

Teachers' attitution towards using checking techniques in teaching vocabulary at Bacninh specialized High School Bacninh province = Quan điểm của giáo viên đối với việc sử dụng các thủ thuật kiểm tra trong việc dạy từ vựng tại trường THPT Chuyên Bắc Ninh, tỉnh Bắc Ninh. M.A Thesis Linguistics: 60 14 10 / Ngô Thùy Dung ; Supervisor : M.A. Khoa Anh Việt

1. Rationale

In Vietnam, since the 1990s, teaching and learning English has become a topical issue appealing for concerns of both practitioners and researchers. It is common knowledge that learning a foreign language mainly involves learning the sound system, grammar, and vocabulary of that language among which vocabulary learning plays a very crucial role.

Vocabulary as a major component of language learning has been the object of numerous studies, each of which has its own contribution to the field. Vocabulary learning is at the heart of language learning and language use. Without vocabulary speakers can not convey meaning and communicate with each other in a particular language. A large vocabulary is also claimed to solve the other problems. Considering the crucial role attributed to vocabulary learning in second or foreign language learning, one can implicitly understand the importance of vocabulary teaching as well.

Recently methodologists and linguists have emphasized and recommended teaching vocabulary because of its importance in language teaching. Vocabulary is not a syllabus,

i.e., a list of words that teachers prepare for their learners to memorize and learn by heart. Language students need to learn vocabulary of the target language in another way. If we are really to teach students what words mean and how they are used, we need to show them being used together in context. Words do not just exist on their own; they live together and they depend upon each other. Therefore, teaching vocabulary correctly is a very important element in language learning. Teaching vocabulary is not just conveying the meaning to the students and asking them to learn those words by heart. If teachers believe that the words are worth explaining and learning, then it is important that they should do this efficiently. Teachers should use different techniques and activities in teaching English vocabulary to motivate the learners, enrich their vocabulary and enable them to speak English properly.

There are many ways to teach vocabulary. According to Celce-Murcia, C's approach which consists of conveying meaning, checking understanding and consolidation is very useful for every teacher. Teachers can use many different ways to present the vocabulary. After that, teachers also apply many interesting ways to check learners' memory. However, how often do teachers check learners' vocabulary, which techniques are used to check and how effective does this step help learners retain these words are a big problem which needs solving. That is the reason why I would like to carry out a study to find the attitudes of teachers towards vocabulary checking technique after conveying the vocabulary in a foreign language lesson at a high school.

2. Purpose of the study

The aim of the study is to explore what activities are commonly used by teachers to check their students' vocabularies, the attitudes of teachers of English at Bac Ninh Specialized High School (BSHS) towards the current checking vocabulary technique and some activities that teachers of English should do to help their students retain the words that they have learned.

The main purpose of the study is to find out the attitudes of teachers of English at BSHS towards the current checking vocabulary technique. Within this purpose, three main objectives are:

(i) To explore what activities are commonly used by teachers to check their students' vocabulary.

(ii) To investigate the attitudes of English teachers at BSHS towards the current checking vocabulary technique.

(iii) To suggest some activities that teachers of English should do to help their students retain the words that they have learned.

3. Scope of the study

The study is conducted at BSHS in order to investigate the attitudes of teachers of English towards the current checking vocabulary techniques. To go ahead, the study also offers some suggestions to better the current context.

4. Methodology

To find answers to the research questions stated in Chapter 2, the study uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches, which include document analysis and survey questionnaires, interviews and class observation.

In order to gain the most successful results, data will be collected through questionnaires, interviews and observations. Collected data, then, will be processed and analyzed. Besides, the writer's own experience in checking students' vocabulary and the analysis of current textbook and vocabulary teaching methods applied to teach English for students at BSHS will contribute much to the completion of the study.

5. Organization

The thesis consists of three main parts as follow:

Part A: Introduction

Part B: Development

Part B is composed of three chapters, each of which focuses on a particular issue:

Chapter 1 deals with theoretical background concerning vocabulary teaching and attitude.

Chapter 2 describes the methods employed in the study and introduces the situation of teaching and learning vocabulary at BSHS.

Chapter 3 is the detail description of analysis and summary of the findings.

Part C: Conclusion

This part presents conclusion, implications, limitations and suggestions for further studies

The appendixes are the last part of the study following the reference.

6. Theoretical background

This part is concerned with some of the important issues in the theories of teaching vocabulary. It consists of the definition of vocabulary, classification of vocabulary, principles of vocabulary teaching, techniques of vocabulary teaching currently used, strategies to teach vocabulary, memory and storage system and attitude as well as the role of attitudes in language teaching.

