Chapter 1:

Introduction

1.1. Background: The context of the problem

The issue of vocabulary acquisition has often been one of the most prominent concerns of the second and foreign language researchers and teachers. The main concern in this regard has been devising an efficient approach for teaching and learning new vocabulary words of a language. That is because recently vocabulary knowledge is increasingly considered to be an important building block of a language. According to McCarthy (as cited in Fan, 2003), vocabulary forms the biggest part of the meaning of any language, and vocabulary is the biggest problem for most learners.

A lot of researchers have tried to show the importance of lexis and lexical knowledge in second and foreign language learning. Segler (2001) states that vocabulary is central to second language learners since learners' vocabulary errors may interfere with communication. In Belisle's (1997) view, vocabulary acquisition is a key component to the successful development of communication and literary skills. Also Barcroft (2004) mentions two factors which underline the importance of vocabulary acquisition, namely the students' perceptions about the relative importance of vocabulary and the critical role of vocabulary knowledge in the development of grammatical competence. Other scholars like Anderson and Freebody (1981) have demonstrated the strong relationship between word knowledge and reading comprehension. (as cited in Segler, 2001).

This importance assigned to vocabulary knowledge has lead many researchers to look for different variables which might have an effect on the process of efficient vocabulary learning. Recently there have been a lot of research programs with the purpose of finding some effective techniques for teaching and learning new vocabulary items. Hulstijn and Laufer (2001), for instance, try to show the effect of the involvement load induced by the vocabulary task on efficient and permanent vocabulary acquisition, claiming that the higher

the rate of the involvement load, the most efficient and long lasting vocabulary acquisition takes place. In other cases of research, different other variables which are claimed to have an effect on vocabulary acquisition are examined, of which we can point to Barcroft (2004), De Groot and Keijzer (2000), Kang (1995), Muncie (2002), Rott, Williams, & Cameron (2002), Schmitt (1998).

Some other studies in the literature like the ones mentioned in the previous paragraphs devise a number of techniques and suggestions for teaching vocabulary in the context of the classroom, however, not many studies have examined the role of the students' native language in L2 vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary like other components of the target language has usually been taught in the target language, with the students' native language being banned in this process. As Cook (2008) puts it, by concentrating on only the target language we are limiting the students' horizons. Because in this way the specific characteristics of L2 users are ignored, including the ability to codeswitch from one language to another , the merit which the monolingual native speaker does not possess (Cook, 2008). Some other important features of the students' native language in this regard like the translation or interpretation process can be of utmost importance which would be totally neglected by sticking to only the target language in the process of teaching second and foreign language (Cook, 2008).

Another important technique which has recently been emphasized to be practical in teaching vocabulary is presenting new vocabulary words in context. It is believed that presenting the new vocabulary words in context makes their learning more efficient (Rodriguez & Sadoski, 2000; Kang, 1995). Various studies have shown that explaining the meaning of words in context is a very good method for learning vocabulary and this has been proven to be very successful (Engelbar & Theuerkauf, 1999).What seems obvious in the studies like these is the exclusion of the students' native language or mother tongue use,

including the translation method and interpretation, which is the second phase of the bilingual method as proposed by Dodson (1967) (as cited in Cook, 2008), as a potentially important factor in learning vocabulary. This means that the inclusion of the students' mother tongue in the process of vocabulary teaching on the part of the teacher and learning on the part of the students can have a better result especially in situations where the target language is considered to be a foreign language, this is because in such situations the students' and the teacher's access to L2 recourses is rather limited and they can rely more on their L1 capabilities to get a better understanding of the meaning of the new words.

The studies which support the context method for teaching new vocabulary items almost neglect the students' mother tongue use in any form and if there is any use of it, that is limited to just giving an equivalent for that single word in the context. In this way the students only experience the use of the new word in a target language context and they do not find a chance to translate and interpret the whole sentential context including the newly presented word in their own language. By not following the process of the translation method and the interpretation model, the students can not get a more precise and holistic idea of what the appropriate usages and uses of the new words are. However, the translation method is one aspect of putting the students' mother tongue in to use, the students' native language can be used in the teacher's instructions for tasks, his explanations about the newly taught words and their usages and uses as well.

