

## An Analysis of English Vocabulary Learning Strategies: A Study of the Second Year Students of the Department of Business English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University

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### ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research are to investigate and analyze the most popular strategies of learning vocabulary of the students. The results of the study showed that the frequency of vocabulary learning strategies the most students ALWAYS used is 'I use a bilingual dictionary to help me translate English words into the Thai language.' by 70%. According to Schmitt's taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies, these are 'Determination strategies' or 'Individual learning strategies': students tend to learn English vocabulary or meaning of new words and to improve their English vocabulary skill without other's assistance. The frequency of vocabulary learning strategies the most students NEVER used is 'I speak the new words out loud when studying.' by 57%. According to Schmitt's taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies, these are 'memory strategies': students link their learning of new words to mental processing by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new words.

**Keywords:** Learning strategies; Vocabulary learning strategies

### บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์ของการวิจัยคือเพื่อศึกษาและวิเคราะห์กลยุทธ์ซึ่งเป็นที่นิยมในการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษ ของนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 2 สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจ คณะศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยรัตนบัณฑิต ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ความถี่ของกลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ที่นักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่ 70% ใช้ 'เสมอ' คือ "ฉันใช้พจนานุกรมสองภาษาเพื่อช่วยแปลคำศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาไทย" ตาม Schmitt's Taxonomy ของกลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ คือ 'Determination strategies' หรือ 'Individual learning strategies (กลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้ของแต่ละบุคคล)' กล่าวคือ นักศึกษามักจะเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษใหม่ๆ หรือความหมายของคำศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษใหม่ๆ และพัฒนาทักษะการใช้คำศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษโดยไม่อาศัยความช่วยเหลือจากผู้อื่น และความถี่ของกลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ที่นักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่ 57% 'ไม่เคย' ใช้ คือ "ฉันพูดออกเสียงคำศัพท์ใหม่ๆ ออกมาดังๆ ขณะเรียนหนังสือ" ตาม Schmitt's Taxonomy ของกลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ คือ

'Memory strategies' กล่าวคือ นักศึกษาเชื่อมโยงการเรียนรู้คำศัพท์ใหม่กับการประมวลผลทางความคิด โดยการเชื่อมโยงความรู้ที่มีอยู่หรือความรู้ภูมิหลังเข้ากับคำศัพท์ใหม่ๆ

**คำสำคัญ:** การเรียนรู้คำศัพท์; กลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้คำศัพท์

## บทนำ

English language is very important for all people who live in the world because we have to use English for all purposes such as running businesses, education, travelling, and so on. In Thailand, we must learn English for dealing with the people who come from various places in the world. We have to be good for using English for communication in both writing and speaking. Therefore, the first thing that we have to learn about is vocabulary. We have to learn all knowledge about it, for example how to read, write, spell, and use. Moreover, we must learn the word system, the useful expressions, and the set of words.

Because vocabulary knowledge is critical to reading comprehension, it is important that those working with young readers help foster their development of a large "word bank" and effective vocabulary learning strategies. There are several effective explicit (intentional, planned instruction) and implicit (spontaneous instruction as a child comes to new words in a text) strategies that teachers can employ with students of any age. Thai students who learn

English as the second language cannot memorize the vocabularies after they have learnt them. Although they can memorize vocabularies which are just learnt, they use them in the wrong terminology or are confused about the parts of speech. Some students can use the one side of the meaning. That is the reason why Thai students must study vocabulary hard. Moreover, Thai students who are studying in the university are facing the problem about learning and using English vocabulary. They cannot speak because of lacking enough vocabulary for making a conversation. Furthermore, the students are facing the common vocabulary while they are reading English context for comprehension. Therefore, the study of vocabulary can help Thai students know how to use the strategies for memorizing and using English vocabulary better.

