EXPLORING VOCABULARY ACQUISITION STRATEGIES
FOR EFL ADVANCED LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the former and current status of Vocabulary learning and teaching, as well as the intricacy and relevance of word knowledge. By presenting a personal introspection on the challenges of Vocabulary acquisition at an advanced level, the present work also provides important insights into vocabulary development in the four skills. In the next section, two Vocabulary Acquisition Strategies for advanced learners are described and illustrated followed by an analysis. The final chapter is devoted to the conclusions of this research journey, the limitations faced and some suggestions for further research.

ERIC descriptors:

Vocabulary Development
Vocabulary Skills
Language Fluency
Communicative Competence

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The field of language teaching and learning has evolved significantly over the last fifty years exposing learners to a gamut of approaches and methods to learn the target language: Audio-lingual Method, Natural Approach, Communicative Language Teaching, among others, have appeared on stage. This has been a crucial process carried out by many researchers and specialists interested in helping L2 learners to master the target language more easily and effectively. Of course, the idea of mastering a language depends on different external and personal factors. Not all L2 learners want to reach a high proficiency level. There is no doubt, however, that any typical L2 learner needs a great deal of help since learning a language involves very intricate aspects, such as learning the way words relate to each other to form sentences (syntax/grammar), how words are formed (morphology), how to pronounce them (phonetics), their meaning (semantics), when and how to use them (pragmatics/sociolinguistics), how those words become part of our verbal repertoire (vocabulary/mental lexicon) and how to write them (spelling/orthography) among the most important ones. Nonetheless, not all these components have been seen as equally important throughout time. A quest for the philosopher's stone started based on different principles and guidelines. That is why aspects like grammar received special importance at the expense of others. That is the case of vocabulary teaching and learning which has been neglected during a long period (1945-1970) called "a limbo" by Carter and McCarthy (41). At that time L2 vocabulary learning was based on a very simplistic approach including memorization of a collection of isolated words grouped into lists where form was considered more relevant than meaning or use. Fortunately, since the mid-1980s researchers have started to draw their attention to the role of vocabulary in second language acquisition, lexical storage,

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lexical retrieval, and use of vocabulary by second language learners (Coady and Huckin ix). In addition to this interest, research on First Language Acquisition has shed more light on similarities between L1 and L2 acquisition, specifically in reference to the mental lexicon. Thus, the Lexical Approach came on the scene benefiting from corpus analysis and computational linguistics. As Coady and Huckin suggest, there has been a reorientation on language teaching/learning that underscores the importance to teach and learn *chunks of language* (16). This new perspective is being explored bringing new challenges, such as facilitating suitable vocabulary acquisition strategies to help L2 learners to learn those chunks of languages or lexical items effectively. Hence, Vocabulary has gained another status in current times. This shift in view has opened golden doors to delve into the role of vocabulary acquisition and its contribution to learners' success.

In this context, learning *words*[1] has acquired a special value since it could make learners more proficient in the target language. Although this perspective can be applied at any proficiency level, this study will be exploring how advanced learners would benefit more from a vocabulary acquisition approach that emphasizes the importance of lexical items and the use of specific strategies that enhance autonomy. Even at a higher level learners often feel lost in an L2 world replete with lexical units. Consider the idiom *jump the gun*, even if the L2 learner is grammatically and phonetically competent he/she might not necessarily know the meaning of this idiom[2], nor how and when to use it. In this sense, pronunciation and grammar knowledge do not seem like sufficient tools to reach higher proficiency, particularly for those learners in academic settings or for non-native English teachers. Arnaud and Savignon note: "Although all advanced learners cannot be expected to reach a nativelike vocabulary, the case of language

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[1] The term "Words", here, has a broader meaning that includes lexical items.

[2] To do something too soon, especially without thinking carefully about it.

teachers is different: One of their professional justifications is the proximity of their competence to that of native speakers" (161). Their research on words, complex lexical units and the advanced learners uncovers relevant data about the importance of acquiring lexicalized chunks of language to bridge the gap that even very proficient non-native L2 learners seem to struggle with when trying to reach a nativelike level.

Therefore, this study will explore in more detail which are some of the challenges that advanced learners face when acquiring vocabulary and which strategies could help them in their process to reach a nativelike proficiency. It is not suggested, however, that reaching a nativelike proficiency is mandatory, but in terms of lexicon L2 learners, particularly non-native teachers, can make more progress if they utilize vocabulary acquisition strategies which could not only broad, but also deepen their word knowledge allowing them be more self-confidence while communicating in the L2.

This study will be divided in 5 chapters. The first chapter will comprise an introduction to the research topic, the aims, research questions and rationale. The second chapter will present the theoretical support for a vocabulary acquisition approach as an indispensable means to succeed in the language learning process. In addition, the "words" concept will be broken down to see what is involved in learning them. The third chapter will consist of an introspection of my personal experience as an advanced language learner and teacher to show the challenges involved in learning and facilitating vocabulary. The fourth chapter will present some viable solutions (Vocabulary Learning Strategies) for advanced learners. The last chapter will show the conclusions of this study.

Research Aims

Learning another language involves fundamentally knowledge of *words*. This concept will guide this study and with that in mind the following aims are presented:

- ✛ Revise theoretical literature that supports the importance of vocabulary acquisition.
- ✛ Identify main acquisition vocabulary challenges for L2 advanced learners in an EFL context based on a personal introspection and literature.
- ✛ Propose and describe solutions (Vocabulary Acquisition Strategies) for advanced learners who want to reach a nativelike proficiency.

Research Questions

In order to navigate this topic in depth, the following research questions are stated:

- ✛ What are the special challenges of learning lexicon well and fully at an advanced level?
- ✛ What vocabulary acquisition strategies are more suitable for advanced learners?
- ✛ How does an advanced learner keep acquiring vocabulary?

Rationale

As mentioned in the introduction, word knowledge has acquired a great importance for language learning in recent years. Exploring strategies to tame new words or lexicalized units can contribute to this yet novel field. Being an advanced learner myself, I feel particularly

committed to explore practices to help other learners who in most of the cases are left alone in this process due to the misconception that they are aware of strategies or steps to continue acquiring vocabulary on their own. Solange Mora noted that traditionally the teaching of vocabulary above elementary levels was mostly incidental, limited to presenting new items as they appeared in reading or sometimes listening (1). Incidental learning is helpful, but at an advanced level individuals should not only count on learning words 'by chance.' Therefore, there is an emergent need to narrow strategies for advanced learners and alleviate the burden of acquiring the endless L2 lexicon. My experiences as a learner dealing with vocabulary acquisition and my sojourn in the United States as a graduate student at SIT Graduate Institute are the main engines to embark in this research.

Words were always a big mystery for me. I wanted to know them thoroughly, ranging from how they are formed to how to find their meanings, and everything in between. That helped me not only to see the challenges of learning a foreign language, but also the rewards that come with it. My interest in those foreign words brought success in my studies and even helped me to unveil more aspects about my mother tongue. In fact, I came to realize that my mother tongue lexicon was expanded during the L2 learning process. Consequently, I started to develop strategies to deal with new words I encountered.

Due to the impact that vocabulary acquisition had on my life and the importance that it acquired during the last decades I believe it is relevant to explore more about the strategies that L2 learners need to be exposed to in order to have success in their learning process, especially at a higher level. Advanced learners like me feel that there is something else that can be done in order to get a nativelike proficiency. Vocabulary acquisition strategies have to do with this, particularly the lexical approach with its chunks of language.

Furthermore when I arrived in the United States I found myself bombarded by new words in various settings. These words were not only academic, but also colloquial. One might think that it would be easy to integrate these new items into one's repertoire, but it was not always the case. Advanced learners often feel that their word baggage is good enough to communicate without any problem. That is one disadvantage I noticed in myself and in other foreign colleagues. When a speaker does not have problems to communicate in the target language it seems that he/she does not pay attention to the acquisition of new words. It is thought that one can function in the target language without them. The use of a reduced amount of vocabulary hinders acquisition of more sophisticated and suitable language. However, in other cases there is no choice because some new words are indispensable.

In addition, as a teacher I believe that no word can be acquired without establishing connections with the learner's previous world or to his/her context. No word goes alone. Therefore, there must be a way to facilitate this in better and more effective ways. Collocations, idioms, phrasal verbs often become the nightmare of most L2 learners. All of them have to do with lexis. Is this a coincidence? I do not think so. That is why I want to explore ways to help L2 learners through their vocabulary acquisition process, especially those Spanish speaking individuals who are learning English as a Foreign Language.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Vocabulary: Cinderella of the Second Language Acquisition Process

As earlier stated, the teaching and learning of vocabulary was neglected during a long period of time making it the Cinderella amongst all the language components required when learning a language, but why was this important aspect overlooked? Richards was of the first scholars that perceived this phenomenon (qtd. in Coady 273). First, he suggested that that was a consequence of the linguistic trends' effects. Ferdinand de Saussure's Structuralism and subsequent Chomsky's Universal Grammar were mainly focused on grammar and sound. There was not much concern about the role of vocabulary because there was a belief that words would take care of themselves during the learning process. It is obvious that linguists were particularly absorbed in syntax matters since it seemed to be the most difficult component in terms of language learning. Thus, it was seen as the keystone for L2 learners and teachers. Second, according to Sinclair and Renouf, designing a syllabus based on grammar components and lexis is seen as extremely difficult (qtd. in Coady 273). It seems that organizing the syllabi grammatically is much simpler because the grammatical components are narrower. Third, Zimmerman concludes that old approaches and methods saw vocabulary just as a complementary area. Fourth, Zimmerman also argues that Vocabulary has not been taught because teachers were not taught it. Here Zimmerman presents some engaging points about the teacher's attitude toward the role of vocabulary in language acquisition. He states that there are some factors that could affect this variable:

- What was the teacher's personal experience of learning a foreign language and how did the method(s) the teacher experienced deal with it?

- What is the teacher's metacognitive attitude toward vocabulary learning? Is it most effectively achieved through reading, spoken communication, memorizing words, and so on?

- What is the teacher's knowledge of the research done on this issue?