A number of studies have revealed the importance of using the students' native language in second and foreign language classes. For example, Anton and Dicamila (1996) (as cited in Swain and Lapkin 2000) assert that the students' L1 has three important functions. First, using L1, learners can provide each other with scaffolded help. The second function of the L1 has been claimed to be establishing and maintaining intersubjectivity, which according to Swain and Lapkin (2002), develops a shared perspective on the task. And finally the third

function of using the students' L1 in an EFL ESL class is proposed to be externalizing one's inner speech during cognitively difficult activities, and by this it is meant to direct speech to oneself in order to direct and organize one's mental activity.

The results of these studies can show the numerous positive potentialities of the learners' native language which can be taken into consideration in the process of second and foreign language teaching. The worth noting point in this regard is that the students' use of their native language in learning a second or foreign language is a natural process which should be observed and considered by the teacher, as Widdowson puts it:

> Learners shouldn't be denied all access to translation. Learners . . . make use of translation anyway because the learning process requires them to do so. A pedagogy which denies this perversely creates difficulties which hamper the learner (Widdowson, 1990, pp. 45-46).

1.2. The statement of the problem

As mentioned in the previous section one problem with teaching different components and skills of a second or foreign language is the assumption that the target language should always be the language of the classroom. This target-language-only paradigm which has been termed native language fallacy (Philipson, 1992) may result in some psychological barriers in the process of learning a new language.

While there are some research studies which aim at realizing the role of the learners' native language in the general process of teaching and learning a second or foreign language, (Hardman, 1999; Levine, 2003; Nemeth & Kormos, 2001; Swain &Lapkin, 2000), there seems to be a paucity of research on the effect of the students' native language on more specific domains like vocabulary acquisition. Some research studies, for example, point to the effects that the students' native language might have on acquiring certain skills like

reading (e.g. Klinger & Vaughn, 2000). In such studies the new vocabularies are presented in a context larger than sentence and in this way the effect of the native language might be mixed with many other variables which have a role in a reading comprehension text. If we limit the context to its shortest and simplest form like a sentential context, we would observe a more independent role for the shared first language of the teacher and the students. Also in many other research studies the students' mother tongue role in a whole teaching process including many different variables has been evaluated as an element of treatment in the form of an experimental study. (For example, Hardman, 1999; Levin, 2003; Nemeth & Kormos, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

What seems lacking in the literature is the examination of the role of the students' native language or mother tongue on the process of vocabulary learning and teaching with a more specific scope. It can be a set of vocabulary words which are presented in a sentential context as aforementioned. In this way it would be possible to count for the role of the students' first language background and how it can have an independent effect on the process of learning and retaining the newly presented vocabulary items. However, in order to count for the effect of the contexts larger than sentence, the new words should be presented in a context as large as a paragraph, or a text made of a few paragraphs.

There exist many research studies in the literature which aim at finding the effect of different variables on the quality of vocabulary learning in order to propose a more efficient vocabulary task. Among these variables we can point to explicit vs. implicit teaching approaches, contextualized vs. decontextualized vocabulary teaching, the key word method, and the high involvement vs. low involvement load effect. (To see some examples of these and some other variables look at: Engelbar & Theuerkauf, 1999; Fukkink, Blok, & Glopper, 2001; Groot and Keijzer, 2000; Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001; Kang, 1995; Pulido, 2007; Rodriguiz & Sadoski, 2000; Scholfeild & Gitsaki, 1996; Webb, 2007). Among these the role

of the context has been studied to find its potential effects on the process of vocabulary learning. (Rodriguez & Sadoski, 2000). In their study Rodriguez and Sadoski (2000) compare the effects of rote rehearsal, context, keyword, and context/key word method on immediate and long term retention of English as a foreign language (EFL) vocabulary. Their results showed a better effect for the context/key word method, and that it produced superior recall to any of the other 3 methods after one week, suggesting a very promising educational value for this method (Rodriguez & Sadoski, 2000). However in this study the context is limited to only sentential form and the effect of the other forms of context is not examined.