Up to now, there has not been only one but a wide variety of definitions of vocabulary. In order to find the best and most easy-to-understand definition is such an unfeasible task. Each linguist or scholar, in his specialized field, with his own set of criteria has found out for his own way to define vocabulary. Vocabulary is an important part of a language as well as the basis of linguistic abilities. It may be worth teaching students an easier formulation of Wilkin's (1972) view that without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. Vocabulary is the total number of all the words that a language possesses, ranging from a single word, two or three words items expressing an idea to multi-word idioms.

It can not be denied that vocabulary is necessary in learning and teaching a foreign language. One reason teachers are concerned about teaching vocabulary is to facilitate the comprehension of a text that students will be assigned to read. If students do not know the meaning of many of the words that they will encounter in a text, their comprehension of that section is likely to be compromised. When the purpose of vocabulary instruction is to

facilitate the comprehension of selection, it is obvious that this instruction must take place as an introduction before reading the selection.

It is common knowledge that the more words a learner knows, the larger the learner's vocabulary knowledge is. "If a language could be considered as a house, then its grammar could be considered as cement and its vocabulary could be figuratively compared to bricks. To build a complete house, not only cement but also bricks are needed. Without bricks, no house can be built, even when plenty of high quality cement is available." (Huyen, 2004:1) This means that to be a competent English communicator, one must acquire a good knowledge of English grammar and have a rich amount of English vocabulary as well. Vocabulary is an essential element of language.

For a long time in the past, methodologists have continuously kept seeking effective ways to teach English vocabulary. It has been witnessed that there has been a prominent shift in the field of vocabulary teaching. Many books on vocabulary teaching have been introduced by such experts as Allen (1983), Nation (1994), Nation (2008), Taylor (1990), Thornbury (2002) and so on. A lot of researchers have spent so much effort to study on teaching English vocabulary, such as Joseph (2011), Solange (2001), Tahririan (2009), etc. Nation (2000) whose specialist interest are language teaching methodology and vocabulary, for example, claimed that the major problem with vocabulary teaching was that only a few words and a small part of what was required to know a word could be dealt with at any one time. He put a considerable stress on the issue of complexity which he pointed out the more complex the information is, the more likely the learners are to misinterpret it.

In Vietnam, there has so far been some research on vocabulary. Nguyen & Khuat (2003) asserted using games in teaching vocabulary to Vietnamese students. Their researched subject was a group of 17 – 20 students at Distance Learning Centre. By implementing and observing such games as: hangman, snakes and ladders, selling and buying things and so on. The co-researchers successfully created an active and expectedly fun learning environment for students involved. However, research on vocabulary checking and the attitudes towards this matter at BSHS has not been done yet.

As a teacher of English, I have dealt with many questions relating to vocabulary teaching as well as checking which raised by my colleagues and my students. For example, what is

the best way to teach vocabulary? How many words can be taught in each lesson? How can teacher do to help students retain the new words? That is the main reason why I am interested in this topic.

7. A summary of findings

This chapter has covered the results from the questionnaire, interview and observation. The results reveal some main problems as follows:

All of the teachers at BSHS agree that it is necessary to focus on the significance of lexical elements during classroom activities; therefore, they all find the important role of vocabulary teaching in language teaching.

Most of them teach vocabulary for communication and they agree that teaching English vocabulary through communicative activities can motivate learning and therefore help students retain vocabulary. However, according to some observed lessons, not all of the teachers teach vocabulary in communicative approach.

All of them share the same idea that it is very important and necessary to teach students memory strategy as well as consolidate the vocabulary to make sure that their students understand all these words. However, most of them face with the problem, which is they do not have enough time to cover all the words. Due to lack of time, they can not design more interesting activities after presenting the words to help their students retain.

Teachers have not realized the potential of their pupils. Students at BSHS are the gifted students, who are intelligent and creative. Therefore, teaching through communicative activities is very suitable for particular kind of students. In addition, most of them have learned English for 7 to 10 years, thus, the emphasis on communicative skills, therefore, can promote a sense of challenge and achievement, and linguistics competence as well.

Teachers' awareness of teaching English vocabulary through communicative activities does not coincide with their present vocabulary at BSHS.

The findings from this chapter provide teachers with various recommendations of the communicative task types to be designed in next part.

8. Recommendation

There are several strong reasons for which the vocabulary component of a language course needs to be carefully planned; therefore, it is necessary to take some following factors into consideration.