- What impact has the experience gained through teaching had on the teacher? (qtd. in Coady 273-74).

The above questions are relevant for a deeper analysis and reflection on the role of the teacher as a facilitator of vocabulary. Teachers are crucial players in the learning game because they have beliefs and experiences that are reflected in the classroom. If a teacher becomes more aware of the importance of teaching vocabulary it could lead to big changes in the way L2 learners build up strategies to reach proficiency. I remember an undergraduate student who at the end of one of my courses told me that he was glad I taught the class "vocabulary" because his previous teacher did not teach that. I might say that he was referring to my context-vocabulary approach since there are still some teachers who use a list-oriented one. There is still a lack of awareness or even probably a lack of skills and methods to teach vocabulary in a more effective way. That is why it is relevant to continue exploring this Cinderella who is certainly turning into a Princess.

Do "Words" Matter?

In the previous section I have mentioned some factors for having gone through a time when *words* were not important or just played a small role in the L2 learning process. Now I

would like to introduce some reasons for the status shift of Vocabulary. Carter and McCarthy state the following:

> Although it suffered for a long time, vocabulary pedagogy has benefited in the last fifteen years or so from theoretical advances in the linguistic study of lexicon, from psycholinguistic investigations into the mental lexicon, from the communicative trend in teaching, which has brought the learner into focus, and from developments in computers. What is perhaps missing in all this is more knowledge about what happens in classrooms when vocabulary crops up (51).

According to this view a lot has changed thanks to different disciplines leading us to a new vocabulary era where word knowledge offers a way to succeed in the L2 learning process. Certainly learning *words* is not a simple task because it implies a strenuous cognitive process. Since the day we were born our brains have not stopped learning new words and connecting them to previous ones creating an exorbitant invisible net that allow us communicate our thoughts. However, this acquisition process is not that automatic because there must be suitable stimuli for a person to acquire his/her lexicon. This is similar to what it happens to L2 learners who need those words to communicate in the L2. Words are not acquired in an isolated way. That is why memorizing a list of words does not lead to acquiring them. A mental process that connects words to the learner's world and previous linguistic experiences is imperative to ensure acquisition. This endeavor is intricate, but not impossible to reach. Due to the complexity of vocabulary acquisition all level of learners should be taught strategies to deal with this, so they can use them not only in the classroom, but also independently. A new generation of L2 learners

should be encouraged. L2 learners who are responsible for their own learning and know the challenges and possible solutions for them must be trained.

At this point it is necessary to delve deeper into the concept of *words*: Why do words matter? To do this it is relevant to define the term "word." This has been a controversy since the dawn of linguistics as a science. P. H. Matthews discussed this subject deeply. He established 3 kinds of words at different linguistic levels (20-36):

1. The phonological and orthographic word (the lexical form)

2. The word in grammar (the word itself)

3. The word in the lexicon (the lexeme)

Examine the following word that illustrates these 3 kinds of words:

1. Rhythm /ˈri-thəm/

2. Rhythm (Noun)

3. Rhythm (–ic/-ical)

It is obviously the same word, but P.H. Matthews sees three because they represent what is behind learning a word. First, the lexical form refers to how we write and pronounce "Rhythm." Second, the grammatical category is also relevant information because it implies the path to be followed when using "Rhythm" in the sentence and discourse level. Finally, "Rhythm" allows derivation which is extremely important information for the L2 learner if he/she wants to expand his/her lexicon net.

Moreover, the sense of the term "word" is not the same across languages. It means that the boundaries of a word are not the same in every language. Linguistic Relativity is illustrated very clearly at this level. That is the case of Aymara (a Bolivian native language). Look at the

example below and ask yourself if there is any difference among these languages and the word boundaries[3].

AYMARA	SPANISH
Kamisaki	¿Cómo estás? (How are you?)
(1 word)	(2 words)

What did you notice? Are these languages using the word boundaries in the same way? Let's analyze it. On one hand, the word "kamisaki" in Aymara is made up of an interrogative pronoun "kamisa" and a case suffix "-ki" that denotes affection and politeness. All this is represented as a single word. In Spanish, on the other hand, we can see two separated words where the subject "you" has been omitted because Spanish is a pro-drop[4] language. Examine now the following example:

SPANISH	ENGLISH
Marcelo *solía* ir a la misa los domingos.	Marcelo *used to* go to mass on Sundays.

Consider the words in italics. Although they have a correspondence in meaning in both languages, only one word (solía) is needed in Spanish while in English two words must occur to express the past habitual. Moreover, the verb "soler" can be used in the present habitual while "used to" does not have a counterpart for that tense. Therefore, other structure is needed in English to express the same idea.

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[3] Blank spaces between words.
[4] Pro-drop languages can omit the subject pronoun. The verb conjugation will give the interlocutor the necessary information about the identity of the subject.

SPANISH	ENGLISH
Vania *suele* teñirse el cabello.	Vania *often* dyes her hair.

These examples are intended to show how problematic it is to define the term "word" and the sophistication behind it, even though it was only analyzed in terms of word boundaries. There is much more if we consider meaning and use. Along with this idea, I believe it is extremely important to be aware of the complexity behind learning L2 vocabulary, especially at a higher level because it is the first step that will lead the learner to start obtaining knowledge, working on skills, and reflecting on his/her attitudes to have a more comprehensive approach when learning an L2.

Theoretical Advances in Vocabulary Acquisition: The Lexical Approach

The teaching and learning of vocabulary has gradually benefited from theoretical advances in various disciplines. Linguistic study of the lexicon, psycholinguistics, technology and linguistic corpus, research on First Language Acquisition have certainly painted new perspectives that lead to a deeper study of vocabulary.

Initially, in view of the importance of learning vocabulary, I want to give an overview of what researchers have to say about the Lexical Approach. According to Lewis the Lexical Approach is not a mere shift of view from grammar to vocabulary. It goes beyond this: "Language consists not of a traditional grammar and vocabulary but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks" (qtd. in Thornbury 4). Lewis refers here to any lexicalized item ranging from collocations (in addition to), fixed and semi-fixed expressions (have a nice day), and idioms (the last straw). Therefore, by acquiring these chunks of language, the L2 learner will be more proficient since words present a continuous connection, especially if we consider "collocation."

That is why acquiring isolated words is not necessarily useful because these words work with others in order to make sense. Grammar and vocabulary are extremely connected in these chunks of words. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman make reference to the Hallidayan term "lexicogrammar" to illustrate this relation (29). This concept is based on the interlingual argument: that which is accomplished grammatically in one language can be realized lexically in another. Moreover, the intralingual argument refers to word order. For instance, *by the way* cannot be *way the by* nor *way by the*. Here, however, doubts about how to implement this Lexical Approach arise. L2 learners must acquire chunks of language, but how would they do that? What do L2 advanced learners need to do to acquire those lexicalized items? How would these language chunks be better learned?

Those are some questions that have to do with Lexicon, a relevant SLA component that has shed light on what is needed to approach the learning and teaching of vocabulary. Singleton points out that: "[Lexicon] constitutes that component of a language or knowledge of a language which has to do with what one might call 'local phenomena' – the meanings of particular elements of a given language, the phonological and orthographic forms of these elements, and the specific ways in which they collocate and colligate" (15).

As was previously noted L2 learners are confronted with an arduous process when learning the target language. Language as a system carries many dimensions that must be combined gracefully to use it as a means of communication. In that sense, when a Spanish-speaking learner is acquiring the English word *friend*, he/she will need to learn what is behind this word at many linguistic levels. The learner will need to know how to spell it and remember that its pronunciation is quite different from what the graphemes show. Considering the last point, being a Spanish speaker will be a disadvantage for this learner in terms of pronunciation since Spanish

is a phonetic language (there is one to one correspondence between grapheme and pronounced phoneme) while English is not. Moreover, the learner will need to go through a process of conceptualization in order to attach meaning to *friend* (a foreign word). Ellis pointed out that: "In the first instance at least, the acquisition of L2 words usually involves a mapping of the new word form onto pre-existing conceptual meanings or onto L1 translation equivalents as approximations." (qtd. in Jiang 104). That is, the L2 learner will utilize his/her mother tongue's mental lexicon to carry this process out. Jiang adds that semantic transfer will occur only if the existing word or concept is similar in meaning to the target word (104). In this case, there is a close correspondence between the term "amigo" and "friend." Therefore, the L2 learner will have fewer problems while attaching meaning to this new word. Nonetheless, the learner will need to learn that *friend* is a countable noun that can be used to refer to males or females. Furthermore when using it in plural learners will need to put an *–s* at the end of the word which will not be a huge task since Spanish pluralization works pretty much in the same way. However, learning how to pronounce it is a completely different story since the phoneme /z/ is not a meaning marker in Spanish. Although in Spanish there are words that have this phoneme (ma*í*z, perdi*z*, *z*eta), it is pronounced as if it were the phoneme /s/. One can pronounce it or not depending on the dialect of Spanish spoken. Later throughout their learning process, learners might discover on their own or guided by the teacher that there are other words that carry the concept of *friend*, but that do not necessarily have the same meaning (buddy, acquaintance, partner, companion, etc.) He/she will need to learn the pragmatic norms that those words involve. This process will be harder if the learner is learning English as Foreign Language since the target community will not be there to teach him the nuance of those terms. What is more learners will have to figure out which words collocate with *friend*. Learning structures as *a friend*

of mine, make *friends,* a close *friend,* etc. should be part of the learner's repertoire since acquiring *friend* will lead to that.

With this example I tried to demonstrate that the complexity that L2 learners have to confront in terms of vocabulary acquisition has to do with other levels, such as syntax, semantics, phonetics, orthography, and grammar, all of them working simultaneously. Following syntax, semantics is probably one of the levels that possess more complications for the L2 learner. Singleton, summarizing Hulstijn and Tangelder's work, points out that the task of acquiring the semantic characteristics of a word takes much longer than its formal characteristics (139). According to these researchers learning the surface level (spelling, grammatical category) can be easily achieved at the beginning of the learning process while integrating it semantically requires much more effort and time if reached at all.

