article accessible. The stops on the dictionary, on the other hand, are likely to interrupt the flow of reading and to reduce the amount of reading that the research prefers.

The decay numbers of Waring and Takaki (2003) indicate that a word's presence in a story is inconsistent, occurring only once in a typical story. The Involvement Load Hypothesis (Laufer and Hulstijn, 2001) offers an insight into how to increase involvement following reading. Learners have the option of choosing words they want to use to write a summary (need), research the definition or pronunciation of specific words (search), and use a near synonym to evaluate the meaning of a new word or as a choice for a sentence (need). They are short and focus on the specific words the learner just learned, but are repeated over the course of days and weeks, as the results of three months demonstrate.

Learners were required to read and listen to the graded readers in Webb and Chang's (2015) study. Audio can be used in a longer text to set a steady pace to it, as well as being the spoken version of a word. As the results apply to the program as a whole, audio should be considered a promising supplemental intervention, and not as a standalone intervention for the gains.

Learners of English philology read for two objectives: to enhance their language and to analyse it. This is an advantage, since their reading is varied (linguistic articles, literary works, journalism, criticism), and they need to use words of medium and high frequency and special senses. It also comes with a risk. Academic reading is typically

authentic and dense, and the coverage research indicates that it will generally be below the 95%–98% comfort zone for a B2 reader.

Three practices follow. Students first should maintain two reading tracks: one that has material graded or lightly adapted for fluency and repeated word meetings and one that is slower and deeper and is used for reading authentic articles that are required for their course. Second, on the intensive track they may apply a brief procedure of guessing, marking, verifying and reviewing. They take a short break after their first reading, then select a few common and/or helpful words, look them up in a dictionary, and incorporate each word into their own sentence within a day or two. Thirdly, they must bring it back after days and weeks, as Waring and Takaki (2003) demonstrate how much is lost in three months if nothing is done. The practical recommendations for teachers include selecting texts for the coverage of the learners, giving selective glosses and creating one high-involving task in each reading lesson (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001).

Conclusion

Vocabulary introduced by reading is available to B2 learners and is unlikely to be encountered in spoken language under specific circumstances. Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski (2010) and Nation (2006) indicate that the minimum for texts to be close to the learner's level is 95% and the target is 98%. Research on learning indicates that there is only limited retention of a single reading (Waring & Takaki, 2003) but large gains have been maintained over three months in a sustained program of gradually increasing reading with audio (Webb & Chang, 2015). The amount of learning that takes place during an encounter is determined by the support and task design (Hulstijn et al., 1996; Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001). The best compromise for philology students is thus a balanced one: plenty of reading at a moderate rate, careful and assisted reading of challenging articles, and brief and repeated subsequent work on selected words. Future research should be conducted with B2 level learners as a focus since the studies

SCIENCE CONNECTS PEOPLE

reviewed here were not all conducted at this level and directly compare reading-only and reading-while-listening conditions.

References

1. Council of Europe. (2001). Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Cambridge University Press.

2. Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (1998). Extensive reading in the second language classroom. Cambridge University Press.

3. Hu, M., & Nation, I. S. P. (2000). Unrecognized level of vocabulary and reading comprehension. Reading in a Foreign Language, 13(1), 403–430.

4. Hulstijn, J. H., Hollander, M., & Greidanus, T. (1996). The effect of incidental vocabulary learning by advanced foreign language students: the influence of marginal glosses, dictionary use and the reoccurrence of unknown words. The Modern Language Journal, 80(3), 327–339. https://doi.org/10.2307/329439

5. Laufer, B. and Hulstijn, J. (2001). The construct of task-induced involvement in incidental vocabulary acquisition in a second language. Applied Linguistics, 22(1), 1–26.

6. Laufer, B., & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, G. C. (2010). Lexical threshold revisited: Lexical text coverage, reading comprehension, and vocabulary size of the learners. Reading in a Foreign Language, 22(1), 15–30.

7. Nation, I. S. P. (2006). What size vocabulary is needed for reading? What size vocabulary is needed for listening? The Canadian Modern Language Review 63(1):59-82.

8. Schmitt, N. & Schmitt, D. (2014). Reconsideration of frequency and vocabulary size in vocabulary teaching of L2. Language Teaching, 47(4), 484–503.

9. Waring, R., & Takaki, M. (2003). At what rate do learners learn and retain new vocabulary from reading a graded reader? Reading in a Foreign Language, 15(2), 130–163.

10. Webb, S., & Chang, A. C.-S. (2015). The Effect of Frequency and Distribution of Occurrence on L2 Vocabulary Learning by Extensive Reading with Audio Support: The Case of English as a Second Language (L2) Language Teaching Research, 19(6), 667–686.

SCIENCE CONNECTS PEOPLE