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The Use of Narrative Framework in Learning L2 Vocabulary Among Malaysian ESL Learners

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Abstract: Reading comprehension relates strongly to vocabulary knowledge and is the core component of reading instruction. Having wide vocabulary knowledge helps learners to learn new knowledge and concepts quicker than those with less vocabulary. However, many learners do not achieve the goals of vocabulary learning. This could be due to the wrong technique used. Hence, this paper aims to investigate how narrative framework helps L2 learners understand and learn vocabulary. 20 participants of the same proficiency level were involved in this study. The experiment conducted in this study intends to compare two different conditions; 1) a condition in which target words were embedded in a series of sentences within a narrative framework (story condition) and 2) a condition in which similar sentences have no connection to each other (unrelated condition). Throughout the study, the participants were required to answer a series of tests which was divided into four phases. The data collected was then analyzed by using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The results show that narrative framework appears to be an effective technique to the particular participants in learning vocabulary as they are able to recall the vocabulary which are used in the experiment. Therefore, narrative framework may be seen as having a pedagogical implication in learning vocabulary.

Keywords: L2 vocabulary, narrative framework, reading comprehension

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension has been undeniably related to vocabulary knowledge. Reading comprehension is said to be the core component of reading instruction (Sedita, 2005). Vocabulary knowledge is important because it provides access to background knowledge, verbalize ideas, and communicate effectively and understand or acquire new and abstract concepts. With a larger vocabulary, students should be able to learn new knowledge and concepts much quicker compare to students with less vocabulary (Chall & Jacobs, 2003).

However, Schmitt (2008) notes that many learners fail to achieve even moderate vocabulary learning goals. Studies have shown that when learners generate stories using target words in a technique known as narrative chaining, they improve performance in short-term & working memory tasks (McNamara & Scott, 2001). This technique even develops a powerful mnemonic device for the retention of vocabulary (Brown & Clark, 1969).

However, though some mnemonic devices are effective for the retention of vocabulary, learners seldom engage spontaneously in the more complex processing which would lead to just rote memorization (Hulstijn, 1997; Schmitt, 1997; Atay & Ozbulgan, 2007; Barcroft, 2009). This study examines the effect of a teacher-provided – as opposed to student generated- story / narration of L2 word forms.