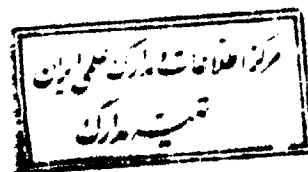On the

comparison of Keyword and Semantic-Context Methods of

learning New

Vocabulary Meanings

By

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**Evaluated and Approved by the**

Thesis Committee :

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Reader : Dr. Nowruzi

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## In The Name of God

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## Abstract

## "The Comparison of Keyword and Semantic-context Methods of Learning New Vocabulary Meanings"

The idea that a systematic, principled approach to vocabulary instruction results in better learning has been voiced by some specialists in the area of foreign language teaching. This is important since vocabulary instruction is an area that has been neglected to varying degrees in both audiolingual and communicative language teaching. "The pride of place has been given to 'structures' and latterly 'function'. Happily this situation no longer obtains and many of the newer coursebooks include word study sections (Taylor, 1990:1 ). More than any other strategy, extensive reading is the key to building an adequate vocabulary (Celce-Murcia and Rosenweig, 1979 ). Many researchers have found that one learns new words better by guessing their meanings with the aid of the context.

The rationale behind the present study is that particular learning strategies produce more effective results when applied together. The present study tried to investigate the efficiency of the semantic-context strategy along with a mnemonically-based technique called, keyword method. To clarify the point, the current study seeked to find answer to the following question :

Are the keyword and semantic-context methods of learning new EFL vocabulary in complementary line ? That is, if used to teach a particular vocabulary meaning, will they provide better results than when we simply use only one of the methods ?

Having the foregoing questions in mind, the following null hypotheses were proposed :

1. There is no difference in the perfomance of the students who learn new EFL vocabulary through the keyword/ context methods and those who do the same job in a no-strategy condition.

2. There is no significant difference in the performance of the students using keyword method and the students using swmantic-context method.

3. There is no significant difference in the performance of the students learning new EFL vocabulary through simultaneous keyword/ context methods and the students involved in the same task using only one of those strategies.

In Order to test the hypotheses, 100 subjects were selected from a large number of students majoring in various technical courses. They were selected upon taking a standardized test (Nelson). those students scoring more than 70 and less than 30 percent were not picked out. then the subjects were adminitered a vocabulary test consisting of 30 items which contained the words to be taught. This test was once used as a pretest and once as a post-test. Students were taught the target words according to a specific strategy. Every 25 subjects took part in one of the groups : control group (no-strategy condition), keyword group, context group, the combined condition (Keyword/context group). After receiving the treatments, the students took the post-test after a time interval.

The statistical techniques used were t-test, correlation coefficient .

# Chapter One
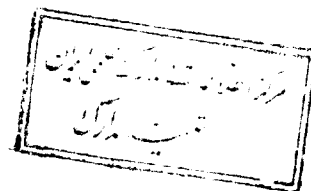
## Introduction

" Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary

nothing can be conveyed " (Wilkins, 1972)

Through. out the history of language teachning, one or two components

of a language has been highlighted at a time. The objectives of a course

or textbook were usually laid down by the course designers, language

teachers and curriculum writers. The same objectives, in turn, did

determine the amount of time and instructions devoted to a particular

component or skill of the language.

From about 1900 to 1950, vocabulary study represented an important

thrust of educational research which investigated both practical and

theoretical aspects of word knowledge. In contrast, from about 1950 to

the mid-1970s, relatively little research was conducted on vocabulary.

More recently, however, a number of reaserchers have again become

interested in vocabulary insturction. The renewed interest in the subject

includes keyword method among others. This up and down in the

degree of attention to vocabulary signals its role in language

acquisition and learning.

Ronald Carter and Michael McCarty in "Vocabulary and Language

Teaching" (1988) have presented a good deal of information on the key

issues in the role of vocabulary in pedogogical and research contexts.