The following diagram explores the above concept. In 1) I included the form *cat*, its phonetic transcription to represent its pronunciation, and its grammatical category. All these points are included in what it is called the formal characteristics separated from 2) synonyms and collocations with a segmented line to represent that the L2 learner will tend to focus on the formal level initially because it is more tangible, and later on in the semantic one. The arrow that goes down represents the difficulty level (+ = most difficult/ - = less difficult). Finally, number 3) tries to explain that not only the formal characteristics, but also the semantic integration is necessary to have a dynamic conceptualization of the term *cat,* so the learner can use it without problems.

	CAT	3) Dynamic
	1) /kæt/	Conceptualization
L2 learner	Countable noun	
	----------------------------	
	2) kitty, feline, pussy	
	house cat	
	cat nap	
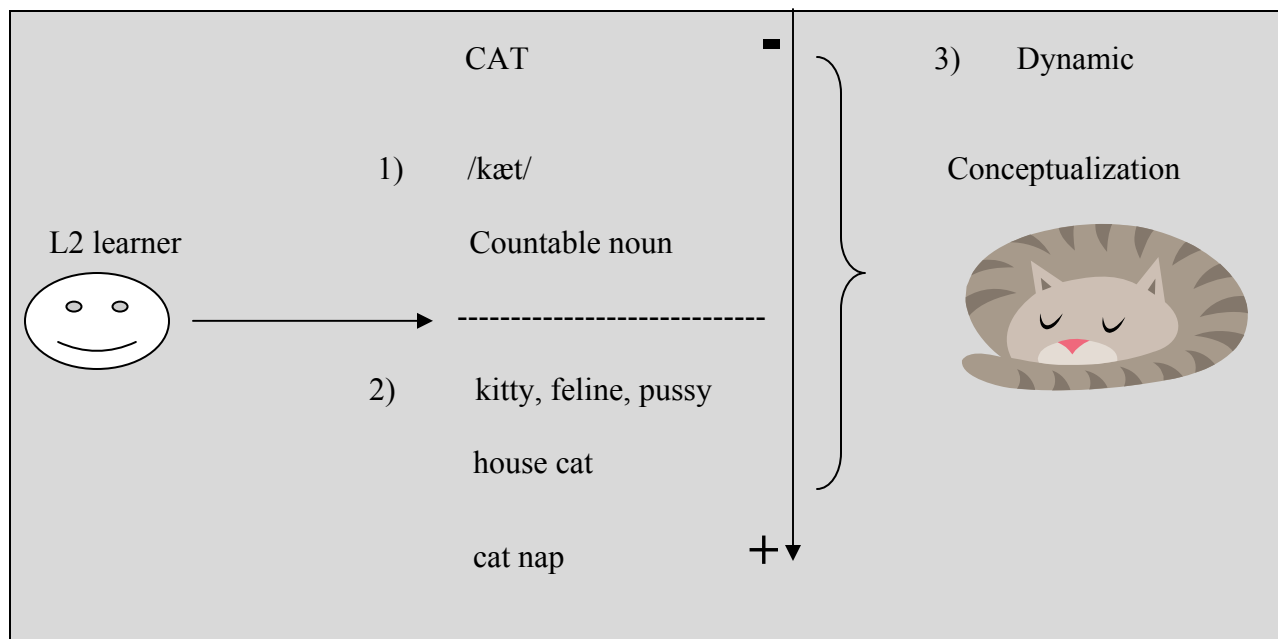
The term used to illustrate this diagram demonstrates that a word is not completely acquired until it is attached to the mental lexicon. This also reminds us that even the acquisition of simple words involves a complex process. When a learner hears and sees the word *cat* for the first time he/she might think he/she knows its meaning or strictly talking its translation, but it is not until this foreign term becomes part of his/her lexicon that it is an acquired concept.

The Lexical Approach has also been benefited from research on the number of words that a native speaker has in his/her repertoire. Recent studies suggest that educated native speakers of English know around 20,000 word families which have several derived family members (proper nouns are not included in the count) (Nation 9). Native speakers will add to their repertoire 1,000 word families every year (Nation 9). These figures, of course, are far from being realistic for a L2 learner especially one who learns English as a Foreign Language. As a consequence specialists like Nation and West developed high-frequency words lists. West's list includes 2,000 word families that should help learners to succeed in the vocabulary acquisition. By focusing on

the most frequent words, learners might have more tools to communicate in the target language. In addition to this, there are those academic word lists such as the one developed by Averil Coxhead which comprises words that a learner pursuing academic studies will need in order to function effectively.

In conclusion, the Lexical Approach and other related areas have shown that the vocabulary acquisition is not a simple task, but certainly due to the theoretical conquests reached so far a new generation of English learners and teachers is ready to move forward and obtain more benefit from it. With this in mind, I want to delve deeper into my own experience as an advanced learner and the challenges as well as solutions that I encountered to continue expanding my vocabulary (see chapter 3).

The Advanced Learner and Vocabulary Acquisition Strategies

The advanced learner has specific needs and challenges in his/her path toward mastering the target language. Although the advanced learner has already reached the basic lexicon threshold to communicate in everyday conversation, there are still an infinite number of unknown *words* that he/she will encounter. McCarthy stresses that the long tail of non-core vocabulary is simply too big to learn in the classroom (1). In order to approach this problem he states that even though it is feasible to quantify the number of words that an advanced learner's repertoire should posses, the quality of this learning must also be considered. In other words, advanced learners should continue their learning process by expanding what they have already learned, not only by adding new items to their repertoires. This supports the idea of re-constructing previous knowledge and integrating new information. This author also makes reference to what it means to know a word, discussed in the previous sections. Knowing words in depth implies the knowledge of the various aspects of use of a word, including, beyond its formal

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properties, its collocations, its sub-senses, and its semantic prosody. By considering all these aspects, advanced learners will be creating stronger associations among words. Vocabulary acquisition therefore will be less difficult.

Autonomy is another characteristic that advanced learners should posses since acquiring new words at that level mostly relies on their own awareness and work. It is useful though to provide strategies for these learners, so they can continue improving their performance.
At this point it is relevant to define 'vocabulary acquisition strategy,' which is part of the larger concept of 'learning strategies.' Yongqi Gu defines it in the following way**:**

A learning strategy is a series of actions a learner takes to facilitate the completion of a learning task. A strategy starts when the learner analyzes the task, the situation, and what is available in his/her own repertoire. The learner then goes on to select, deploy, monitor, and evaluate the effectiveness of this action, and decides if s/he needs to revise the plan and action (3).

Based on this definition it can be concluded that a 'vocabulary acquisition strategy' is a specific plan to learn L2 vocabulary. Moreover, the election of a particular strategy depends on many other variables like the situation, the task (vocabulary learning), the learner's L2 background, individuality, and needs.

This study will propose two strategies that can help advanced learners to expand their lexicon while being more active and reflective in their learning process (see chapter 4).

CHAPTER 3

EXPLORING VOCABULARY CHALLENGES:
ACCOUNT OF AN ADVANCED LEARNER

The first chapter of this study introduced the intricacy involved in learning L2 words and the advances in the field of language teaching and learning that emerged yielding a change in the status of Vocabulary Acquisition. Beyond question, this linguistic component is crucial for any L2 learner. Nevertheless, identifying practical solutions that EFL learners can put into practice is more complex. In order to contribute to this relevant issue, the second chapter will be devoted to the challenges that L2 Advanced Learners face in an EFL context when acquiring L2 Vocabulary. This will be based on introspection on my journey as an advanced learner and as a non-native teacher, and on theoretical support. Thereby this study will be narrowed into more specific aspects of Vocabulary Acquisition. This will be the basis for our solutions to be presented in chapter 3.

In the Beginning

Although this section will be devoted to my journey as an advanced learner, I would like to start this account by sharing a brief anecdote about the acquisition of my mother tongue. Currently I am a linguist pursuing the last stage of the MAT in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at SIT Graduate Institute. I am a native speaker of Spanish and a non-native speaker of English and French at an advanced level and a beginner in Aymara and Japanese. Every time I recall these facts it is hard to believe that it took me three years to acquire the right amount of vocabulary to speak in my mother tongue. In fact, my mother was very worried when she noticed that I was not a verbal baby, so she took me to the doctor and asked him if I suffered

from a language development problem. The doctor stated that I was fine since I could say, at least, a couple of words such as "mamá" (mom), "leche" (milk), and "papá" (dad.) He added that I would be speaking soon. That was a relief for my mother. Indeed my vocabulary did not match my chronological development. Cook presents a sample of a child's words where she identifies 83 words for a child up to the age of two to demonstrate the amount of vocabulary that a normal child should posses at that age (140). According to this data, I was an exception to the rule.

Some aspects for reflection arise from this anecdote now that I want to delve more into the challenges of acquiring vocabulary. First, it also took me three years to feel comfortable speaking in other languages, or in other words, reach an advanced level. In respect to this fact, Cummins indicates that immigrant students need two years to gain face-to-face L2 communication skills, but between five to seven years to approach grade norms in L2 academic skills (qtd. in Nation 115). Time is a crucial aspect for language learning and particularly for vocabulary acquisition. The L2 learner will need time to create those semantic routes that will help him/her to communicate in the target language using suitable vocabulary. That is why the time frame for learning a language must be considered as a relevant factor. It is not rare to find myself answering the following question to my students, friends and even relatives: How long would it take to learn English? Although I used to address that question explaining to them that they must study the language at least for three years based on my own experience, now I think I would use a comparison to answer it. Learning a foreign language is pretty much like learning a mother tongue. There is not an end for that process. Although learners have different goals for learning a language and different proficiency expectations, being able to enjoy the process makes things easier. No one thinks about time when one is having fun. Second, there are challenges in terms of vocabulary acquisition even in one's mother tongue. Thus, the complexity of acquiring

L2 words is higher, especially if the learner is an adult. I started to learn English officially when I was seventeen years old. This fact, always seen as an impediment to acquire the target language, made me become more eager to reach a high level of proficiency. The 'Critical Period' hypothesis states that a language can be fully acquired only at an early age. However I think that encouraging learners to see the positive aspects of learning a language in adulthood must be part of our practice as teachers. Learners who think they will never be able to learn the foreign language because of their age are being limited. Third, stimuli or input plays a very important role in the acquisition of vocabulary. L1 research has broadly demonstrated that language acquisition starts before the first word is said. Finally, the use of strategies to overcome the challenges that the vocabulary acquisition brings is critical. Human beings are equipped with an extraordinary language machine in their brains; it is also true that they develop strategies to overcome difficulties. This is not only shown in daily life, but also in academics.

