Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Definition: a learning strategy
“the process by which information is obtained, stored, retrieved, and used”
(Rubin 1987 in Schmitt, 1997)

e.g. Looking up in a dictionary to find out the meaning of a word

e.g. Writing words on cards & practice from these cards

Learner autonomy and learning strategies
strategy use/ autonomous learner
(initiated & implemented by the learner)

Significance of autonomy & strategy use in vocabulary learning
volume of low frequency words requires self-learning

Vocabulary learning strategies
large number:
Schmitt (1997): 58 strategies /40 strategies
Stoffler (1995): 53 strategies
Gu & Johnson (1996): 91 strategies
Fan (2003): 60 strategies
Categorisation of VLSs

Schmitt(1997) / 6 categories

1. **Discovery strategies**: discovery of a new word’s meaning
   - Looking up in a dictionary
   - guessing from context
   - asking the teacher

2. **Consolidation strategies**: for consolidating a word once it has been encountered
   - written / oral repetition
   - keep a vocabulary notebook
   - put English labels on physical objects

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**Discovery Strategies**

A. **Determination Strategies**: working out the meaning / on his own / using own resources
   - Guess from textual context
   - Bilingual dictionary

B. **Social strategies**: asking other people (teacher & peers)
   - Ask teacher for an L1 translation
   - Discover new meaning through group work activity

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**Consolidation Strategies**

A. **Social strategies** (practice words with other people)
   - Interact with native speakers

B. **Memory strategies** (to aid recall of the word on subsequent occasions)
   - Say new word aloud
   - Study word with a pictorial representation of its meaning

C. **Cognitive strategies** (mechanical means)
   - Written repetition
   - Put English labels on physical objects

D. **Metacognitive strategies** (control & evaluate learning)
   - Testing oneself with word tests
   - Use spaced word practice

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**Gu & Johnson (1996)**

1. metacognitive regulation (e.g. selective attention)
2. guessing strategies
3. dictionary strategies
4. note-taking strategies
5. memory strategies (rehearsal & encoding)
6. activation strategies
Stoffer (1995)
1. strategies involving authentic language use
2. strategies used for self-motivation
3. strategies used to organise words
4. strategies used to create mental linkages
5. strategies involving creative activities
6. strategies involving physical action
7. strategies used to overcome anxiety
8. auditory strategies

Arbitrariness in the categorisation
(little overlap across taxonomies except memory strategies & metacognitive strategies)

Research Issues:
1. Which strategies are most/least frequently used?
2. Which strategies are seen as most helpful?
3. How does strategy use change over time?
4. How is strategy use related to overall proficiency?
5. How is strategy use related to vocabulary size?
   inconclusive: few studies /different taxonomies

Arbitrariness in strategies
(limited overlap: e.g. repetition, dictionary look up, imagery, guessing)

Vocabulary Learning Styles
Gu & Johnson (1996)
Readers: vocabulary should be picked up from natural exposure (best group in size & prof/ greater use of self-initiation & guessing)

Active Strategy Users: used almost every strategy /more extracurricular time on English (hardworking & motivated/second best)

Readers and active strategy users: 11% of the learners
Passive Strategy Users: mirror image of active strategy users / relied most heavily on visual repetition (worst group / 2% of the learners)

Encoders & Non-Encoders: average / distinguished only in the use of encoding (memory) strategies (87% of the learners)

1. Structured approach
   (more successful in a vocabulary achievement test)
   Self-created learning activities
   Kept extensive records of vocabulary items
   Reviewed their records regularly

2. Unstructured approach
   Minimal amount of independent study
   Minimal engagement in self-initiated activities / limited range of such activities
   Minimal records / little or no review

Self-Regulated Learning
Pintrich (1995)
constant adjustment of one’s cognitive activities and processes to the demands of a particular learning situation

Self-regulating learners:
1. set proximal, attainable goals
2. are learning- rather than achievement-oriented
3. have an understanding that different learning tasks require different strategies and tend to use the most appropriate strategies effectively
4. possess high self-efficacy
5. control their achievement through strategies such as self-instruction and attention focusing
6. mindful of the intermediate outcomes of their learning process and able to make accurate causal attributions for the learning outcomes
7. open to adapt their learning strategies to the immediate requirements of each particular learning situation.