In Thai education, for every faculty or every course, we cannot avoid learning English. Most Thai students face the trouble of using English, especially vocabulary. Besides, the students who do not have enough vocabulary to speak also face the trouble about reading comprehension ability. They find many words in

the books that they can read but do not know the meaning. This is a common problem for students learning English. Thus, students should learn the basic vocabulary to help their reading comprehension ability and understand the context. Therefore, vocabulary learning strategies is one crucial factor that affects the success of the students who learn English.

This research was created to analyze the English vocabulary learning strategies of the second year students studying in academic year 2016 of the Department of Business English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University. The main big problem which Thai students cannot speak English fluently is that they do not have enough vocabulary to speak or communicate. Furthermore, some students cannot use vocabulary correctly. Others cannot memorize vocabulary even though they are the easy words. This is the reason why Thai students need to learn more vocabulary. In addition, vocabulary learning is very important to improve English skills for Thai students or others who learn the English language, and instructors or educators who would like to know what the best strategies of learning vocabulary should be for each of the particular groups of students.

## Literature Reviews

### Definitions of Vocabulary

Vocabulary is central to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed. With some useful words and expressions, people often manage to communicate. Particularly, as students develop greater fluency and expression in English, it is significant for them to acquire more productive vocabulary knowledge and to develop their own personal vocabulary learning strategies.

The term *vocabulary* has a range of meanings. For example, some teachers use the term to mean *sight-word vocabularies*, referring to students' immediate recognition of words in print; other teachers refer to words students understand as their *meaning vocabularies*. In other words, the term *vocabulary* refers to students' understanding of oral and print words. Vocabularies include conceptual knowledge of words that goes well beyond a simple dictionary definition. Students' vocabulary knowledge is a building process that occurs over time as they make connections to other words, learn examples and non-examples of the word and related words, and use the word accurately within the context of the sentence (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005).

Schmitt (2000) defines vocabulary is knowledge of words, including explanations of word meanings. A word is described as a sound or a combination of sounds, or its representation in writing or printing that symbolizes and communicates a meaning. To master a word is not only to learn its meaning but also to learn its register, association, collocation, grammatical behavior, written form, spoken form and frequency. All these properties are known as "word knowledge". To many learners, mastering the meaning of a word means to master the definition of the word in dictionaries.

Schmitt (2000) says that word meaning consists of the link of the word and its referent, and the latter means the person, thing, action, and situation. The meaning of a word in dictionaries is the basic meaning elements. However, a word can have different meanings in different contexts. This phenomenon involves the register. It is used in people's daily life popularly, and it means the denotation of a word meaning from the basic meaning in different contexts. It is the relationship between the content, sender, receiver, situation and purpose (Carthy, 1990).

### **Definitions of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS)**

VLS are a subcategory of language learning strategies (which in turn are a subcategory of learning strategies in general). If

language learning strategies can be defined as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations." (Oxford 1990).

VLS are intuitively appealing to teachers and learners. It has also become a popular research topic among researchers in the last three decades. VLS constitute knowledge about what students do to find out the meaning of new words, retain them in long-term memory, recall them when needed in comprehension, and use them in language production.

### **Categorizing the Taxonomy**

Of the more established systems, the one developed by Oxford (1990) seemed best able to capture and organize the wide variety of vocabulary learning strategies identified. The part of her strategy system most useful for this purpose consists of four strategy groups: Social, Memory, Cognitive, and Metacognitive.

Social Strategies (SOC) use interaction with other people to improve language learning. Approaches which relate new material to existing knowledge fall into the Memory Strategies (MEM) category. Cognitive Strategies (COG) exhibit the common function of "manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner" (Oxford, 1990:43). Finally, Metacognitive

Strategies (MET) involve a conscious overview of the learning process and making decisions about planning, monitoring, or evaluating the best ways to study.

Although generally suitable, Oxford's classification system was unsatisfactory in categorizing vocabulary-specific strategies in several respects. Most importantly, there is no category in Oxford's taxonomy which adequately describes the kind of strategies used by an individual when faced with discovering a new word's meaning without recourse to another person's expertise. It was therefore necessary to create a new category for these strategies: Determination Strategies (DET).