The Context

In Bolivia, English is the most broadly preferred foreign language to be learned due to the fact that it is the current *lingua franca* in the world. English is taught in every public and private school in the urban area. Although I had had English classes since primary school I could not speak English when I graduated from high school, just like most of my classmates. Therefore my official English learning journey started in 1997 when I passed the entrance examination to pursue a bachelor's degree in Linguistics and Foreign Languages at Mayor de San Andres University in La Paz, Bolivia. The program I chose was very appealing since it offered specialized English classes after the second year of studies, but before that I had to start taking classes of general English and specialized classes in Spanish. I had three-hour English sessions from Monday to Friday for two and a half years. In the third year of the program I started to

learn about morphology, semantics, translation, phonology, and other disciplines in English

while finishing up my general course of the target language. Having these specialized classes

was essential due to the challenge involved. It made me realize how hard it is to learn a language.

Fortunately I was extremely motivated because I had the sensation that I was in an English

speaking country. The program I was pursuing involved a total academic immersion in the

foreign language from the 3rd year on[5]. This gave me the opportunity to develop skills in a

somewhat real context. From my perspective it was a privilege to be taught in English since the

opportunities to use this foreign language as a means of communication are rare in Bolivia.

Motivation is an essential engine that helps learners who are in pursuit of learning a foreign

language. This can be triggered by different factors, such as the desire to become part of the

target community or using it as a means to pursue superior studies. In my case it was a

combination of both factors. From the beginning I wanted to learn the language because I wanted

to have a better future and because I dreamed of living and studying in an English speaking

country.

My Vocabulary Fears

Acquiring vocabulary is like performing a very intricate dance. There are many aspects

that must be considered, such as body movement, choreography, emotions, expression,

coordination, rhythm and so forth. The same happened when I had to find a balance among the

variety of linguistic levels involved in learning a word, such as pronunciation, spelling, grammar,

syntax, discourse, pragmatics, semantics and many others in relation with the fours skills:

speaking, listening, reading, and writing. I had to adjust myself to a new environment where

English was the main means of communication. As I was taking specialized linguistic classes I

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[5] Bachelor's degrees in Bolivia last 5 years and a final thesis is required to obtain the diploma in most of the departments

had to read very technical and abstract material. I asked myself if I would be able to cope with all the academic work in a language that I had not fully mastered and whose vocabulary was still a work in progress in my brain. This gave birth to my vocabulary fears which will be presented here organized by skill.

Reading

The reading challenges related to academic vocabulary knowledge ranged from encountering new words at a high rate to figuring out how to remember their meaning for a further use, for instance in an examination. Nation states that receptive vocabulary involves perceiving the form of a word while listening and retrieving its meaning (24-25). When reading P.H. Matthews[6] in English I felt confused since there were many new words I had to perceive. In some cases many of them in one single sentence or paragraph hindered comprehension. The same happened when I had to read phonology course books plagued with words that talked about phonemes that I had to learn. Words ranging from *plosive*, in reference to the phoneme /p/, to *paradigm*, a common term in any linguistic book, became my daily bread. However, this academic vocabulary was not in the end the most difficult part of learning words for reading since I had taken linguistic specialized classes in Spanish (my mother tongue). Nation, in reference to the Academic World List, argues that second language learners who have not done any academic study in their first language will not automatically benefit from learning the list since it cannot replace the lack of experience they have (197-98). Therefore, world and academic knowledge in one's mother tongue are also other fundamental parts to succeed in the foreign language learning process. Regardless of these big challenges I had a very important tool in my hands; Spanish, my mother tongue, was a good source of help when reading because

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[6] Author of "Morphology an introduction to the theory of word-structures."

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speaking a romance language gives access to Latinized words such as paradigm which is a true cognate (Paradigma).

In addition, navigating newspaper or online articles, not-simplified contemporary novels, comics and even lyrics of songs was another challenge I had to face. Due to the high rate of idioms, metaphorical and creative language in this kind of material it is really hard to grasp the meaning if one does not understand those lexical units as a whole. Idiomatic expressions show a very relevant component that we have not discussed until now: culture. Learning a language implies awareness about culture. The learner must be familiar with the lifestyle of the target community and their world view because if the learner does not consider these aspects, he/she will not be able to acquire a good competence to perform in the target language. Boers, Demecheleer and Eyckmans in their study about etymological elaboration as a strategy for learning idioms explain that these metaphors (figurative idioms) can be, to some extent, a consequence of a country's history (e.g. the comparatively high number of sailing metaphors in British English) or even its national stereotypes (e.g. the relatively high number of baseball metaphors in American English) (57). Hence, the demands of learning the L2 accrue more and more even if one is an advanced learner. Certainly a language reflects thoughts, behaviors, and views that cannot be easily learned in an EFL context. From a teacher's perspective idioms are also a difficult matter because the learner must experience them in real situations in order to understand their meaning. He/she needs a somewhat real context in order to put them into practice. This is a hard goal to achieve since the classroom does not always offer opportunities to use these items. However, the more I learned about the English language through English the more I felt motivated to continue. All my classes were an opportunity to discover what was behind that foreign language.

Speaking

Speaking brought new challenges in my academic life. Certainly, this productive aspect of language demands a high cognitive process for L2 learners, especially at the first stages because one feels vulnerable for lacking all the required tools (particularly vocabulary) to communicate effectively. It explains why, from my perspective and based on a small-scale action research I conducted in Bolivia, speaking is one of the hardest skills to acquire.

For this research a diagnostic questionnaire was administered to 30 English learners of intermediate level. The purpose of this survey was to identify their main areas of learning problems in the English language. This was basically focused on the four skills: writing, reading, speaking and listening. The results showed that 50 % considered speaking their main concern, 25% stated that they were struggling with listening, and 16.6 % said that all the four skills was a problem. Once this data was obtained a second questionnaire was administered based on theoretical research. This time the subjects had to identify which linguistic component was an obstacle to speaking based on their experience. The following statement had to be completed: "When you want to speak in English you have more problems with…." Five items were considered to complete the statement: vocabulary, grammar, fluency, interaction and other (one that was not mentioned) following theoretical research. 41.6 % said that *vocabulary* was the component that was hindering their oral competence. After that, a plan to help these learners with that linguistic component was designed in detail. Techniques ranged from encouraging the use of monolingual dictionaries to teaching substitutes for the words the students already knew to expand their vocabulary. Retrieving the right word at the right time could become a hard task. That is why working on strategies to overcome these difficulties is necessary.

In relation to the vocabulary needed to speak, Nation states that:

Word frequency studies indicate that a much smaller vocabulary is needed for speaking than for writing. This difference however is probably as much a difference influenced by degree of formality and topic as it is by the spoken and written modes. We tend to write about more weighty matters than speak about them (125).

Although Nation holds the view that a lower number of words are needed to speak in the target language the difficulty of spoken informal language cannot be diminished. The use of slang or informal language can be as difficult as delivering an academic speech. I still experience that now that I live in the target community. At the advanced level speaking should be easier, but when one has learned English as a Foreign Language, the environment did not provide a rich environment to use an informal register. Opportunities to speak in English informally for me were rare because I did not have the necessity to do it to function in Bolivia.

Furthermore, as most of my professors had studied in English-speaking countries I got the impression that we had to speak perfect English (formal English) while showing knowledge about content. Therefore, my classmates and I felt under pressure because the standards set were fairly high. Delivering presentations was the most demanding mode to show oral competence in the English language because it implied showing fluency, use of pertinent *academic* and *specialized vocabulary*, good sequence, and pronunciation. Most of my classmates were very afraid of this since it involved a hard socio-cognitive process. I was afraid too. I still remember classmates who used to get petrified in front of the class before starting their presentations because they were nervous or not feeling ready to speak in English at an academic level. Did this occur because their vocabulary knowledge was limited? What was hindering their performance?

Which are the challenges to speak in the L2? Nation observes that when an individual wants to speak in the foreign language he/she will need to retrieve and produce the appropriate spoken word form (25). Indeed speaking demands having the right word at the right time and being familiar with other nuances of the target language. For instance, from my observation English is spoken loudly while La Paz Spanish[7] is spoken softly. My students in Bolivia tend to speak very softly because that is the way they speak in their mother tongue. They had to learn how to tune the volume of their voices besides all the suprasegmental aspects of the English Language, such as: intonation, stress and pitch.

Although I have reached a good speaking proficiency in different scenarios there is a long path to follow to become a nativelike speaker. I believe that working more on vocabulary can facilitate this process.

Writing

Writing is an art that requires words to come together to form a coherent whole. In order to produce a piece of writing many aspects of the target language must be taken into account, ranging from knowing the format, cohesive devices (logical connectors), culture (directness of English), and other linguistics components that we have already discussed such as spelling and orthography.

Researchers agree that vocabulary for productive use is more demanding because it implies retrieval and production of words. Based on Nation's explanation about the implications of knowing a word, let's analyze what is involved in knowing the word *unhappy:*

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[7] A dialect of Bolivian Spanish spoken in La Paz and El Alto city

- ✦ Being able to write it with correct spelling

- ✦ Being able to construct it using the right word parts in their appropriate forms

- ✦ Being able to produce the word to express the meaning *unhappy*

- ✦ Being able to produce the word in different contexts to express the range of meanings of *unhappy*

- ✦ Being able to produce synonyms and opposites for *unhappy*

- ✦ Being able to use the word correctly in an original sentence

- ✦ Being able to produce words that commonly occur with it (collocation) (28).

But why is productive vocabulary harder to learn? Nation summarizes several possible explanations that are complementary rather than competing:

1. The 'amount of knowledge' explanation. Productive learning is more difficult because new spoken and written output patterns must be learned. For instance learners whose mother tongue has a different writing system will need to learn word forms from scratch.

