

THE ROLE OF DEFINITIONS REGARDING VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE TO IMPROVE MEMORY

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Abstract: *This article reviews foreign language teaching methodology. The aim of the article is to provide information about the classification of definition and memory as well as its types, benefits of memory for language learning, the positive effect of vocabulary learning for memory improvement and the role of definitions to enhance memory. It will be theoretically useful for FL teachers and amateur researchers working on the same area.*

Key words: *definitions, memory, sensory memory, short-term memory, working memory, long-term memory, top-down processing.*

Introduction

"A definition precisely explains the fundamental state or meaning of something, often given formally as by lexicographers writing a dictionary or legislators writing laws... Definition is a concise explanation of the meaning of a word or phrase or symbol" [1].

Definitions help to clarify the meaning of words or phrases. In learning vocabulary the function of definitions is to make the meaning of new words clear and understandable for learners to memorize and use them easily in context. Learner-friendly definitions can motivate students to learn new words successfully. Learner or monolingual dictionaries have a lot of benefits for learners in terms of the provision of the right or useful definitions of their unknown words that can be helpful even for autonomous learning in the upper levels of language acquisition. Although some of the research on the topic suggests that definitions only cannot help students to gain vocabulary knowledge making mistakes regarding the usage of the words, others claim that the same result was achieved when the students were taught only through definitions and taught vocabulary in context. However, another group of researchers highlight that teaching vocabulary in context and with the help of definitions together where necessary can result in success in vocabulary development. In the meantime, definitions can aid to improve the memory of learners as well.

Definition of memory and its types

In Encyclopedia Britannica memory is defined as "the encoding, storage, and retrieval in the human mind of past experiences... both a result of and an influence on perception, attention and learning" [2]. Although researchers and experts have debated the classification of memories, the majority agree that there are four main categories of memory: sensory memory, short-term memory, working memory and

long-term memory. Toketemu Ohwovoriole (2022) states that “sensory memory allows you to remember sensory information after the stimulation has ended”. In other words, sensory memory is remembering the sensation when a person sees something or hears a sound or touches something in passing. Typically it holds on to information for a little time. She also adds that “when a sensory experience keeps recurring, and you start to attach other memories to it, the sensory experience stops living in your sensory memory. It might move to your short-term memory or more permanently to your long-term memory” [3]. Short-term memory is remembering specific information for a brief period. It is between sensory memory and long-term memory, which is also known as primary or active memory. According to the research conducted by Cascella M, Al Khalili Y. (2021), “short-term memories only last for about 30 seconds. When you read a line a book or a string of numbers that you have to recall, that’s your short- term memory” [4]. Working memory is defined by Toketemu Ohwovoriole as “memory that involves the immediate and small amount of information that a person actively uses as they perform cognitive tasks”. Finally, long-term memory is explained as any memory we can still remember after 30 seconds, which means the majority of our memories is stored in this memory. We cannot limit how much our long-term memory can be and for how long.

Memory for language learning

Monica Savage (2018) stresses that “memory is an active, subjective, intelligent reflection process of our previous experiences...Memory has as fundamental role in life, reflecting the past as the past, and offers the possibility of reusing all past and present experiences, as well as helping to ensure continuity between what was and what was going to be”. Moreover, Shazia Ijaz enumerates three important roles of memory in learning a language. Firstly, “working memory becomes the place where language is being processed. Secondly, working memory provides the temporary storage that is very useful in language comprehension process. Thirdly, in language production, working memory becomes the place where the pronunciations of the words are put in linear order on the basis of the syntactic and semantic relations in the intended utterance before the construction of a motor program that produces the utterance” [5].

Language learning and vocabulary development for memory improvement

As memory provides a lot of benefits for language acquisition, language learning also influences memory in a positive way that can lead to improvement of it. Carley Spence (2022) highlights the role of language learning in developing a more powerful memory. She claims that “studying a language engages memorization skills (learning new words and rules) as well as recall (producing new language in-class activities). So it is no surprise that people who regularly use a second language have more powerful memories” [6]. She also adds that in

actuality, studies reveal that bilingual individuals outperform monolingual individuals on memory tests. It also does not matter if they picked up the language as a child or an adult. Moreover, language learning enhances both short-term memory and long-term memory.

Curiously enough, learning new words can be an advantage in terms of boosting memory and, ultimately, our brain power, as Doctor Richard Restak (2020) explains. "Words are memory boosters and prime the brain's visual areas. The resulting mental images make us more sensitive to what we are trying to memorize". He further elucidates that "this is called top-down processing, where the upper part of the brain is controlling the limitations on the lower part- the sensory input. In this type of processing, the information moves from general to specific as we first form an abstract impression of an item and then gather more details through our senses" [7].

Definitions to improve memory

"Definitions can be helpful not only for vocabulary improvement but also for memory enhancement. As most of the research showed, as vocabulary learning assists to improve memory, we cannot deny the possible benefits of definitions as a technique in learning vocabulary to enhance memory, too on account of the fact that learners are exposed to frequent repetition of definitions to learn new words by heart and use them in different class activities and games based on definitions of words".

Conclusion

Definitions are the interpretations of the meaning new words and expressions in dealing with vocabulary knowledge. They can help to make the meaning of words comprehensible for learners to learn, remember and use them in the right context in some way. As memory benefits language acquisition, vocabulary learning through definitions can also be advantageous enough to enhance memory.

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