The environment in which students learn a foreign language is very important, as it has great effect on the learning process. In ESL environments, teachers can rely on students' picking up vocabulary outside the class. However, generally EFL students have encounter new items mostly only during class time. Therefore, teachers should exploit communicative vocabulary activities designed by the teacher to bring students into contact with language as it is used in real situation to meet actual communication needs. Also, the vocabulary activities need to be chosen cautiously in order to provide students with more knowledge which can upgrade their other skills.

Every vocabulary learning communicative activity is different. That's why a careful preparation is necessary. Teachers should focus on some of the problems, such as: the purpose of the activity, the help that students need the instruction and the interest of the activities. Visual should be used to attract students' attention. Teachers can deliver handouts or some photocopied paper beside the textbook, which interest students a great deal. Teachers should also use games in both presenting and checking the words, but teachers need to be careful to find out an appropriate game for the class in term of the types of participation. Game should be regarded as supplementary so it can be used in short time.

Teachers' pronunciation is also a big problem that should be taken care cautiously. Teachers' poor pronunciation affects negatively to the students' pronunciation. Therefore, each teacher should pay more attention to study how the words are pronounced and they themselves have to self-study to improve their pronunciation. "For non-native English teachers, language proficiency will always present the bedrock of their professional confidence." (Murdoch, 1994:254)

In order to help students retain the words, teachers should pay attention to the checking in class. Besides, teachers should ask the students to have a notebook to write down everything they know about new words such as definitions, translations and examples,

even write down all the new words that they come across. It is important to make personal vocabulary notes a habit in class which is easy and natural for students to do. This activity plays a great role in vocabulary acquisition because personal vocabulary notes engage students in the cycle of noticing their own needs.

Hyponymy or metonymy are said to be very useful and students should not ignore. This will help learners memorize new words more quickly. And writing a few example sentences using the new vocabulary is another good way to help students remember the words in context.

Teaching English in modern time today requires teachers to develop new skills and classroom techniques related to the new methodology. Teachers should be introduced to new skills and classroom techniques related to the new methodology such as drills, pair work, substitution tables, presentation of new language, and using games more effectively through various professional development activities. Raising awareness of attitudes and beliefs among teachers to address the constraints on their teaching using the text book will help to build up teachers' self-confidence and capacity to work with the new methodology under difficult circumstances.

9. Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, the present study has not only helped us understand teachers' attitudes towards checking the new words after presenting, but also provided techniques as well as activities that teachers used in teaching vocabulary.

Followings are the implications for teaching in general and checking vocabulary in particular at BSHS and motivation.

Teacher should pay more attention to teaching vocabulary by developing programs which maintain the learners' interest and motivation. Vocabulary should not be taught separately but integrated into skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation). It is clear that teaching vocabulary through reading text and dialogues is very useful. Teachers should find more reading text in the relevant materials such as magazine and the newspaper.

Visuals are used regularly to attract students' attention. Teachers can deliver handouts or some photocopied paper beside the textbook, which interest students a great deal. Games are commonly used in teaching vocabulary. Teachers need to be careful to find an appropriate game for the class in term of the types of participation. Game should be regarded as supplementary so it can be used in short time.

Teachers should pay so much attention on their instruction to help their students understand quickly. The instructions need to be brief, easy to understand and clear so that students can know what they have to do. These keep students maintain their commitment to the lesson and avoid confusion.

Using mother tongue is an effective way of getting over the problem of complicated instructions and misunderstandings. However, it is better to use a bilingual approach in order to promote students security while we work towards using the target language.

Finally, the learning atmosphere plays an important part in the success of teaching. If the atmosphere is not friendly, communication in class seems not to be effective. Therefore, the teachers should give a relaxed, friendly and understanding atmosphere, only then can the aims of the activities for the retention of vocabulary.

10. Limitations and suggestions for further studies

Although the paper has accomplished the objectives set at the beginning, the research cannot avoid some limitations. The shortcomings of the present study are essentially about the subject of the study and the content of the questionnaires.

Firstly, the subject of the study is teachers of English at BSHS. The finding, of course, would be more useful if we recruited more teachers from different schools in Bac Ninh province.

Apart from that the questionnaires focus mainly on the investigation into teachers' attitudes based on checking techniques, so there are possible inadequateness of their content.

Besides, the research is carried out in a very limited scope in term of classroom based on teaching and checking vocabulary. In fact, there are a great number of activities that

teachers can use to check their students' understanding about the vocabulary and help them retain vocabulary, so the ignorance of some aspects of the issue discussed in the study is possible.

To get a whole picture of the trends of vocabulary teaching and checking, the research will serve for further research on all teachers of English at all high schools in Bac Ninh province.