2. The 'practice' explanation. It is broadly known that receptive use is generally more practiced in the classroom. Therefore the productive use is diminished, particularly in EFL contexts where the chances to write in the target language only occurs if the teacher assigns it.

3. The 'access' explanation. A new foreign language word in the early stages of learning has only one simple link to its first language translation (the receptive direction).

The receptive direction

Foreign word   ⟶   L1 translation

Surprising   ⟶   *Sorprendente*

The L1 word however has many competing associations (the productive direction) and thus

productive recall is more difficult than receptive because there are many paths to choose

from, and the ones within the L1 lexical system are likely to be stronger.

The productive direction

L1 word ⟶ Foreign word

Sorprendente ⟶ Surprising

(Inside the L1 lexical system)

    ⟶   collocates of *sorprendente*

    ⟶   synonyms of *sorprendente*

    ⟶   opposites of *sorprendente*

    ⟶   etc. (28-29)[8].

This explanation made me think of my days as a translator. The most demanding task was

translating from my mother tongue, Spanish, into English. This demonstrates that productive use

is extremely arduous. When I had to translate from English into Spanish I did not have many

problems because I was producing in my mother tongue. Overall, the same happens when the

learner has to write a piece with limited vocabulary. There are not enough paths to choose from.

4. The 'motivation' explanation. Learners' degree of motivation to use certain words is an aspect

that must be considered. Corson states that the socio-cultural factor can make learners avoid

certain kinds of knowledge productively (qtd. in Nation 30). The directness of English, in formal

letters for example, is not shared by all languages. The use of vocabulary that is direct and

assertive might not be necessarily an active feature in some learners' vocabulary production.

Therefore, I believe learners whose mother tongue does not share this characteristic will have

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[8] Nation's text was summarized and a new example was introduced.

more problems when trying to use direct and assertive vocabulary since it might go against their culture, linguistic and social norms.

Without doubt writing requires a great deal of processing effort from the learners. It implies using a new code that, depending on the level of proficiency, can be influenced by the mother tongue making this productive skill a big challenge. In order to write I need to know how words could be combined because I have to put my thoughts together in a coherent way. For that I need to use correct collocations, show variety in language (synonyms), be creative with the language, use correct spelling and be able to edit my own work. In other words, I need to have a solid word knowledge foundation.

From a teacher's perspective vocabulary use is a good indicator of the learner's proficiency. The higher the level of the student the more varied and elaborated language must be shown. Nation suggests that one way to measure vocabulary size and growth in written work is to analyze the vocabulary of learners' written compositions. Vocabulary is measured considering many aspects, such as: lexical variation, lexical originality, lexical density, lexical sophistication and lexical quality (179).

Regarding lexical sophistication Corson argues that, for writers with academic purposes, it is essential to gain productive written control of Graeco-Latin vocabulary of English in order to be recognized as member of the academic writing community (qtd. in Nation 178). In addition, Leki and Corson found that second language learners see lack of vocabulary as the major factor affecting the quality of their writing (qtd. in Nation 178).

Having the right amount and suitable vocabulary for writing is still a big challenge for me. In the MAT program at SIT Graduate Institute, reflective essays are the main way to evaluate students' progress. This was a fairly new experience that made me work on my

vocabulary. It seemed to me that in order to reflect I had to be more concise as well as creative with the language. Using metaphors or figurative language to explain what I had learned was very new to me. Moreover, while writing this study I find myself looking for not only words, but also the right collocations in order to express my ideas. Advanced learners have a big repertoire of words to cope with writing, but as vocabulary acquisition is a continuum there are always new demands that need to be fulfilled.

All these aspects should make us reflect on the importance of vocabulary knowledge for writing and the challenges that are involved in this process.

Listening

For many reasons listening has always been my Achilles heel. I always scored poorly in the listening sections during the general English course I took in my hometown university. I also obtained a B in the FCE (Cambridge First Certificate in English) examination due to my low performance in listening. I particularly find listening challenging because when you are listening to somebody there are no pauses, so you need to hear the words, retrieve their meaning and in most cases, answer immediately to what was heard. Affective factors are also involved when listening as one feels under pressure. I remember that during my last modules of general English my teacher used to expose us to many listening exercises, mostly TOEFL based. Anytime we had those exercises I felt extremely nervous, so the results were terrible. When I could not understand a word I kept thinking of it hindering my comprehension. I was 'blocked'. L2 learners would need at least 95 % coverage of the running words in the input in order to gain reasonable comprehension and to have reasonable success at guessing from context (Nation 114). One cannot hear a word whose form and meaning was not learned previously if most of the words that are around it are also new.

In an EFL context the opportunities to hear the target language outside the classroom are very scarce. Therefore, listening practice is limited. I would say that listening was one of the skills that I did not enjoy because I did not have a lot of practice in the first stages of my learning process. However, when I started to take specialized classes I was immersed in an academic setting where English was the main means of communication. Therefore I was greatly benefited even though I continued to struggle with it.

Nevertheless, having learned English in an academic context was also a disadvantage in terms of hearing informal English. That is what I noticed when I arrived in the United States. My informal English was hardly appropriate because I was not taught slang and because my idiomatic knowledge background was not broad.

In addition, in connected speech, words will not be necessarily comprehensible because they suffer changes due to a variety of phonemic phenomena, such as contraction, linking, reduction, assimilation, flapping and so forth. There are also neologisms that cannot be easily understood and the accent of the target community's dialect can also hinder the listener's comprehension.

My listening performance fortunately improved when I was living in France. Being immersed in a French community somehow helped me to improve my listening in English. Of course, understanding French during the first month was a real challenge because my proficiency level in this language was not as good as in English. Therefore I developed strategies to cope mostly with interaction and vocabulary. In addition, the affective factor was also critical. Little by little I became more self-confident when interacting in French; which might have also strengthened my English. If my listening in French (L3) was almost perfect why could I not expect the same from my strongest L2 (English)? It seems that having gone through such an

experience contributed to my thorough multilingual proficiency. When I took the TOEFL examination in France I scored pretty well in the listening section. Words became clearer in my mind. There is no doubt, however, that slang is complicated to understand, particularly because it involves idioms and neologisms. In the past I would have thought that after a year in the target community (United States) I would have been able to use slang, but it is not true, at least in my personal experience. There is still work to be done. Exploring strategies to cope with these new challenges in regard to vocabulary is urgent.

CHAPTER 4

SOLUTIONS

As seen in chapter 3, there are various challenges that must be overcome in terms of advanced vocabulary not only related to isolated words, but also to complex lexical units. Thus, developing strategies that lead advanced learners to expand and deepen word knowledge should be a priority in any language learning setting (EFL or ESL).

This chapter will focus on a proposal for two vocabulary acquisition strategies that intend to contribute to the vocabulary field. These vocabulary acquisition strategies have been developed based on personal and professional experience: resorting to familiar idioms in L1 and the vocabulary awareness model. Each strategy will be described in detail here.

First Strategy: Resorting to Familiar Idioms in L1 to Learn Idioms in L2

Linguists, teachers and learners agree that idioms are big enigmas because of their syntactic, lexical and semantic intricacy. Langlotz (2006: 4) states that idioms can be described as complex symbols with specific formal, semantic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic characteristics. This lexical unit is not homogenous since many categories can correspond to it. Idioms can be phrasal verbs (cut it out!), fixed phrases (by the way), collocations (in order to), sayings or proverbs (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth) and have figurative meaning (to go against the grain). In order to be more specific Langlotz proposes a definition for these lexical units:

> An idiom is an institutionalised construction that is composed of two or more lexical items and has the composite structure of a phrase or semi-clause, which may feature constructional idiosyncrasy. An idiom primarily has an ideational

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discourse-function and features figuration, i.e. its semantic structure is

derivationally non-compositional. Moreover, it is considerably fixed and

collocationally restricted. (5)

Idioms, in all of their forms, are omnipresent, especially when the learner has reached an

advanced level. For that reason, it is relevant to resort to the learner's background knowledge to

scaffold this learning process. In addition, we consider that the use of idioms is a relevant part

when learning a language because its use implies higher proficiency. There is no doubt, however,

that this task is not easy to accomplish, but by using learners' mother tongue as a resource,

advanced learners could make significant progress.

This strategy consists of developing a personalized glossary comprising idioms that are

pertinent to the learners' vocabulary acquisition process. In fact this strategy must be tailored by

every learner by resorting to idioms that represent a problem to them. These idioms must be

somehow equivalents in both languages or have a similar word element when translating. This

would be an effective tool for noticing and raising awareness about the importance of learning

idioms. Marton notes that weakly idiomatic complex units such as *to have the last word* and

complex units that have a close equivalent in the L1, such as *to grease someone's palm/graisser

la patte a quelqu'un*[9], do not pose a decoding problem and therefore tend to pass unnoticed,

which probably hinders their acquisition [for production] (qtd. in Arnaud and Savignon 161). It

is, therefore, relevant to emphasize strategies that raise awareness concerning these lexical units.

Nevertheless, we know that not all idioms show this characteristic (see the examples below), but

we are also aware that it would be a first step in order to motivate students to learn idioms and

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[9] An example related to Spanish as the L1 can be: Have somebody in the palm of one's hand/Tener a alguien en la palma de la mano

use them productively. These kinds of idioms share similar features to the Spanish ones, so they can be learned more easily once they are noticed.

The blink of an **eye**	En un abrir y cerrar de **ojos**
Have one's **hands** tied	Tener las **manos** atadas

It is also possible to encourage learners to create mental images and then represent them in drawings to facilitate retention. Learners who are more visual-oriented would be more motivated to do that. Although this could be time consuming, learners are encouraged to resort to more techniques that can help them to acquire those idioms effectively. In fact advanced learners should assume more responsibility for their own learning since this process has no end. Native speakers also acquire vocabulary throughout their entire lives.

Creating a glossary of this nature is not only challenging, in a positive sense, but also promotes analysis and more exposure to new words.