In terms of the process involved in vocabulary learning, strategies may be divided into two groups: those for the discovery of a new word's meaning and those for consolidating a word once it has been encountered.

### A Taxonomy of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Vocabulary	Discovery	Determination strategies
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Learning Strategies (VLS)	strategies	Social strategies
		Social strategies
	Consolidation strategies	Memory strategies
		Cognitive strategies
		Metacognitive strategies

Schmitt (1997: 206–208) based his taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies on Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of learning strategies. Since Oxford (1990) created the taxonomy for describing learning strategies as a whole in the first step Schmitt (1997) had to revise it in order to act as a useful tool especially when categorizing vocabulary learning strategies.

According to Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy, there are two main groups of strategies: discovery strategies and consolidation strategies. Discovery strategies include several determination strategies and social strategies. Determination strategies which are a part of discovery strategies, include strategies such as guessing the meaning according to structural knowledge, guessing from L1 cognate, guessing from context or using reference material. Since learners can ask help from someone in discovering the meaning of a new word, social strategies can also function as discovery strategies (Schmitt, 1997: 208–209).

Discovery strategies are those strategies which are used in discovering the meaning of a new word whereas consolidating strategies deal

with the consolidation a word once it has been encountered. The former consists of determination strategies and social strategies whereas the latter includes social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies. There is a natural sense that almost all of the strategies applied to discovery activities could be used as consolidation strategies in the later stage of vocabulary learning.

### **Schmitt's Taxonomy of Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

Schmitt (1977) provides a useful overview of the rise in importance of strategy use in second language learning, noting that it grew out of an interest in the learner's active role in the learning process. This research has applied the strategies that are suggested by Schmitt (1997). He categorized vocabulary learning strategies into five sub-categories:

#### **1. Determination strategies**

If learners do not know a word, they must discover its meaning by guessing from their structural knowledge of the language, guessing from an L1 cognate, guessing from context, using reference materials, or asking someone else. Determination Strategies facilitate gaining knowledge of a new word from the first four options. Learners may be able to discern the new word's part of speech, which can help in the

guessing process. They can also obtain hints about meaning from its root or affixes, although not always reliably.

#### **2. Social strategies**

A second way to discover a new meaning employs the social strategy of asking someone who knows. Teachers are often in this position, and they can be asked to give help in a variety of ways: giving the L1 translation if they know it, giving a synonym, giving a definition by paraphrase, using the new word in a sentence, or any combination of these. L1 translations have the advantage of being fast, easily understood by students, and make possible the transfer of all the knowledge a student has of the L1 word (collocations, associations, etc.) onto the L2 equivalent.

#### **3. Memory strategies**

Most memory strategies involve relating the word to be retained with some previously learned knowledge, using some form of imagery, or grouping. They help individuals learn faster and recall better because they aid the integration of new material into existing cognitive units and because they provide retrieval cues. A new word can be integrated into many kinds of existing knowledge (ie. previous experiences or known words) or images can be custom-made for retrieval.

#### **4. Cognitive strategies**

Cognitive strategies in this taxonomy are similar to memory strategies, but are not focused so specifically on manipulative mental processing; they include repetition and using mechanical means to study vocabulary. Written and verbal repetition, repeatedly writing or saying a word over and over again, are common strategies in many parts of the world.

#### 5. Metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive strategies are used by students to control and evaluate their own learning or their progress, by having an overview of the learning process in general. As such, they are generally broad strategies, concerned with more efficient learning.

Several advantages of Schmitt's taxonomy over others have been determined, namely that it can be standardized as a test, can be used to collect the answers from students easily, is based on the theory of learning strategies as well as on theories of memory, is technologically simple, can be used with learners of different educational backgrounds and target languages, is rich and sensitive to the variety of learning strategies, and allows comparison with other studies, among them Schmitt's own survey.