In another study done by Kang (1995), the effort is made to find out ways to enhance second- language vocabulary learning. He examines the relative effectiveness of four instructional approaches: the paper and Pencil (P&P), the computer-based word for word (CW), the computer-based word-for-word plus picture (CP), and the computer-based context (CC). The results of the study which was carried out at an elementary school in Seoul, Korea, showed that in the retention test, the CC group showed significantly higher performance than any other group on all the major evaluation tasks (Kang, 1995). In his conclusion Kang (1995) asserts that "this study strongly suggests that the context-embedded approach to second-language vocabulary learning was most effective in promoting knowledge transfer, listening comprehension, and long-term recall of vocabulary definitions."

Again like the previous study the context is limited to sentential context and the effect of the student's native language is not accounted for in this study. The important point here is that while it is informative to study the effects of different variables on the process of vocabulary acquisition, it is unreasonable not to see any point for the effect of the learners' native language as a potentially important variable in second or foreign language vocabulary learning. An equally important point is that it would be useful to conduct a survey on the

effects of using the learners' native language in vocabulary specific tasks, in which the specific goal for the students would be to acquire a set of new vocabulary items. In other words, we want to see how or in what manner we can make use of the learners' native language competence to help them acquire a set of new vocabulary items more efficiently and with long lasting results.

1.3. The significance of the study

The importance of such a study becomes revealed when we see how much effort has been made to find an efficient approach to vocabulary learning. While it is discussed that using the target language as the only language of instruction in the classroom is not compatible with what happens naturally in learning a second language (Widdowson, 2003), in many English as a foreign language classes English is used exclusively as the language of the classroom in almost any learning activities (Cook, 2008). If in one phase of the teaching program the aim is to provide the students with a chance to acquire a set of new vocabulary words in order to store in their long term memory, it would be practical for the teacher to give the students' native language qualifications a try. It is totally reasonable to see the teacher and the students' shared first language background as a merit rather as a detriment. By means of the results of this study, teachers can come to a better understanding of how and in what way, they can apply their students' L1 competency in the process of teaching vocabulary.

Another important factor in teaching vocabulary is the context in which the new word has been used. As was mentioned in the previous parts many studies have shown that when the new words are presented in context a more successful and long-lasting learning occurs. But in most of these studies the sentence is considered as a preferred context and the role of larger contexts are ignored. In this way there still remains another important question: 'Would it bring about a more successful vocabulary learning experience if we enhance the context?'

In other words when we introduce the new words in sentential context we get better learning outcomes than in isolation. Now can we say if we present the new words in contexts larger than sentence we would see even a more significant difference in learning outcomes?

But how the use of the students' mother tongue and the translation method can be related to context? In a sense there is this understanding that the usefulness of context is because of its meaningfulness (Kang, 1995). Presenting a new word in context that seems more meaningful to them brings about a more efficient learning. However, for many students especially at low levels, the context itself might hamper the process of learning if the students' native language is not allowed. As was mentioned previously, the use of the students' mother tongue and the translation method can be very promising in learning foreign language vocabulary. But in many EFL classes around us we see that the students' mother tongue is ignored altogether even when the task deals with vocabulary learning and not the speaking or listening abilities (native language fallacy) (Philipson, 1992).

Furthermore, using the students' native language in the process of teaching vocabulary seems crucial from the affective point of view. When the students are given the opportunity to use the language they are totally familiar with, this can help to bring about a feeling of security in to the classroom. In this situation the students are provided with the opportunity to resort to their 1ˢᵗ language competence whenever they feel their second language resource is not responding. In this way we do not block the process of easy negotiation and comprehension which can emerge out of the use of a laguage in which both the teacher and the students are competent.(Hancock, 1997).

1.4. The purpose of the study

As discussed previously, the main purpose of this study is to determine the possible effects of using the students' native language, (in this case, Farsi), on efficient and long-

lasting vocabulary acquisition. In other words, this study aims to find whether we can have a better vocabulary recalling ability using the shared first language of the teacher and the students besides using the target language, in comparison with a situation in which only the target language is used.

The other related purpose of this experimental study is to compare the effect of the students' mother tongue with the relative effect of the context and especially the contexts larger than sentence. Here the two variables: the students' mother tongue use besides the target language, and the use of only the target language are included in both cases of sentential context and contexts larger than sentence. This means that the new vocabulary items will be presented both in the sentential context and in larger contexts. The reason why the use of the students' mother tongue is compared with using context is the importance which has been assigned to the role of context and especially contexts larger than sentence in learning vocabulary in the related literature (Engelbar & Theuerkauf, 1999; Kang, 1995)

So in this study we have four variables: using the students' mother tongue besides the target language in sentential context, using only the target language in sentential context, using the students' mother tongue besides the target language in contexts larger than sentence, and using only the target language in contexts larger than sentence.

