

In the name of God

**A Thesis submitted to the Graduate Studies Office in Partial Fulfillment of
the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a
Foreign Language**

**The Effect of Teaching Etymology Strategy on
Learning
Vocabulary by Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners**

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Dedicated with gratitude to my beloved family

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the impact of etymology strategy instruction on the development of vocabulary of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Etymology, knowledge of origin of words, roots, and affixes, has proved to be a controversial issue and a question of long debate with regard to its impact on the process of vocabulary learning. This study employed etymology strategy in an experimental design for the students to study different tables of common roots, affixes with their meaning in order to get the meaning of unknown words based on the meaning of each part. Data collection involved administering an etymology test among 60 male & female participants of age range 20-30. Tests were administered both before and after the procedure in both control and experimental groups. Data analysis of this study displayed that teaching of etymology strategy reinforce vocabulary learning of participants in experimental group.

Key words: etymology strategy, vocabulary learning.

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1. 1 Background and purpose

To acquire a foreign language requires improvement of some skills and components. To achieve this goal, the learner should develop and use some strategies. Strategies help learners to learn better. As a teacher, the researcher was always engaged in finding a way to help students in learning process and understanding which methods of learning was useful and which one should be discarded. Second language acquisition depends crucially on the development of strong vocabulary.

Vocabulary plays a core role in language teaching and learning. It lays a basis for speaking, listening, reading and writing. If one has not an extensive amount of vocabulary and good strategies to acquire new words, learners usually accomplish less than their potential. A significant research suggests that one difference between achieving students and non-achieving students is their level of vocabulary development (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004).

Researchers have focused their attention on the need for second language learners to optimize their vocabulary knowledge (Singleton, 1999; Schmitt, 2000). Therefore, development of word knowledge is an important factor in learning second language.

Unfortunately, teaching and learning vocabulary have been undervalued in the field of foreign and second language acquisition. As Sahandari and Kafipour and Abdullah (2009) state that vocabulary learning strategies are a part of language learning strategies which have received more attention since the late 1970s and their investigation has advanced understanding of the processes learner use to develop their skills in foreign language. However, strategies are complex and involve choice in order to help learners require knowledge and should benefit from training.

Brown (2001) in his book "teaching by principles" criticizes one of the causalities of the early approaches to CLT and believes a loss of concerned focus on the lexical forms

of language while traditional language teaching methods highlighted vocabulary study. There was a period of time when the teaching and learning of vocabulary were undervalued. Towards the end of twentieth century, there was a revival of systematic attention to vocabulary learning across a number of proficiency levels and contexts to the extent that in current view, attention to lexical forms is now more central to the development of language curricula.

During the early decades of last century, many problems arose by ignoring learning vocabulary in the process of language learning and learning proficiency. Words, like facts, are difficult to remember out of context. Remembering is greatly facilitated when learner has a body of information with which to associate either a word or a fact. Vocabulary acquisition is very important in the English language learning and their various ways of teaching and learning vocabulary. But students still have many difficulties in achieving high proficiency approach. Using strategy such as etymology is a good way to acquire English vocabulary knowledge. By studying a language with an etymological focus it is possible to discover the deep roots of the word structure(s) and meanings.

In this study, etymology strategy for learning vocabulary and using the useful methods is selected. The importance of vocabulary on reading and other skills should not be overlooked by teachers because vocabulary knowledge affect reading comprehension, speaking, writing and we know that communication breaks down especially when speaker doesn't use the right words. Davoudi and Yousefi (2009) believe that many of the learners' difficulties, both receptively and productively, result from an inadequate vocabulary, and even when they are at higher levels of language competence and performance, they still feel in need of learning vocabulary. Therefore, the need for vocabulary learning is obvious for any EFL learner. So vocabulary learning is not an easy task and is beset by many road blocks, forgetting the word, remembering the word but not

knowing how to use it, but forgetting the pronunciation, multiple measure of the same word, multiple words meaning the same thing, and just the sheer number of words to learn, makes it look like a daunting task indeed.

According to Kaivanpanah and zandi (2009), grammatical knowledge is also one of the most important factors influencing reading and successful reading is also influenced by vocabulary knowledge. This kind of knowledge is the main part of study in etymology approach.

With regard to our own country's pedagogical situation, with the states of English as a foreign language, and with the still inevitable importance of reading comprehension skill, any effort investigation which can facilitate the process of reading comprehension for language learner seems to be justifiable. Reading is the most important skill to develop vocabulary.