Procedure

This is a strategy that can be introduced to advanced learners at the beginning of a course or used independently. In order to motivate autonomy and responsibility, the teacher should not score it. These are the steps the learner has to follow:

Stage 1	Be clear about the purpose of this particular strategy (To develop a glossary of idioms that share similarities with idioms in your mother tongue 'Spanish' to expand your lexicon in English)
Stage 2	Identify certain idioms in the foreign language (English) that have a close relationship with your L1 (Spanish), regarding **meaning** and **context**.
Stage 3	Select those idioms that interest you and enhance your proficiency in the foreign language.
Stage 4	Create a glossary with those selected idioms with their equivalents in the L1.
Stage 5	Present different examples, in both languages to demonstrate similarities in the context for better retention.

In order to illustrate this strategy 10 idioms and their equivalents in Spanish will be presented in this section. Learners could also develop additional features to enhance acquisition (for example drawings) as it was mentioned earlier.

1. Break somebody's heart = Romper el corazón a alguien.

S: Cuando lo ví besando a esa mujer me *rompió* el *corazón.*   E: He *broke* her *heart* when he left

2. Have an open mind= Tener la mente abierta

S: Para entender la homosexualidad uno debe *tener la mente abierta*

E: I'm not convinced your idea will work, but I'll *have an open mind* for the moment

3. You are only young once= Se es joven sólo una vez en la vida

S: No te amargues sólo *se es joven una vez en la vida*   E: Enjoy the club! - *you're only young once*

4. Actions speak louder than words = Las acciones dicen más que las palabras

S: Si quieres demostrar que me amas, recuerda que *las acciones dicen más que las palabras.*

E: If you want to succeed, remember that *actions speak louder than words*

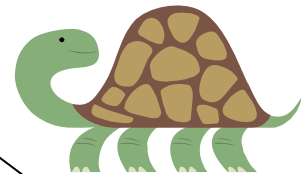5. Nothing venture nothing gained = El que no arriesga no gana

S: Sé más valiente, el que *no arriesga no gana*

E: Tell your friend that he must be bolder because *nothing venture nothing gained*

6. Slowly but surely = Lento pero seguro

S: Prefiero realizar mi trabajo *lento pero seguro*, no deseo que salga mal

E: *Slowly but surely* her condition improved

7. Wash one's hands of somebody / something = Lavarse las manos

S: Tu siempre te *lavas las manos* en cualquier tipo de problema que tenemos

E: I've *washed my hands* of the whole sordid business

8. Two heads are better than one= Dos cabezas piensan mejor que una

S: ¿Podrías ayudarme?, *dos cabezas piensan mejor que una*

E: Remember that *two heads are better than one*. Call me if you need my help.

9. Start off on the right/wrong foot (with sb) = Comenzar con el pie izquierdo/derecho

S: Este año *comencé* la universidad *con el pie derecho*, todo salió como yo deseaba

E: He *started off on the wrong foot* by being rude to his new boss

10. Bite one's tongue = Morderse la lengua

S: Tuve que *morderme la lengua* para no decir lo que sentía

E: I *bit my tongue* because I didn't want to tell what I was thinking

By creating their own glossaries learners will be more motivated to add these peculiar lexical units to their active repertoire. The process of selecting idioms they are interested in and comparing them with similar ones in their mother tongue is highly cognitive and enhances analysis of the language. Moreover, the learner will need to work on two examples in both languages to give the right context. Sources for obtaining idioms are everywhere: idioms dictionaries, readings, movies, songs, internet etc. The EFL advanced learner has scarce input and output opportunities, but he/she must be aware of his/her responsibility to look for appropriate sources. The strength of this strategy is the process of idioms selection, their analysis and finally their production shown in sentences within an appropriate context.

Second Strategy

Context: Acquiring Words in the United States

Being in the United States was a perfect opportunity to come up with some ideas to maximize my vocabulary acquisition in the target community. One of those ideas was to keep a log of most of the new words I encountered. Although this was not a constant activity I was able to record a good number of words. In this section of the study, an analysis of 10 of those words and a reflection on the learning process is presented. In order to gather this descriptive information a think-aloud technique called 'Stimulated Recall' was used. O'Malley and Chamot indicate that this technique consists of leading learners through their performance (for example, by viewing a videotape of it) and asking them to make judgments about their own level of success (114). In this particular case, the log was my guide to make judgments about my success in acquiring words. In addition, a reflective questionnaire about the acquisition process was designed. This model is the second strategy proposed to advanced learners to be more self-aware of what they can do when they encounter new words. Although I encountered these words while being in the target community it is also possible for EFL learners to use the same model to acquire vocabulary and reflect on that process. This strategy can also be time consuming, but as it was mentioned advanced learners have more responsibilities because the spectrum of words to be learned is always expanding.

Vocabulary Awareness Model

"A word that goes with the wind, it is a word that you might need in the future."

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Procedure

The learner has to follow these steps:

Stage 1	Keep a log of new words or words that must be re-learned or reconnected.
Stage 2	Answer the reflective questions about each word. Monitor any progress.
Stage 3	Read the answers and identify strategies used with each word.
Stage 4	Add any personal feature to this strategy, for example keep track of how many times the word was used in a certain period of time.

Reflective Questionnaire

1. In which context did you learn this word?

2. How did you know that it was a new word for you? Did you know anything about the word?

3. Why did you choose to learn that word?

4. What did you do to learn it? Which were the strategies you used to learn it?

5. How do you know you learned it?

6. Which linguistic levels[10] of this word did you acquire?

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[10] Phonetic, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels

'Hinder' *(prevent the progress or accomplishment of)*

1. In my first Group Dynamics class our professor asked us some reflective questions after an activity. One of them was: What hindered your learning?

2. That was the first time I heard the word 'hinder' and because I lacked its meaning I could not understand the question. However, I knew that it was a verb because of the word order and form. I also had the idea that it had a negative meaning, but I was not certain.

3. When looking around I perceived that all my classmates understood the question and I felt embarrassed. I could not understand the question because of that word; I needed to know its meaning.

4. I decided to ask one of my American classmates for the meaning of *hinder* once I received the handout where I could see the word (I am very visual). My classmate gave me a definition, but then she added a synonym (prevent), so I finally understood its meaning. After my first encountered with 'hinder' I was bombarded by readings and reflective questions where I could see it again and again. This repetitive process helped me to acquire the word.

5. I know I learned this word because I have seen it a lot during this year. I acquired the meaning and sometimes I do not even have to think about the word in Spanish which happens with some of the words in my repertoire. 'Hinder' is 'hinder' in my mind.

6. The first encounter was oral and then written. I can pronounce, read, and write this verb without any problem. Due to the great amount of readings where this word appeared, I also became familiar with its collocations.

'Bring it up' *(Put forward for consideration or discussion)*

1. In my Four Skills class one of my classmates said this verbal phrase. I immediately took notes and wrote its translation in Spanish because I could understand its meaning through context. My classmates said: If you bring it up (Si lo mencionas). I was fascinated by learning this construction because it seemed very useful when speaking.

2. Although its components were not new for me, the somehow idiomatic meaning was new.

3. As I automatically got the translation in my mind I thought it was a helpful expression to use in class. This phrasal verb was heard in this context: If you bring it up (In Spanish, 'Si lo mencionas').

4. I wrote the whole structure 'If you bring it up' and next to it I wrote the translation in Spanish.

5. Although at that moment I was very excited about this construction I think I have not acquired it yet, probably because I was not faced with a situation that pushed me to use it. Sometimes it also has to do with a very conscious decision of using certain vocabulary you learn. One needs to practice the words that are new in one's repertoire.

6. I can pronounce the whole structure correctly, write, and understand it now.

'Bombed' (devastated)

1. One of MAT classmates, while driving us to Brattleboro, said that he received some feedback from his advisor and that after reading it he was 'bombed.' Because of the context I understood that my friend felt disappointed because of what his advisor said.

2. Although I had seen this word before the connotative meaning used in his utterance was new. I only knew that it was an adjective.

3. I decided to learn it because it seemed a word that I could use easily because it expresses an emotion.

4. I kept repeating the word in my mind and then when I had the chance to use it I did it. My interlocutor was very surprised when I used that idiomatic expression. That experience encouraged me to acquire it. However, I will need to use it more frequently.

5. I know I learned it because I could use it in a very appropriate context and because my interlocutor felt gladly surprised. In addition, while writing this study my advisor also made me aware of another possible meaning for this word (drunk).

6. Before the first encounter I knew only one meaning for 'bombed', the denotative one, but now I added another meaning to its lexical net.

'Discuss something' (Speak with others about (something); talk (something) over in detail; have a discussion)

1. When some MAT colleagues and I attended the New England TESOL Conference one of them told me that I was making a mistake while using the verb 'discuss.' I was using a wrong collocation 'discuss about.'

2. In fact, this was not a new word, but a collocation that I was using incorrectly. This could have been caused by an interference with my mother tongue (discutir sobre) even though in Spanish we also have an object after this verb (discutirlo= discuss it). I might have contrasted 'talk' with 'discuss' and concluded that I could use the preposition 'about' with 'discuss' as in 'talk about.' Both verbs share similar semantic load.

3. I decided to correct myself because it will lead me to a better performance in the target language and because I am a teacher.

4. Immediately I wrote down 'discuss about' and 'discuss it'. I crossed out the first one, so I would remember that it was a mistake. After that, anytime I have to use the verb 'discuss' I am very careful and try to avoid putting the preposition 'about' after it, especially when speaking.

5. I know I learned it because I remember my classmate correcting me. It could be an affective factor that pushed me to correct myself.

6. By correcting this mistake I acquired lexicogrammar awareness. I learned the grammatical behavior of 'discuss.'

'Stall' (small area selling or dispensing goods)

1. When I was doing my internship at the University of Connecticut I shared a Bolivian tradition with my advanced students. In order to do that I looked for an article that explained this tradition. When reading the article I finally found a word that always gave me problems when I used to work as a translator: 'stall.' Stalls are very common in the festival I intended to explain to my students.

Extract of the article:

'The Municipal Park paths and entrances fill up with *stalls* which are well-covered with plastic sheets, a proven protection against water-filled balloons.'