It should be mentioned that the use of the students' mother tongue in this study is twofold. It means that the students' mother tongue is used both in the teacher's instructions for the tasks, his explanations about the newly taught words and their usages and uses, and also in the process of the translation of the given sentences and contexts including the new vocabulary items. This latter use of the students' native language is related to the translation method, which itself has been the focus of a number of studies aiming to find its effect on efficient vocabulary acquisition.

The focus of this study hence would be on the role of the teacher and the students' native language verbal discourse and also the role of translation in vocabulary learning. Here the teacher and the students' trial to use the first language to make the meanings of the words clear have a crucial and determining importance.

1.4.1. Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

Q1: Is there any significant difference in the immediate recognition test scores of the students who receive the new words:

In sentential context with their L1 being used?
In sentential context with only L2 being used?
In context larger than sentence (discourse) with their L1 being used?
In context larger than sentence (discourse) with only L2 being used?

Q2: Is there any significant difference in the immediate production test scores of the students who receive the new words:

In sentential context with their L1 being used?
In sentential context with only L2 being used?
In context larger than sentence (discourse) with their L1 being used?
In context larger than sentence (discourse) with only L2 being used?

Q3: Is there any significant difference in the delayed recognition test scores of the students who receive the new words:

In sentential context with their L1 being used?
In sentential context with only L2 being used?
In context larger than sentence (discourse) with their L1 being used?
In context larger than sentence (discourse) with only L2 being used?

Q4: Is there any significant difference in the delayed production test scores of the students who receive the new words:

In sentential context with their L1 being used?

In sentential context with only L2 being used?

In context larger than sentence (discourse) with their L1 being used?

In context larger than sentence (discourse) with only L2 being used?

1.4.2. Research hypotheses regarding different treatments

H01: There is no significant difference in the immediate recognition test scores of the students who receive the new words:

In sentential context with their L1 being used.

In sentential context with only L2 being used.

In context larger than sentence (discourse) with their L1 being used.

In context larger than sentence (discourse) with only L2 being used.

H02: There is no significant difference in the immediate production test scores of the students who receive the new words:

In sentential context with their L1 being used.

In sentential context with only L2 being used.

In context larger than sentence (discourse) with their L1 being used.

In context larger than sentence (discourse) with only L2 being used.

H03: There is no significant difference in the delayed recognition test scores of the students who receive the new words:

In sentential context with their L1 being used.

In sentential context with only L2 being used.

In context larger than sentence (discourse) with their L1 being used.

In context larger than sentence (discourse) with only L2 being used.

H04: There is no significant difference in the delayed production test scores of the students who receive the new words:

In sentential context with their L1 being used.

In sentential context with only L2 being used.

In context larger than sentence (discourse) with their L1 being used.

In context larger than sentence (discourse) with only L2 being used.

1.4.3. Hypotheses regarding lexical recall and retention in delayed tests

H05: There is no significant difference between the means of the immediate and delayed recognition tests for the students who receive the new words in sentential context with their L1 being used.

H06: There is no significant difference between the means of the immediate and delayed production tests for the students who receive the new words in sentential context with their L1 being used.

H07: There is no significant difference between the means of the immediate and delayed recognition tests for the students who receive the new words in sentential context with only L2 being used.

H08: There is no significant difference between the means of the immediate and delayed production tests for the students who receive the new words in sentential context with only L2 being used.

H09: There is no significant difference between the means of the immediate and delayed recognition tests the students who receive the new words in context larger than sentence (discourse) with their L1 being used.

H010: There is no significant difference between the means of the immediate and delayed production tests for the students who receive the new words in context larger than sentence (discourse) with their L1 being used.

H011: There is no significant difference between the means of the immediate and delayed recognition tests for the students who receive the new words in context larger than sentence (discourse) with only L2 being used.

H012: There is no significant difference between the means of the immediate and delayed production tests for the students who receive the new words in context larger than sentence (discourse) with only L2 being used.

