Effective and Enjoyable Foreign Language Teaching

Hana Suchankova

Abstract

Bearing in mind, that the knowledge of a sufficient amount of vocabulary is an essential qualification for being able to achieve communication goals in different social roles and communicative contexts, we should try, use and exploit all the techniques and practices, which we find useful. At the beginning, the contribution briefly repeats the basic psychological principles of human memory function. It further presents the results of testing different types of memory and the vocabulary acquisition questionnaire, carried out among our university students. On the basis of this, it endeavours to suggest useful practices and techniques, capable of intensifying the results of our teaching. Even if not all complex approaches are suitable for every teaching environment, the employment of a single element can bring enjoyment and effectiveness into our classrooms.

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1. Introduction

Do we pay enough attention to vocabulary while using modern communication methods?

Both the public and learners themselves evaluate vocabulary knowledge very highly. That is because lexical errors impair communication to a greater extent than mistakes in grammar or
syntax. Vocabulary has got a greater communicative value.

Vocabulary is the designating part of the communication act. Knowledge of lexis is necessary for comprehension.

Harmer (1991:153) says: “If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh”.

2. Problem Statement
Our brain is the most complicated and important organ of our body. It is connected with our health state and physical development. The capacity is incredible. Human brain consists of 15 billion neuron cells and they can create 10 x more synapses. They build an incredibly sophisticated network of 500 000 kms neuron fibre. But unfortunately we only use 4 – 10 % of its capacity; some scientists say even less than 1 %.

Both hemispheres work at the same time but have different roles. The left hemisphere serves high psychological functions, it has got centres for reading, writing, speaking, abstract thinking, logical memory a.s.o., it forms our active language. The right hemisphere enables us to understand intonation, emotional background, ensures our sense of space, humour, music, shapes and colours, works with passive, receptive language. Whereas the grammar centre is in the front of the left hemisphere, the vocabulary centre is in the back.

3. Research Questions
Whatever the linguists call and explain vocabulary, they all agree that it is very important and its learning, teaching and acquiring is of the utmost importance. But it is also very difficult; sometimes learning active vocabulary is considered to be the most difficult part of learning a language. That is because vocabulary is mostly acquired by employing our verbal memory: logics, deducing, analyses and other operations play just a secondary role.

Can we make learning vocabulary effective, efficient and enjoyable at the same time? Can we make this knowledge sustainable? What methods of presenting vocabulary is the most effective according to students?

4. Purpose of the Study
The reason why cannot use more of our brain is because we devote more attention to the left hemisphere and abandon the right one. The tuition at schools consists with 90 % of left hemisphere activities, but employing the right one can be a good help.

Another limiting factor is our learning style. Psychologists usually distinguish 4 – 5 styles: visual, auditive, haptic, verbal and communicative. These are the most important
groups and are determined by everybody’s preference entrance channels. They are further
influenced by other factors such as surrounding, individual associations, feelings, habits, a.s.o.

Another limiting factor can be our daily rhythm. Our body temperature and blood
pressure fluctuate during the course of the day and so does our energy, spirits, creativity and
memory efficiency. The best time for our short-term memory is 9 – 10 AM, whereas the most
efficient time for our long-term memory is 3 – 4 PM.

The quality of our memory, i.e. the ability to store and retrieve information, also
depends on the way we perceive and code the knowledge.

5. Research Methods

One of the tests I carried out with my students was the test of preferences for different
perception channels. The test is from Langside College Glasgow. I tested 300 students of
English and Russian, students of secondary and tertiary schools with different lengths of their
language study.

Another test I used in my research was the test of different vocabulary presentation. Different items of vocabulary were presented in their written forms and as pictures.

The last part of the research was in the form of a questionnaire, where students stated
their opinions as to which way of presenting new vocabulary they consider best.

6. Findings

Results of test No 1:

As you can see, the curves of sound and form follow nearly the same pattern, but the
curve of meaning is shifted towards significantly bigger figures. The statistic method ANOVA proved, that there is a relation between the perception channel and the effectiveness of memory. Even the test criterion shows that the most vocabulary is remembered, if it is coded by its meaning, if the word – logical memory is employed. And the correlation between the effectiveness and the length of study was 0,0867 for Russian and -0,21566 for English, which says that this fact is true for all stages of language learning, even for very early ones, and for both above mentioned languages.

Results of test No 2:

![Graph showing visualization increase in memory effectiveness]

We can read from the graph that the visualization significantly increased the effectiveness of the memory; the increase was by more than 19 %.

Results of the Questionnaire:

![Pie chart showing responses]

A – with a Czech translation  
B – in a phrase, structure  
C – with an Engl. Explanation  
D – in a text  
E – other (using it, tech. devices)
A large number of the students require a Czech translation, only 1/6 of them prefer a structure and only 6% want to learn it with an English explanation. Some prefer a combination of different ways, which is declared to be the most effective.

About 7/8 of the students consider drill repetition of more difficult pronunciation useful. 2/3 of the respondents are of the opinion, that presenting related vocabulary makes remembering new vocabulary easier and the same number considers presenting words with similar or opposite meaning a good way to make learning new words easier.

7. Conclusions
If our learning or teaching should be effective, we have to employ all senses and both hemispheres.

We remember better everything which is at the beginning or at the end, which is encoded with emotions, both positive and negative, which has a special importance for us, which is different from the others, which develops associations, brings memories, which is somehow connected to what we know, which is perceived by more channels, which suits our learning style and is logically stored and repeated. If we have all these aspects in mind and use different aids, strategies and elements mentioned above, we can make vocabulary learning and acquisition easier, more effective and enjoyable at the same time.

We have to agree to Vera Birkenbihl quotation: “There is no bad memory, just the bad ways of construction”.

8. References