2. I knew it was a new word, but I could identify its meaning due to the very familiar context. The lexical compound 'plastic sheets' gave me the most significant clue. I knew by experience that stalls must be covered with these plastic sheets because this festival lasts 3 weeks and because it takes place in carnival which involves the second clue 'a protection against water-filled balloons'. Young people and children play with water-filled balloons during carnival. The article described a festivity I knew very well. I also knew this word was a noun.

3. I decided to learn this word because it would help me to describe this Bolivian festivity in a better way to people who are not familiar with it.

4. I underlined the word in the article and looked for the correct pronunciation. Later when I gave a presentation on my country I used this word again feeling more confident about its form and meaning.

5. I know I learned it because I can remember and use it.

6. I know how to pronounce and spell it. I know its meaning and I am aware of other possible meanings (a compartment for a domestic animal in a stable or barn/ a space marked off for parking a motor vehicle).

'Single sex school' (schools for only men or women)

1. In one of our Group Dynamics classes, I was working in pairs. We had to give our perspectives on single sex schools. It was the first time I encountered this lexical unit. I understood the meaning right away, but the word order was a little hard for me at the beginning, particularly when speaking.

2. I had never used or heard that lexical unit, so I knew it was new. Its meaning, however, was not. I perfectly understood it.

3. I decided to learn it because I needed to use this word for the activity we were having and because I had studied in a single sex school.

4. I wrote down this lexical unit and tried to use it as many times as I could, especially during the activity we were doing. Later in informal conversations, I started to use that lexical unit to describe the primary and secondary school I attended. I felt more confident about what I was

saying because I was using the right word. In the past I might have said that I studied in a school for only girls.

5. I can remember and use it.

6. Using this word when speaking is the linguistic level that I think I acquired the most. Writing it is not very difficult.

'Wore out' (Exhaust or get tired through overuse or great strain or stress)

1. In one of my trips after having had a long day one of my friends asked if I was 'wore out'.

2. I did not understand nor identify the words he was using except from 'out'. Because of the context I somehow understood what he was trying to say, but I was not completely sure.

3. As I was not sure about what I was hearing and could not identify the word 'wore' I decided to learn it.

4. I told my friend that I did not understand him. He gave me the definition while using the denotative meaning of the phrasal verb 'wear out' (Deteriorate through use or stress). Then I said to him that it was an idiom, but he argued that it was a phrasal verb. It is true it is a phrasal verb, but it has an idiomatic or figurative meaning. This discussion made me learn this lexical unit. Later when my advisor revised this section I realized that I missed some important points regarding this lexical unit. First, 'wore out' is an adjectival phrase derived from a phrasal verb (wear out). Second, 'wore out' corresponds to a non-standard (rural) register. Third, it was replacing the less marked 'worn out.' After this input, I started to reflect on what I actually heard. My friend might have said 'worn out' or 'wore out.' It is something I should have checked well.

5. Now when I hear it I can understand its meaning.

6. Both meanings, denotative and connotative, are part of my repertoire. In addition, I learned that even though 'wore out' and 'worn out' share the same meaning, they do not share the same pragmatic use.

'It should be borne in mind that' (a point that must be considered)

1. While reviewing literature for my thesis, I found this lexical unit that I understood without problems. However, I had never used it in my writing.

2. This lexical unit was new for me because I never used it before. I knew all of the components, but I had never combined them in that way.

3. I decided to learn it because it seems to be a very useful semi-fixed lexical unit for academic writing.

4. First I wrote down its translation in Spanish (Se tiene que tomar en cuenta) and next to it I wrote its English version. Before I have not thought about the order, but now looking at my log, I noticed that.

5. I have the meaning in Spanish, so I can use it in English. Sometimes I feel I do not have all of the sophisticated language in English, so that is why I try to notice these particular lexical units.

6. I am pretty sure I can use this lexical unit when writing, but I am not sure if I can use it orally. I need to be exposed to more repetitions.

After my advisor revised one of my drafts it was clear that this lexical unit is mostly used in academic writing and not in speaking. A possible exception would be a lecture.

'Enhance' (to increase or improve in value, quality, desirability, or attractiveness)

1. I first saw this word in one of my academic readings. Later, I noticed that this word appeared very frequently in that kind of material.

2. I had not seen that word before, but I knew it was a verb because of the word order.

3. In my first encounter I did not fully understand the sentence where this word was, so I needed to look it up in the dictionary.

4. I looked it up in an online dictionary and listened to its pronunciation since I had only read the word. Then, I wrote it down and started to identify it in other readings. I looked this word up a couple of times after that because I could not remember its meaning. Later, I tried to use it when writing.

5. I know I learned it because I know its meaning now. I can also write and pronounce it.

6. Writing or reading is not a problem, but using it orally is something I have not done yet.

'Pinkish' (somewhat pink)

1. In my everyday life in the United States I heard this word and others ending in –ish.

2. It was new because I did not know that such words could exist. I knew 'childish', but it took me a while to realize that the suffix –ish worked with other words, even with numbers 'fourish' making reference to time (around 4).

3. I decided to learn it because it is used in everyday language.

4. I wrote it down and started to hear it when my MAT classmates used to use it. Later I also started to use it. This learning was also reinforced in my English Applied Linguistics class.

5. I know I learned it because I can use the suffix –ish more naturally, particularly with nouns (pinkish, greenish). I still have to work on numbers (fourish, sixish).

6. I learned that this kind of word must be used in an informal setting. I also learned that the suffix -ish could be attached to a great variety of words including numbers (time).

Analysis

      An analysis of my log and the answers to the reflective questions is pertinent at this point since it will provide more insights into the vocabulary awareness model presented. The complexity of learning new words or re-learning/re-connecting others is like solving a puzzle with linguistic, affective and cognitive pieces coming together. As observed, any time a new word was encountered, its acquisition did not happen automatically. A variety of strategies that were word, learner or situation dependant had to be used. As an advanced learner, I tried to resort to what would help me to 'stick' the word to my language repertoire more easily. I resort to my mother tongue, native speakers, my linguistic professional background, dictionaries, etc. However, what is mostly seen in this vocabulary acquisition process is a desire to create connections, so the new words will become part of an active repertoire. This, of course, only occurs when there are multiple encounters and motivation to use new words or fine-tune those that are not completely new.

      Anderson, following a more cognitive perspective, explains that it is known that information is stored in two distinct ways: short term memory (the active working memory that holds modest amounts of information only for a brief period) and long-term memory (the sustained storage of information, which may be represented as isolated elements or more likely as interconnected networks) (qtd. in O'Malley and Chamot 17). The acquisition of *'hinder'* is a good example of what happened in my brain. Once I resorted to a strategy (asking the meaning to a native speaker) I entered the new information in my short term memory. Then, motivated by

multiple encounters, necessity and personal factors (I felt embarrassed for not knowing that word) I finally stored this word in my long-term memory. Moreover, as mentioned in the log 'hinder' is mostly 'hinder' in my mind. This can be explained by resorting to an analysis of the 'linguistic sign':

HINDER	HINDER	HINDER	
(Signifier)	(Referent)	(Signified)	prevent
Form	Abstract	Meaning	
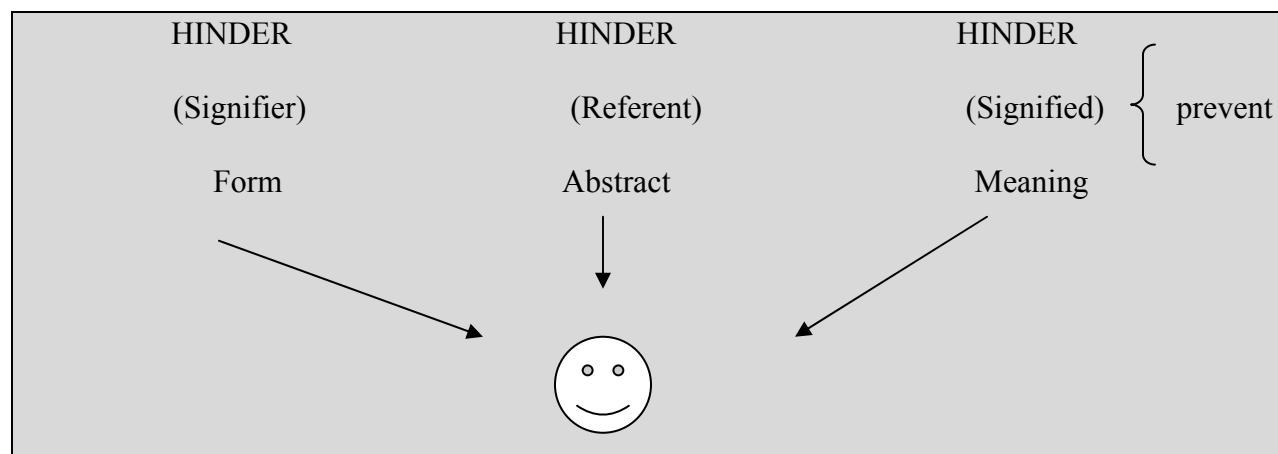
It seems that when 'hinder' is retrieved the referent and meaning are processed in the L1. Therefore, I do not need to resort to my mother tongue for its use. For some reason, there are words that are more easily stored with one entry (just English). It is not uncommon since I believe advanced learners build the ability to resort to other means to acquire new words, despite their mother tongue. Moreover, non-native speakers who live in the target community have to use the language all the time. This immersion is an excellent tool for vocabulary acquisition. In an EFL context, this is more difficult, but feasible. Most of my vocabulary was learned in an EFL context which helped me to interact with different kinds of speakers and pursue a graduate program in the target community.