Chapter 2:

Review of the Literature

2.1. The importance of vocabulary

Vocabulary is central to language acquisition, whether the language is first, second, or foreign (Decarrico, 2000). Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p.255). Vocabulary growth is such an important part of language acquisition that it deserves to be planned for, deliberately controlled and monitored (Nation, 2001). Recently there has been a growing interest in the role of vocabulary knowledge in the process of learning a new language and as a consequence this has caused specialists to emphasize the need for finding a systematic and principled approach to vocabulary teaching (Decarrico, 2000).

The importance assigned to vocabulary has caused so many research programs which have as their aims the most effective techniques for teaching vocabulary. This considerable attention to vocabulary has been justified in short by Krashen (1981):

> Excellent reasons exist for devoting attention to vocabulary and spelling. First there are practical reasons. A large vocabulary is of course, essential for mastery of a language. Second, language acquirers know this; they carry dictionary with them, not grammar books, and regularly report that lack of vocabulary is a major problem. . . . On the theoretical level, the study of the acquisition of vocabulary and spelling ability can help us understand language acquisition in general. (p.65)

Also as I mentioned in the introduction section of this paper, McCarthy (2001) (as cited in Fan, 2003) states the same idea and explains why recently there has been such a preoccupation with vocabulary. He asserts that vocabulary forms the biggest part of the meaning of a language and like Krashen (1981), he argues that most language learners' biggest problem is with vocabulary. This leads him to conclude that those learners who can develop techniques and disciplines for learning vocabulary are in fact successful learners.

From all these discussions and as indicated by many other studies, there remains no doubt that vocabulary acquisition is increasingly gaining importance in the process of learning a second or foreign language. The appreciation of this importance has invoked many scholars to develop research programs to find the most effective approaches for teaching vocabulary.

## 2.2. Second language vocabulary instruction

Based on a framework proposed by Hunt and Beglar (2005, P.3), vocabulary instructional approaches are divided into two main groups of implicit and explicit instruction. According to Doughty and Williams (1998), as cited in Hunt & Beglar 2005, the aim of the explicit instruction is to direct learners' attention whereas the aim of the implicit instruction is to attract learner ' attention. (Figure 1)

According to Nation (2001), the deliberate learning of vocabulary (explicit), may contribute directly to implicit knowledge if the words learned are not complicated and if the learning is meaningful. The results of deliberate learning will be available for language-focused use, which may then indirectly contribute to implicit knowledge through production or through making meaning-focused input meaningful. There is a lack of research on the effect of deliberate vocabulary leaning on meaning-focused use.

What relates this point to our previous discussions of the context method is the intentional and the incidental learning experiences which differentiates these two forms of instructions. Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) assert that explicit instruction can take place both intentionally (such as learning from word lists) and incidentally (such as learning from context), but implicit instruction can only be incidental. Accordingly the explicit instruction involves both contextualized and decontextualized vocabulary instruction, but here context is a sentence not a context which provides extensive reading.

So in this study, the focus is on the explicit instruction of vocabulary; however, the context is not limited to a single sentence presenting the new word, the intended new words are presented in larger contexts as well. Also as mentioned previously with the inclusion of the students' mother tongue in the form of the translation method and other forms in the experimental groups, the instruction becomes even more direct and explicit.

Figure 1. A framework for vocabulary instructional approaches
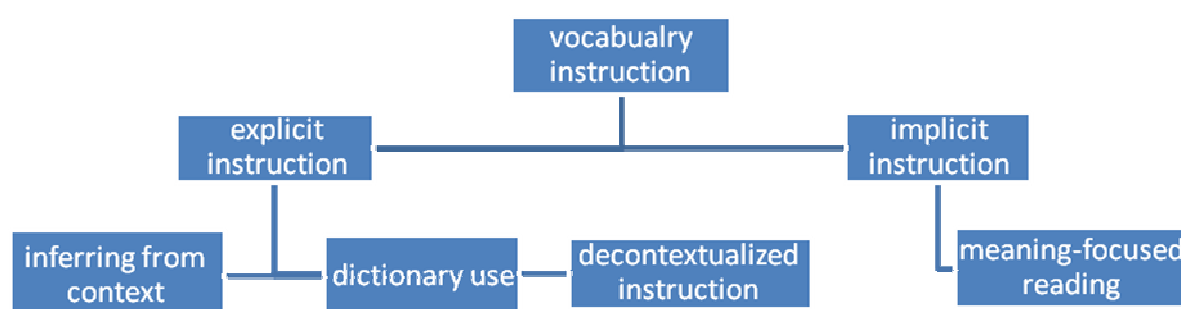
2.3. The role of the learner's native language ins econd and foreign language learning