## Research Methodology

### Subjects

The target students in this research were 30 of the second year students studying in the academic year 2016 in the Department of Business English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University. English language is the core subjects in the department. In addition, many English language courses are taught for all the business English students in their four years.

### Instrument

The method employed to collect data in this research was a survey. The instrument used in this survey was a 25-item questionnaire based on Schmitt's Taxonomy. It was constructed according to the purposes of this research as follows:

The first part was designed to collect information concerning the students' general background information. Data in this section included the respondents' details about their age, gender, and how long the respondents have been studying English language. The questions in this part were in the form of check list items.

The second part of the questionnaire is about students' use of vocabulary learning strategies. The 25-item questionnaires were asked about the frequency of the use of vocabulary learning strategies. The scales were used to indicate the frequency of the usage of each strategy as follows: 5 = Always, 4 = Often, 3 = Sometimes, 2 = Rarely, and 1 = Never.

### Data Collection Procedures

Given the description of the questionnaire, this sub-section presents the procedures used in the administration process. Prior to distributing the questionnaire, the students were informed of the objectives and significance of the research. They were also requested to state their true and honest responses. In addition, the subjects were informed to ask for any clarifications they might have. Then, the questionnaire was distributed to 90 of the fourth year students in the academic year 2016 of the Department of Business English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University.

### Data Analysis Procedures

The quantitative data of the questionnaires were analyzed to calculate the percentages and frequency of vocabulary learning strategies of the second year Business English students in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University.

The results were presented by using tables and charts to describe the information. Opinions and difficulties concerning the subjects' vocabulary learning strategies are also presented and discussed. After statistical process, results from data collection followed by relevant discussion based on the research questions are presented.

### Research Result

In this research "An Analysis of English Vocabulary Learning Strategies: A Study of the Second Year Students of the Department of Business English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University", the researcher focuses on English vocabulary learning strategies of the second year students studying in the academic year 2016 in the Department of Business English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University. The result is summarized from 30 students who are the second year students studying in the academic year 2016 in the Department of Business English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University. There are 15 men and 15 women who answered the questionnaire, and most of them were 22–24 years old. Moreover, most of the respondents was more than 10 years studying English.

In part two about statements of vocabulary learning strategies, the frequency of vocabulary learning strategies the most students always used is 'I use a bilingual dictionary to help me translate English words into the Thai language.' by 70% and secondly, 'I follow English speakers in YouTube or other online channels to improve my English vocabulary skill.' by 63%. According to Schmitt's taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies, these are 'determination strategies' or 'individual learning



strategies'. Such results indicate that students tend to learn English vocabulary or meaning of new words and to improve their English vocabulary skill without other's assistance. Thirdly, 'I use a dictionary application on a mobile phone to learn English words.' by 40% is 'determination strategies', 'I repeatedly practice new words' by 40% is 'cognitive strategies', 'When I try to remember a word, I write or say it repeatedly.' by 40% is 'cognitive strategies', and 'I translate words in my head as I read and listen.' by 40% is 'memory strategies'. Fourthly, 'I listen to English songs and news.' by 33% is 'metacognitive strategies'. Fifthly, 'I memorize new words from English magazines.' by 30% is 'metacognitive strategies' and 'When I read, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases before I find their meaning in a dictionary.' by 30% is 'social strategies'.

Moreover, the frequency of vocabulary learning strategies the most students never used is 'I speak the new words out loud when studying.' by 57% and secondly, 'I make vocabulary cards and take them with me wherever I go.' by 55%. According to Schmitt's taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies, these are 'memory strategies: learners link their learning of new words to mental processing by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new words' and 'cognitive