In order to delve more into details of my vocabulary acquisition process, I would like to reference to Weinstein and Mayer's four stage encoding process. The stages are: *selection,*

acquisition, construction, and integration (qtd. in O'Malley and Chamot 17). In my log, the

reader can perceive the randomness of the words *selected* since I did not know which words

would interest me before hand. However, certain criteria can be traced, such as the saliency of

the words and the need for self-correction. In some situations, I needed the word to fully

understand an activity or question, in other words, to function in the target language. In others, I

realized that I was making a mistake and wanted to correct it (*discuss*). This corresponds to the

first stage of the encoding process because I was selecting what to record. In the second stage

'*acquisition,*' learners actively transfer information from the working memory (short term

memory) into the long-term memory for permanent storage. In most of the cases, the words

recorded in the log were actually acquired based on this definition. By recording them and

answering the reflective questions, this process was pushed forward benefiting me. This,

however, does not mean that the acquisition process of those particular words ended. In the third

stage '*construction*,' learners actively build internal connections between ideas contained in

working memory. The information from long-term memory can help the retention and way of

storing the new information. This occurred with the word '*enhance*'. I tried to find a way to

remember this word just by looking it up in the dictionary because the definition would give me

the opportunity to build those internal connections in working memory. Then, my long-term

memory helped me to store it as a verb even though the meaning was not very clear. I had to

check the meaning of this word a couple of times. In the final stage '*integration,*' the learner

actively searches for prior knowledge in long-term memory and transfers this knowledge to

working memory. This occurred with the word '*pinkish.*' It seems that the way I learned

'childish' helped me to understand 'pinkish,' but as mentioned in the log, it took me a while to

realize that. I built connections and finally stored the new word in my long-term memory.

Here, it is important to emphasize that the process detailed above is the core of this study. Not only me, but other advanced learners can benefit if they follow this strategy or others that answer their needs. Although the infinite amount of words to be learned seems to be a discouraging point, learners' self-confidence can be raised by empowering them with suitable strategies, particularly those that make them 'reflect' about the process of learning words.

In the first chapter, it was mentioned that traditional vocabulary approaches considered that lists of words were necessary for the retention of new vocabulary. Although the vocabulary awareness model presented is also based on a list (record of new words) the difference is clearly shown through what the learner actually does with this particular list. First, the data recorded is not restricted to isolated words, but includes lexical units as well, promoting a more context-based acquisition. Second, each question considered in the reflective questionnaire draws attention to crucial information about the lexical system of the words acquired as well as the learner's needs. For instance, the question 'Why did you choose to learn that word?' makes reference to the learner's motivation to learn a specific word and the needs that he/she is trying to fulfill. Third, the questionnaire serves as a self-monitoring and self-evaluation mechanism (How do you know that you learned it?) promoting autonomy and responsibility. Finally, an analysis of the data gathered for question 4 (What did you do to learn it? Which were the strategies you used to learn it?) leads to noticing different strategies and techniques that were used, among them:

- Translation (First I wrote down its translation in Spanish…and next to it I wrote the English version).

- Note Taking (I wrote this lexical unit…)

- Repetition (…and tried to use it as many times as I could, especially during the activity we were having)

- Contextualization (I knew it was a new word, but I could identify its meaning due to the very familiar context).

- Resourcing (I looked it up in an online dictionary and listened to its pronunciation since I had only read the word).

- Transfer (I knew 'childish,' but it took me a while to realize that the suffix –ish worked with other words…).

- Question for clarification (I decided to ask one of my American classmates for the meaning of hinder…).

O'Malley and Chamot classify the above mechanisms as "cognitive and social mediation (question for clarification) strategies" (119-120). All these strategies are part of a general one (the vocabulary awareness model) which can be classified as a "planning strategy" (Nation 218) because the learner chooses what to focus on and when to focus on it. Clearly, the learner who uses the vocabulary awareness model will be planning to record words. However, the words that will comprise the log are not planned. That is a more spontaneous process guided by the learner's needs and intuition of what is good to learn.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the acquisition of vocabulary is a puzzle that must be carefully solved. It implies time, effort and motivation. The words I learned or semi-learned during my sojourn in the United States clearly demonstrate that the acquisition process is a very complex process, but feasible at the same time. It should be also borne in mind that this phenomenon is dynamic at many levels (cognitive, linguistic, social and affective) which implies more load for the learner. However, by reaching this breaking point or at least by installing a sort

of vocabulary antenna and strategies that can enhance proficiency, the learners will also be able

to feel more self-confident regarding their lexicon.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This study intended to explore the importance of vocabulary acquisition and bring some tools to those advanced learners eager to continue working on their lexicon and for those non-native teachers (multilingual proficient teachers) who want to perfect their English.

The first chapter was focused on establishing the theoretical basis for a better understanding of the old and current status of the Vocabulary Acquisition field. Although Vocabulary was neglected for a long time, it is now broadly known that lexis plays a crucial role in language learning. The Lexical Approach opened our eyes to the dynamic relationship between lexis and syntax. For that reason, learners should be more aware of the importance of learning 'chunks of language' and the entourage of the words they acquire to improve their word knowledge, and consequently their language proficiency. This section also presented an analysis of what it means to learn a word and its challenges from a linguistic perspective. This aspect, although broadly discussed in literature, helped to set the context in which the topic of this study emerged.

An introspection of my personal experience as an advanced learner, in the second part, supported what was discussed early in this study by looking at the vocabulary challenges faced in each skill. Certainly acquiring words is not a simple task, especially in an EFL context. This account also tried to delve into details and musings of what actually happened to me. Although personal, readers could identify themselves with my experiences and reflect on their own language learning process while reading it. Before I came to SIT, I had never kept a journal of my L2 or L3 learning process, but because of what I have learned in this institution, now I

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believe it is vital to look back and reflect on those personal experiences. Human beings tend to be very product-oriented. However, being process-oriented (experiential learning) could give us more insights about which are the best ways to approach a challenge.

The third part intended to contribute to the Vocabulary field by proposing two strategies for advanced learners: resorting to familiar idioms in L1 and the vocabulary awareness model. Both strategies were detailed and illustrated, so the reader can use them. Teachers and learners are encouraged to use or adapt them taking their own learning needs into account. Analysis is a word that can summarize the first strategy. When advanced learners resort to their mother tongue in order to learn new words (idioms) in the L2 they need to be very analytical. This strategy also tried to emphasize meaning and use by forcing the learner to look for a pragmatic entourage that matches the idiom. If the learner notices that there are similar idioms in L1 and L2, the acquisition of those lexical units should enhance their lexicon.

The second strategy, based on what I experienced throughout my sojourn in the United States, aimed to demonstrate that learners are responsible for their learning. An active role in their language learning process is necessary to continue expanding their word knowledge. Advanced learners have to be reflective, autonomous and responsible to be able to move forward. Here, I would like to emphasize that reflection is vital. Memorizing 100 or 1000 words will not help the learner unless he/she is aware of the best ways to learn those words. Moreover, the learner must be knowledgeable about certain factors that might pose problems in his/her vocabulary acquisition process. Learners should also consider aspects, such as time (the learner needs time to own the word), motivation (the learner must have a goal for acquiring words) and the use of suitable strategies (those for retention as well as awareness) to succeed in this

endeavor. Reflection is crucial at any proficiency level, but it is indispensable when one has been learning a language for a long time.

Concerning the limitations of this research, it can be observed that because of the nature of this study (small-scale research) some points were not considered in depth. A more theoretical detailed profile of the advanced learner in contrast to other kinds of learners would have enhanced this study. Advanced learners have very specific characteristics and needs that must be explored deeply. The introspection in chapter 3 was individual-based and therefore it cannot be generalized.

Moreover, as mentioned in chapter 4, the strategies proposed are time-consuming and in some cases, students would not feel motivated to use them. A series of motivational strategies may accompany our proposal if the advanced learner is still having language classes. However, if the advanced learner wants to use these strategies independently, we recommend making a personal commitment to be constant.

There could also be some problems if the advanced learner has not been trained on the reflection process, particularly for strategy 2. It is important to present a good model before starting using this strategy or working step by step.

In reference to further research based on what has been explored in this study some aspects could be worth discussing in more detail:

- Do advanced learners need a more systematic approach to continue expanding their lexicon? And which are the mechanisms to reach this?
- Motivation as a relevant factor to expand vocabulary.
- How to teach reflection-based strategies to advanced learners?

- Self-confidence and self-esteem as relevant factors to acquire and expand vocabulary.
- Learners as analysts and monitors of their language learning process.

To conclude this study I would like to share a Facebook message that I recently received. It was written by one of my former high-intermediate students from the University of Connecticut. An extract verbatim says:

> I'm still preparing for graduate school. You know, TOEFL is my biggest problem right now. It's never gotten be easier. (Is is correct?) Anyway, I memorize over 100 words everyday, but I cannot see the end. :) Also, half of those are forgotten after midnight like the movie, Memento. It is almost miracle if I memorize everything I want to do. Yet, it's interesting and enjoyable for me to learn English, which is good so far."

Certainly there are many learners out there, including myself, who sometimes feel frustrated because we do not see the light at the end of the tunnel. I still find myself looking for words when I have to communicate in English. It seems that the more I learn, the more I need additional words to express my thoughts effectively. However, it is not good to take a 'victim pose.' It is true that there are so many words and so much about them to be learned, but there are also strategies that can help us to deal with that challenge. It must also be considered that at an advanced level, the responsibilities are higher. As a learner and a non-native teacher, I believe that, although sometimes seen as an impossible mission, learning words in depth and breadth is completely feasible. Once the L2 advanced learner has become aware of the importance of

selecting good strategies that enhance the development of his/her L2 vocabulary, the rest should be easier.

It is also important to conclude that the acquisition of words is a continuum. I believe that L2 learners are like committed architects or artists who are always working on a very important piece of art such as "La Sagrada Familia." This giant temple, located in Barcelona, Spain, has been under construction since 1882. Although it will sound very pretentious to be compared to Gaudi, the designer, I strongly believe that the time and work that have been devoted to the construction of this temple can make us reflect on how much is needed to achieve perfection and beauty. Something similar happens when the L2 learner is acquiring L2 words, he/she will need time, effort and perseverance. Every piece adds something to the construction. If one brick is not well placed, there could be problems. Therefore, it is crucial to have good foundations and to carry on working. Acquiring L2 words is a work in progress!

Fig. 1 View of the west facade of La Sagrada Familia, Barcelona, Spain. 10 October 2008.
<http://www.raingod.com/angus/Gallery/Photos/Europe/Spain/Barcelona.html>

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