

LATVIJAS UNIVERSITĀTE

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RĪGA 2011

UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

**SECOND LANGUAGE VOCABULARY  
ACQUISITION**

**OTRĀS VALODAS VĀRDU KRĀJUMA APGUVE**

BACHELOR THESIS

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RIGA 2011

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, the author of this research paper would like to thank the advisor, Dr.phil. Vita Kalnbērziņa for the guidance, support, as well as patience, secondly, the author`s family (mother and grandmother) for the supply of financial needs and finally, the Master students of Linguistics, Radboud University - Nijmegen (the Netherlands) and students (2010) from the University of Latvia, Department of English Philology (full time), English Philology for their assistance in the case study, especially to Sandra Grinberga who distributed the questionnaires among the students of Radboud University.

## ANOTĀCIJA

Bakalaura darbs pēta otrās valodas vārdu krājuma apguvi, metodes, kuras izmantotas tā apgūšanā, kā arī paņēmienus, ko lieto, lai pārbaudītu valodas prasmi, piemēram, testējot vai anketējot, kas arī tikuši izmantoti praktiskajā daļā. Pētnieciskā darba mērķis ir vārdu krājuma apguves pētīšana, paņēmieni, kuri tikuši izmantoti laika gaitā, kā arī testi, kuri pārbauda zināšanu līmeni, lai noskaidrotu, kuri no paņēmieniem ir vislabākie, lai apgūtu vārdu krājumu. Praktiskās daļas rezultāti liecina, ka pastāv vairāki paņēmieni, kuri tiek uzskatīti par lietderīgiem respondentu vidū, kā, piemēram, grāmatu lasīšana vai pat televizora skatīšanās, bet, neskatoties uz šo dažādību, tām visām piemīt svarīga loma vārdu krājuma apgūvē. Katrai no tām ir savi plusi un mīnusi, kā arī atkarībā, kurai no tām priekšroku dod skolnieki. Visiedarbīgāk tie kalpo savam mērķim, tos apvienojot.

**Atslēgas vārdi:** Otrā valoda, vārdu krājuma apguve, valodas apguves metodes, valodas prasmes pārbaude, vingrinājumi, grāmatas, video

## ABSTRACT

The research paper is devoted to the research of the second language vocabulary acquisition, the strategies applied in order to acquire the vocabulary, as well as the means to assess it, such, as the test and questionnaire provided in the case study. The purpose of the research is to examine the means and efficiency of vocabulary acquisition methods used in the course of time and tests to assess it, as well as which of the strategies is more beneficial to acquire the vocabulary as seen in the empirical part of the research. The results of the Case Study demonstrate that there are several approaches which are considered to be beneficial among the respondents (Reading books, watching television), nevertheless this variety, they all play an important role in the vocabulary acquisition, each with its own pros and cons and the preference of the language learner but the most effectively they serve their purpose if you combine them.

**Key words:** Second Language, Vocabulary Acquisition, Language Learning Strategies, Language Assessment, Exercises, Books, Video



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## INTRODUCTION

The researcher chose this theme due to the fact that vocabulary acquisition is one of the most important aspects when learning a language. It is considered that acquiring any language the very first item that a learner is exposed to is the vocabulary, due to the fact that words are the very essence of the language. Some people consider it to be more important than acquiring perfect grammar or writing skills, nevertheless there still are opinions concerning both of the items to be equally important [Online 18].

The **goal** of the research is to examine which of the methods are the most beneficial in order to acquire the vocabulary more efficiently.

The **enabling objectives** are:

- 1) to get acquainted with the theories about second language vocabulary acquisition and via visual input and analyze them;
- 2) to study the theory on vocabulary tests;
- 3) to survey and test the students' lexicon as well as analyze their results;
- 4) to draw relevant conclusions.

The **hypothesis** of the Bachelor Thesis is: the most effective approach to acquire the vocabulary is a combination of cognitive, metacognitive, as well as visual memory strategies.

The **methods of research** are:

- 1) the study of theories of vocabulary acquisition as well as the methods and development of vocabulary theories;
- 2) the empirical method is case study.

**The participants of the research** are the students (2010) from the University of Latvia, Department of English Philology, full time and the master students of Linguistics, Radboud University - Nijmegen (the Netherlands). The all individuals have studied English as their second (foreign) language.

**Chapter 1** describes the nature of the lexis, the types of lexis, as well as describes several of the theories conducted by other researchers.

**Chapter 2** examines vocabulary acquisition strategies which were applied in order to improve vocabulary acquisition, each with their pros and cons and debates whether they are as useful as they claim to be.