strategies: learners do not link their learning of new words to mental processing, but it is more mechanical means' respectively. According to Oxford's taxonomy of language learning strategies, 'memory strategies' and 'cognitive strategies' are 'direct strategies'. Interviewed by the researcher, the second year Business English students in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University who were the respondents pointed out speaking the words out loud when studying is embarrassing as primary and secondary school students always do and that making vocabulary cards and taking them with them anywhere was uncomfortable and disturbing. In addition, it isn't an interesting way to practice their English vocabulary skill. Thirdly, 'I use pictures illustrated in the textbook to find the word meaning.' by 30% is 'determination strategies', 'I learn the meaning of words by identifying its part of speech.' by 30% is 'determination strategies', and 'I know some new words when working in group works.' by 30%, is 'social strategies'. Fourthly, 'I write a new word in a sentence so that I can remember it.' by 27% is 'memory strategies', 'I ask native speakers for help about word meaning.' by 27% is 'social strategies', and 'I read an English novel to learn and improve English vocabulary skill.' by 27% is 'metacognitive strategies'.

## Conclusion and Discussion

According to the study of vocabulary learning strategy of the second year students studying in the academic year 2016 in the Department of Business English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University, the results show that the strategy most frequently used is ‘determination strategies’ to find the meaning of words and learn new words.

As it can be seen from the table, the ‘determination strategies’ are used to determine meaning of new words when encountering them for the first time. Some examples of these strategies are using a bilingual dictionary to help students translate English words into the Thai language, following English speakers in YouTube or other online channels to improve students’ English vocabulary skill, and using a dictionary application on a mobile phone to learn English words. This is was in accordance with the theory of Schmitt (1997) ‘determination strategies’ are ‘individual learning strategies’ where meaning of new words are discovered without other people’s assistance. Schmitt’s taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies are defined as the strategies used by learners who want to control and evaluate their own learning, by having an overview of the learning process in general.

However, ‘memory strategies’ and ‘cognitive strategies’ which are the lowest percentage in frequency of the strategies are used by the second year students studying in the academic year 2016 in the Department of Business English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University. According to Schmitt (1997), ‘memory strategies’ involve relating the word with some previously learned knowledge by using some form of imagery or grouping or are strategies whereby learners link their learning of new words to mental processing by associating their existing or background knowledge with the new words’, and ‘cognitive strategies’ are strategies that do not focus on manipulative mental processing or are strategies that include repetition and using mechanical means such as word lists, flash cards, and vocabulary notebooks to study words. Some examples of ‘memory strategies’ are speaking the new words out loud when studying, and writing a new word in a sentence so that students can remember it. Some examples of ‘cognitive strategies’ are making vocabulary cards and taking them with students wherever they go, writing or saying a word repeatedly when students try to remember it, and noting vocabulary from English soundtrack movies in students’ notebooks.

As mentioned before, this research has been conducted to investigate the most popular

strategies of learning English vocabulary of the second year students in academic year 2016 of the Department of Business English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rattana Bundit University. This research result is expected to provide helpful information for the English teachers to know what strategy the most popular to learn English vocabulary among the Thai students is. It could make the teachers know whether these most popular strategies are best or not for the Thai context. Consequently, the problems the teachers and the students have to encounter during the process of learning English vocabulary should be considered later. Moreover, teachers, particularly educators should know how they can solve these problems to eliminate the obstructions in order to improve the students' vocabulary proficiency. Moreover, it would be beneficial for the students in order to realize the problems of their English vocabulary learning and find the ways out to improve their English vocabulary learning. It is the most important that English teachers should realize what are effective ways to teach students

the use of strategies to enhance their learning. In practice, it is quite difficult to decide where to draw the line between different strategies and their numerous variations.

When studying vocabulary learning strategies as a unified concept, however, it must not be forgotten that they are for the benefit of the learner. Thus, we must consider our learners' feelings, and take note of what they think of the various learning strategies (Horwitz, 1988; Wenden, 1987). So one way forward is to continue research into which vocabulary learning strategies learners are using, and at the same time ask them how effective they believe those strategies are. A survey study was undertaken for this purpose, using an early version of the above strategy taxonomy. It attempted to answer the following questions: What is the pattern of usage of the various vocabulary learning strategies?, 2. How helpful do learners perceive the various strategies to be?, and Do usage and perceptions of helpfulness change as learners mature? (Schmitt, N., 1997)

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