Before investigating the premises and practices of etymology, it is useful to examine the meaning inherent in the word itself. According to *Dictionary of language Teaching and Applied linguistics* (Richards and Schmidt, 2002), etymology is “the study of the origin of words, and their history and changes in their meaning”. Etymology deals with the origin or derivation of words. When learner knows the meaning of a Latin or Greek root, prefix, or suffix; it helps to understand and easily remember. So many researchers believe that etymology and other vocabulary learning strategies can be used as learning tools as Erichsen (2009) states that learning vocabulary can be a tedious task and many people can benefit from mnemonic devices. He mentions etymology as mnemonic devices - little tricks that aid the memory. Pirerson (1987) believes that etymology has all the attributes of what educational psychologists term "meaningful learning". It is a type of learning connected to prior learning, more highly retainable and generalizable, making it superior to simple rote vocabulary learning. Learning words this way instead of merely learning by rote and without any relevance makes it easy to recall the word with its

meaning, and so, link the new words that learner already knows. In this field, Morrisson (2006) suggests that there are many techniques that learner can use as a device for learning vocabulary but some of them are more preferable. He adds most people learn vocabulary more easily if they have some sort of memory hook that relates the new vocabulary to some things that already know. This is because words that are morphological complex the meaning of some parts may be known they can cut down on the amount of new information to be learned.

So the memory hook researcher refers is etymologies of the morphemes making up the English words. Understanding the meaning of each morpheme and knowledge of word formation are good devices for learning vocabulary. In etymology approach, structural analysis is the main point. Learners try to know word parts and become familiar with the root and affixes and the meaning that each part implies. Analyzing word part is related to independent word-learning strategies. Based on this model, as teacher can model and teach students so as to help them figure out the meanings of unknown words on their own. Because students learn most new words incidentally, and key word-learning strategies include the efficient using of dictionary and using word parts to unlock a word meaning and using context clue.

In etymological approach, roots, suffixes and prefixes are the basic elements. Learners discover the meaning of some common Latin and Greek roots then each learner will then learn a particular root and related vocabulary words. Because each root has multiple meaning, defines multiple words containing a common ancient root and infer the meaning of some common Greek and Latin roots. So, learners can synthesize their knowledge of word origins by creating original words using Greek and Latin roots. Another way in this approach is using etymology dictionary. Learner can research etymological knowledge of words in which he compares the definition of some word with the meaning of composite roots. In etymological approach learner learn about Latin and Greek prefixes, roots, and

suffixes and figure out unfamiliar English words by recognizing their etymological structure, the building block from which they are constructed. This kind of knowledge helps learner to construct many words by building block together in a proper way and determines the meanings of thousands of English words that has seen before.

Davoudi and Yousefi (2009) states that the failure in learning vocabulary refers to old methods of teaching and learning vocabulary like rote memorization, finding word from native-language dictionary, asking the new words from teacher, writing synonyms and antonyms, writing translation and other ways which are not effective. Students are encouraged to employ the new way of learning vocabulary like using contextual clues, word association, collocation, and study the roots and affixes called etymology which is considered one of the most debatable strategies among researchers. The use of vocabulary learning strategies has accompanied the shift from the teacher-oriented to the learner-centered curriculum.

Brown and Allen (cited in Davoud & Yousefi 2009) believed poor vocabulary is one of the FL/SL learners' sources of complaint in the process of language learning. The problem arises where a poor knowledge of vocabulary impedes reading process, and serves as a stumbling block in effective communication. Lack of vocabulary knowledge is student's problem in acquiring English.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

With respect to the importance of learning vocabulary in acquisition of language, one hopes to overcome the learning vocabulary difficulties. If learners stumble over words they don't know, they cannot get the idea contained within and across sentences and comprehension would not happen. To solve this problem, teachers should train student and give them instruction in effective strategy of etymology, word formation, knowing

stem and root of a word, understanding the meaning of each part and having the ability to analyze them by combining the knowledge of roots and prefixes and suffixes, they can analyze a surprisingly large number of words.

Learning a second language involves the manipulation of main skills; speaking, writing, listening, and reading, which lead to effective communication. One crucial factor is the amount of vocabulary which forms the biggest part of meaning of any language (McCarthy, 1988). Vocabulary, however, is the biggest problem for most learners. In view of this, vocabulary acquisition is currently receiving attention in second language pedagogy and research. But it is still a contentious issue how learners acquire vocabulary effectively and efficiently or how it can best be taught.

Vocabulary is generally given little emphasis in university curriculum in Asian countries (Fan, 2003). The situation is the same in Iran as an Asian country. Generally, the emphasis on English teaching in universities in Asian countries is on the four language skills. Vocabulary teaching in many classrooms is largely incidental (Fan, 2003; Catalan, 2003). This means that when a particular word or phrase appears difficult for the students, they are given the definitions and they are encouraged to turn to dictionary to look up for meanings of words. The result is the unsatisfactory performance of students in their exam. It is high time for teachers to look into ways to enhance vocabulary knowledge in university students.

1.3 Significance of Study

As the problem conveys, the tendency towards learning vocabulary through analyzing words leads to have students involve in learning process. A brief survey of literature in the field indicates that so far etymology, especially as an effective learning strategy, has not been investigated extensively and comprehensively. This study aims to survey

student's vocabulary learning. For example, how does it affect an effect on male and female EFL learner?