They cautiously imply that vocabulary learning and teachning should be

pursued multidimensionally, considering even discourse- genre and socio-cultural context. As the followers of communicative teaching, they emphasize the contextulized attention to lexicon and view any decontextualization deviating from the norm.

The present paper tried to investigate the efficiency of learning lexicon in both of the above cases. The idea is that instead of seperating them, bringing them together would benefit the learner. So far, the most prevailing assumption on teaching vocabulary has been the use of contextual clues in guessing the meaning of a word. Abundant written work does exists on the usefulness of building vocabulary through reading texts. It is suggested that the learner makes use of his cognitive structures and the processes involved require deep elaboration.

Sternberg (1987) claims that "most vocabulary is learned from context, "but adds that "what the claim does not imply is that teaching specific vocabulary using context is the most effective, or even a relatively effective way of teaching that vocabulary" (P.,89).

Craik and Lockhart's (1972) depth-of-processing theory provides a theoretical basis for comparing the keyword with sematic methods. They suggested that retention is dependent on the level at which information is processed: As one moves from the shallow sensory level of processing to the deeper semantic level, memory traces become more permanent. At the sensory level, the stimulus is processed in terms of its visual or acoustic properties. In contrast, stimuli processed at the semantic level are analyzed for meaning and related to existing

cognitive structures.

A reasonable suggestion is that the type of processing used with keywords involves mainly elaboration at the sensory level combined with some attention at the sematic level ( Pressely, Levin, Delaney, 1982). The focus is on acoustical similarity and the interlinking associative image, which does not necessarily encourage avtive processing at the sematic level. The primary emphasis, on the other hand, in any semantic procesing method for learning L2 vocabulary is on the semantic association between the new word and its definition. Any procedure that causes the learner to act on the meaning of a new word by tying it into existing knowledge structures would fit into this category. For example, Crow and Quigley's " Sematic field " appraoch (1985) had subjects manipulate synonyms along with target words in meaniingful sentences.

Having made a survey-type description on the strategies in question, this study intends to see if they would work along each other.

Vocabulary learning strategies are many and varied in type. Through the present study, It can also be determined that which of the methods are appropriate for adult learners of English. According to Henning's experimental evidence, adult beginners tend to encode vocabulary on the basis of interrelated sounds (Keyword method ) but more advanced learners do the same task on the basis of associated meanings ( semantic method ).

## Statement of the problem,

In general, the problem under investigation in the present study is the vocabulary enrichment. Up to now, the problem has been tackled via various channels by many researchers. All of the studies in the past have tried to achieve this end by presenting different methods, strategies and techniques. The present study, however, makes an attempt to compare and contrast two of these strategies. On the one hand, we have the semantic-context method of vocabulary learning which has been in vogue for many decades. Keyword method is on the other end of the scale. In fact, we may restate the research problem (s) in the form of the following questions :

1. Are keyword and semantic-context methods of learning ESL vocabulary in complementary line ? That is, if used together to teach a particular vocabulary meaning, will they provide better results than we simply use only one of these methods ?

2. Does keyword method enhance vocabulary learning significantly better than the semantic-context method? Or does the reverse case hold true ?

3. What is the connection between the vocabulary learning through particular strategies and achieving the same end in a no-strategy condition ?

Now it is hoped that, in addition to general goals, the specific

instructional objectives of the present study have been clarified. The most basic underlying idea in the researcher's mind is that vocabulary instruction should be done in memorable ways. One should try to devise particular activities and techniques in order to teach a vocabulary item. It is not reason able to leave the task of acquiring word meanings to the learner himself, saying that he can acquire the needed vocabulary on seeing it in a text. So the problem is to find out what strategies can best teach the learners different vocabulary items.

## The purpose of the study

Once the scope of investigation identified and the related problem stated clearly and precisely, the researcher should state the purpose of the study. The objective, here, is to see the extent to which the methods in question improve vocabulary learning. At the same time, the reasercher hopes to find out about the degree of differentiation between these methods. Indeed, the aim is to understand whether keyword and sematic-context methods of acquiring new vocabulary meanings are effective when used together or individually. And if the second case holds true, which one is more effective ?

