

Chapter 66

Vocabulary Learning and Consolidation With Mobile Application

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ABSTRACT

Language learners at all levels need a way of recording and organising newly learned vocabulary for consolidation and for future reference. Listing words alphabetically in a vocabulary notebook has been a traditional way of organising this information. However, paper-based notes are limited in terms of space (learners often run out of space for certain categories; for others the space might be unused) and time (handwritten pages deteriorate over time and cannot easily be updated). Organizing vocabulary in more meaningful categories might make it easier to learn. Textbooks, for example, often introduce new vocabulary thematically. Words can also be organised according to their grammatical class or characteristics, their real world category (e.g. modes of transport, means of communication), their phonological pattern, their etymological elements, or according to when/where they were learnt. This research experiments how the mobile learning of a lexical spreadsheet can be used for the consolidation of and reference to new vocabulary. Offering the learner multiple ways of organising vocabulary at the same time – combining all of the approaches mentioned above, the resource can easily be modified and updated. Importantly, in keeping with autonomous learning theory, the spreadsheet is designed to encourage learners to take more responsibility for their own vocabulary learning and to approach this process more systematically. The resource can be used from any mobile smart phone, tablet or i-Pad.

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INTRODUCTION

New technologies such as the smartphone, tablet and I-pad and other mobile internet-accessible devices have become increasingly available. These technologies have the potential for learners to most effectively utilize available resources. Technological innovations can increase learner interest and motivation (Bibby, 2011); provide students with increased access to target language input, interaction opportunities and feedback; and provide language tutors with an efficient means for organizing course content and interacting with students (Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson & Freynik, 2014). With the availability of new technologies as mobile learning means, more and more researchers and language practitioners are turning their attention to enhancing language learning via mobile technology devices. Particularly, these technology devices can be used for vocabulary learning. For example, learners can use mobile learning apps on smartphones and tablet devices to vocabulary (Sweeney & Moore, 2012).

Literature

Vocabulary is an essential component of language, and the most important part of foreign language knowledge for academic achievement (Willis & Ohashi, 2012). Although listening, speaking, reading and writing are the skills that language learners need to master, it is indeed vocabulary that is central to all these four skills, because it is hard to develop any of the four skills without sufficient vocabulary. There is a growing recognition in the importance of vocabulary in language teaching, as summarized by Milton (2012) in the guest editorial in *The Language Learning Journal*, 40(1). In this issue of the journal, some problems centre around vocabulary teaching and learning: Tschichold's (2012) study revealed that only a quarter of all the words presented to learners in their teaching texts are, on average, recognised after five years of study. The limited vocabulary presented in the textbooks, and particularly the focus on only the most frequent vocabulary explains the low levels of students' vocabulary knowledge. Along the same line, Alsaif and Milton (2012) discovered in their study that lexical input in the textbooks is not merely small but also focused heavily on the most frequent words and they further claimed that when the vocabulary levels of learners are already so low they cannot communicate, and therefore it seems self-defeating to omit this crucial element of language development. Konstantakis and Alexiou (2012) analysed lexical loading, and found the lexical loading in the language courses falls far short of the quantities necessary to attain communication. In addition, they stated that the time made available for learning in the syllabus is severely limited. If learners are to progress to the vocabulary levels needed to achieve the communicative goals of the course, ample time is to be made available outside the classroom for lexical learning. Milton (2010) warned that the syllabuses we now use are lexically deficient and the point is further stressed by Schmitt, Jiang and Grabe (2011) that learners are not given the chance in learning materials to learn large amounts of vocabulary, but they cannot achieve their communicative goals without this vocabulary. To ignore the existence of the thresholds in vocabulary knowledge damages language teaching (Milton, 2010), and the needs to find ways to consolidate vocabulary that students have learnt, to extend vocabulary from the limitation of textbooks and classroom settings, and to raise the lexical input and loading with ample after-class time have come to the fore. Milton (2010) calls for a system for integrating the required vocabulary into current language teaching approaches. To integrate sufficient vocabulary into language teaching approaches, Pauwels (2012) studied different materials and strategies used by students in guided self-study of academic vocabulary. The result of his study shows that 'sufficiently informative' materials proved the most effective, though his students tended

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