Does etymology strategy as a new way of teaching and learning vocabulary has any effect on Iranian intermediate EFL student's vocabulary level? Would it be possible in a pedagogical situation like Iran for students to receive enough training on how to use and learn etymology strategy properly? In order to find a pertinent answer to these questions, the researcher conducted this study.

As far as etymology is concerned, the question related to investigating impact of etymological approach on learning vocabulary on various subjects in different pedagogical situations and under different circumstances. It is worth stating that the result of this study will have teaching, testing, and materials development implications; in that teacher will become more aware of the merits involved in applying etymology strategy in teaching reading, vocabulary and other related parts.

Words are unique and interesting. A limited vocabulary keeps the learner from expressing his real thoughts and feelings. A strong vocabulary gives him the right words to use at the right time. Vocabulary building takes patience and continued effort. Learner's vocabulary can and should be a reflection of this. So vocabularies are alive and should grow and change to meet the learner' needs.

1.4 Objectives of Study

The present study intended to investigate the application of etymology strategy on learning vocabulary. This study is mainly about trying to understand the effectiveness of strategy in one area of language learning that is vocabulary in order to possibly identify implications for teaching. This study was designed to provide baseline data for future research on vocabulary learning. The study mainly aims:

1. To explore the usefulness of etymology strategy by Iranian Intermediate EFL learner.
2. To explore the development of vocabulary knowledge and learning by Iranian intermediate EFL learner.
3. To find out the impact of this strategy on self-esteem.

Jiangwen and Binbin in their article "the role of vocabulary in ESP teaching and learning" name five important strategies in learning vocabulary. They are contextual guessing, memorizing, affix learning, repetition and recycling a word and relating the word in reality. They conclude that teaching and learning of vocabulary plays a key role in the overall structure of the language teaching program because of its basic functions in the language components. It is highly important for both teachers and learners. Learner should make a distinction between all types of English vocabulary and teacher also makes the best selection of the type of vocabulary to be taught.

1. 5 Definition of terms

Structural analysis is the process of breaking down morphologically complex words into their constituent morphemes (word meaning parts) (Bellemo, 2009).

Morphology is the knowledge of process of word formation in English- how prefixes, suffixes, base words, and Greek and Latin words combine (Templeton, 2004).

Vocabulary recognition relates to the strategies that an efficient reader employs, while reading a text, to work out of meaning of an unfamiliar word in the text (Brown, 2001).

Active (productive) vocabulary refers to language items which are used appropriately by learners in speech and writing, this range includes words which students will need to understand as well as use themselves (Uberman, 2006).

Passive (receptive) vocabulary, those language items which can only be recognized and understood in the context of reading and listening material; words which teachers want students to understand (Uberman, 2006).

Lexical knowledge as Uberman (2006) defines “lexical knowledge is a complex issue paramount to overall foreign language proficiency. It entails the ability to recognize as well as apply lexical items appropriately to situation and context of use. A lexical item, also referred to as a lexeme, is understood to represent basic abstract unit of the lexicon on the level of langue which may be realized in different grammatical forms”.

Pseudo suffixes are not real suffixes because the parts before these pseudo suffixes are not themselves roots (Buckhoff, 2009).

Stem is the combination of roots and derivational affixes (or inflectional root). The stem is therefore the longest common denominator among all word forms belonging to the same lexeme. It defines the basic structure over which inflections apply (Wiki, 2010).

1.6 Research Questions

To achieve the research objectives outlined above, the following research questions may be derived from the hypothesis:

1. Does *etymology*, as a generative strategy, bring about any variation in understanding and learning vocabulary of EFL learners?
2. Does implementing etymology strategy in the learning milieu have any effect on Iranian Intermediate EFL students' self-esteem?

1.7 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypothesis (N0) may be posed as the major hunches of the study:

1. L2 learners' use of etymology as a generative study strategy in EFL learning situation has no effect on their learning vocabulary.
2. Application of etymology strategy to the language classroom management has no impact on the improvement of Iranian Intermediate EFL students' self-esteem.

1.8 Limitations of the study

On the account of interpreting the result of this experiment, the following elements would rather be kept in mind:

1. The subjects in this study were chosen from Azad University in Torbat-e-Heidarieh. Randomizing the subjects was not possible because these groups already existed in the University. Thus subjects were intact and a quasi experimental design was implemented.
2. The subjects in this study were to be in an intermediate level. This way the researcher could consider the subjects in both groups of control and experimental were in the same level of proficiency. However, because the subjects were not randomly divided into two groups, there could be possible individual differences and the researcher could not control this variable.

3. The factor of sex was cleared up, since both female and male students in Azad University were selected.
4. The validity and the reliability of the Persian equivalent self-esteem test (Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory, 1967) are reported by Kohansal (1995) in Iranian situation. She used Cronbach's method and reported an internal consistency of 0.85.