## The significance of the study

" Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vacabulary,

nothing can be conveyed . "

It can not be denied that vocabulary is one of the most basic building

blocks of any language. In case it lacks, all concepts and ideas are

imprisoned in the language users' mind, even if they know the sounds

and structures of the language well. Therefore, attention to vocabulary

instruction is a must in our field. The vital role of the vocabulary

knowledge in communication requires the establishment of a reliable

and efficient programing for teaching this component of language. For

doing so, as Celce-Murcia (1979) suggests, it seems necessary to

investigate what kinds of strategies language learners should utilize to

enrich their knowledge of words.

Having a clear description of strategies and the intensity of their use at

each level of proficiency, it may help teachcers match the level of

expectation with the procedures of teaching vocabulary in EFL

classrooms. Furthurmore, proposing and discussing learning strategies

would make students more concious of what is going on in their minds.

And in fact, the aim of teaching is nothing but to promote learning; to

make people discover their talents and capacities.

Vocabulary learning strategies-though idiosyncratic in nature-to the

extent of generalizability, are of great significance to our field. If we

know what processes are involved in learning, storing, and recalling

words, we can make use of them in teaching to facilitate learning.

As a sample of learning strategies, keyword and semantic-context methods, if used properly, can facilitate learning and retention of new vocabulary items. Semantic-context strategy is significant since it is very well known in educational circles and is recommended by most textbook writers and language instructors. That is, we may teach new words by creating appropraite contexts in which those words are used . In order to elevate the degree of absorption through the context method, the researcher suggests another vocabulary learning strategy i.e. keyword method. This new strategy makes use of associative techniques and interactive images, which in its own turn, help the target word stick more firmly in the mind.

If the two forementioned strategies have positive effect on one another, the researcher's prediction will come ture. In such a case, the significance of the study will be highlighted since it has proved to be helpful to the language teaching programes.

## Chapter Two

"The words of a foreign tongue which we commit to memory are prisoner of war, incessantly trying to escape, and it requires great vigilance to detain them; for unless our attention be continually directed toward them, and unless we muster them frequently, they steal away into the forest and disperse. But when they are bound together in sentences, the same degree of watchfulness is not required because they escape with difficulty, and a whole gang of them may easily be traced and recaptured at once " .

The above quotation comes from Predergast's 1864 book The Mastery of Languages.

Words, words, .... words make us happy. Words make us sad. Words enable us to describe our feelings and experience the world we live in. As our vocabularies grow, so does our ability to perceive and understand. Many psychologists miantain that a high level of vocabulary correlates with a high level of success. The gift of language is a gift of life (O'harra, 1984).

## Introduction

Any language consists of three basic components: meanings, sounds and syntax. Just as it is important for an ESL teacher to be informed of the English sound system and the grammetical system, it is also important for him or her to learn something about the English lexicon (i.e. words, meanings, derivations, productive lexical processes, etc. )(Celce Murcia and Rosenweig, 1979). According to Krashen, a large vocabulary is essential for mastery of a language and lack of vocabulary is a major problem (1989). In 1973, Finocchiaro and Bonomo expressed their attitude toward teaching the vocabulary system as follows: The lexicon of a Language is divided into function and content words. The function words are a closed class : we can not add to prepositions, auxiliaries or any other structure word of the language. The content words, on the other hand , can be added to at any time as new scientific advances make new words and communication about new inventions necessary. At the beginning level, it is essential that we emphasize the function words, following a logical gradation and paying attention to the spiral approach.

Not all of the words a student hears during any lesson or even later lessons.

They further suggest that we should give precedence to the vocabulary which is intimately related to the environment and experiences of the pupils whether or not it is found in our textbooks.

It has become popular in the past two decades to minimize the