In the following paragraphs the benefits and advantages of using the students' L1 in foreign and second language classrooms are viewed from different perspectives:

2.3.1. Theoretical bases for the efficacy of the students' L1 in L2 acquisition

What seems conspicuous in the literature of L2 acquisition is the agreement about the benefits of using students' L1 in learning their L2 (Ramachandran & Rahim, 2004). It is believed that L1 should be used in EFL classrooms because it reduces anxiety which helps students learn better (Auerbach, 2001; Buckmaster, 2000; Cole, 2001; Reis, 1996). There is no doubt that the L1 is in some way implicated in L2 acquisition, but perversely enough, it is just this one certain thing that language pedagogy seems resolutely to ignore (Widdowson,

2003, p.152). However, while avoidance of the first language is taken for granted by almost all teachers, and is implicit in most books for teachers, the reasons are rarely stated (Cook, 2008, p.181). This ignorance of the role of the students' native language is also stated by Canagarajah (2005). Aiming to describe a critical pedagogy in L2 learning and teaching, he states that

> Gone are the days when we treated the L1 as needing to be suppressed if one is to become a proficient speaker of an L2. We know from recent research that skills and language awareness developed in L1 can transfer positively to L2, that a validation of the students' L1 can reduce the inhibitions against English and develop positive affect to enhance acquisition. (Canagarajah, 2005, p.11)

By focusing on only the target language as the main criterion for designing second and foreign language syllabuses and consequently defining it as the only acceptable language in the classroom, (native language fallacy as proposed by Philipson, 1992), the specific characteristics of L2 users are ignored. This is because L2 users can do things that monolingual native speakers cannot (Cook, 2008).

In his book: 'Second Language Learning and Language Teaching', Cook (2008) presents different arguments in support of use of the L1 as a crucial but ignored principle in L2 teaching and learning. The important question that Cook (2008) poses is that "should the native speaker be the target of language teaching?" To answer this question we should initially define what a native speaker is? Bloomfield (1933) defines native language as the first language a human being learns to speak. That is the first language a baby encounters in his life is his native language and the person grown up becomes the native speaker. Stern (1993) defines native speaker as possessing some special characteristics including a subconscious knowledge of rules and creativity of language use (cited in Cook, 2008). In still another definition being a native speaker implies having a specific language identity. It means

that every individual speaker belongs to only one group of speakers, even if he chooses to adopt a new identity by joining a group of native speakers (Cook, 2008).

Defined in this way, it is totally impossible for students to become native speakers of a second language, and as Cook (2008) concludes, trying to train the students to become like native speakers "limits their components to those that monolingual native speakers possess rather than the additional skills of L2 users, such as translation." By focusing on the native speaker model as the basis for language teaching the students would be frustrated because they soon appreciate that they will never be the same as native speakers, and also they would be constrained to the activities of monolinguals rather than the richness of multilingual use (Cook, 2008, p. 173).

The potential benefits of students' L1 are increasingly gaining much more attention by EFL/ESL scholars because of the multilingual life environments that people find themselves in. Teaching English with no reference to the students' first language may disempower them in such environments (Canagarajah, 2005). Being able to take advantage of a multilingual state is thoroughly important in today's life because it makes it possible for a multilingual to adopt a different policy when encountering different communities (native or non-native) in different circumstances. Canagarajah (2005) elaborates on this point:

> ….they draw from their multilingual competence the recourse to challenge both the native and the mainstream communities. Such communicative activities prove the hidden power in multilingual speakers to use the resources from competing languages to develop a critical point of view. (Canagarajah, 2005, p.12)

Focusing on the target language as the only language of the classroom in second and foreign classes brings about a sort of paradox concerning the two processes of teaching and learning. The explanation is that the purpose of teaching a new language is to develop in students the ability to use a language (L2) other than their own (L1). Then our purpose in