**Chapter 3** Describes the historical development which has been applied in the vocabulary learning throughout the history.

**Chapter 4** comprises the analysis of the testing methods of knowledge of vocabulary. Despite the difficulty of creating lexical tasks, they are an immense part of the language assessment, the most popular have become the multiple choice tests, although they are not as reliable as one might consider.

**Chapter 5** is a case study, in which tests and questionnaires are described that were distributed among the students, furthermore, the case study is provided with a theoretical background about the television influence of a person`s language acquisition, as well as in the end the analysis of the gathered data.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE NATURE OF VOCABULARY**

This chapter comprises the very nature of the vocabulary, the elements which consist in it.

Muriel Saville-Troike (2006: 33) claims that one of the most important characteristics in the nature of vocabulary is ‘word meaning, pronunciation (and spelling for written languages), grammatical category (part of speech), [and] possible occurrence in combination with other words in idioms.’

#### **1.1 The Definition of Vocabulary**

At first it would seem rather complex to define the very essence of the vocabulary, due to the fact that there are many opinions and explanations that should precisely define it, let us look on the most prominent ones. As stated by (Online 1) the vocabulary is:

- 1.’ All the words of a language.
2. The sum of words used by, understood by, or at the command of a particular person or group.
3. A list of words and often phrases, usually arranged alphabetically and defined or translated; a lexicon or glossary.’

Furthermore Merriam Webster’s dictionary offers similar definitions:

- 1: ‘a list or collection of words or of words and phrases usually alphabetically arranged and explained or defined: lexicon
- 2 a: a sum or stock of words employed by a language, group, individual, or work or in a field of knowledge b: a list or collection of terms or codes available for use (as in an indexing system)’ (Online 2)

To the researcher’s mind the most understandable and applied definition should be rather simple which basically describes the vocabulary, namely by defining it as “all the words of the language.”

#### **1.2 The Size of the English vocabulary**

In this subchapter can be observed the amount of words in the English language as considered by several researchers' who conducted a study to measure the size of the vocabulary. The study of several researchers vary in the amount of the English vocabulary, for example, R Claiborne's (1983: 5) research indicates that the size of English vocabulary which is used in the popular press has a range from 400,00 to 600,000 words, this is the amount of vocabulary that is frequently used, but does not comprise every vocabulary item. Secondly, D. Crystal (1988: 32) argues that the size of it varies from a half million to over two million, in addition, Nurnberg & Rosenblum's, (1997: 11) study indicates that the size of the English vocabulary consists of approximately one million and 200,000 words in common use, nevertheless, (Bryson, 1990) argues that if technical and scientific terms would be added to the vocabulary, it would extend into millions. These researches demonstrate that there is not a consistent number in which we should measure the size of the English vocabulary; they have different views about what constitutes a distinct word. The size of the vocabulary per se is changing all the time, thus, developing, due to the fact that many new words enter the language and old fashioned words are discarded, therefore it is quite difficult to determine the precise amount of words in the English language.

### **1.3 Active and Passive Vocabulary**

In this subchapter another aspect of vocabulary is examined, it is an integral part of the vocabulary which should be taken into account. Schmitt (2000:4) argues that every person has been exposed to many new words, nevertheless they understand and recognize their meaning when they see it spoken or written. This understanding and recognition is due to the fact that there are several degrees to which a person might understand a word, thus knowing a word and being able to comprehend it. This is when active and passive vocabulary is being applied. Every person has both, active and passive vocabulary and as Schmitt (2000) states that the active vocabulary is the vocabulary that the language learner or user uses, on the other hand, the passive vocabulary is the vocabulary which is understood but not used in daily-life communication. The passive vocabulary usually is larger than the active; hence in the daily life situations people tend to communicate using simple and repetitive words,

rather than synonyms or complex words. Passive vocabulary usually consists of highly formal words which are only used occasionally. People from a specific field of work use jargon which consists of technical terms and thus have a different active and passive vocabulary than other people.

## **1.4 Word Meaning**

This subchapter deals with the meaning of words, the relationships among words and their respective referents, which are persons, things, actions, conditions, or case and it refers to real or imagined world. Firstly, the English language has seven word classes: the verb, the noun, the adverb, the preposition, the adjective, the pronoun, the conjunction. In addition, Schmitt (ibid.: 22) explains that word meaning is usually associated with definitions in dictionaries, nevertheless, when a word is studied in greater detail, some problems may occur. As stated by Drum & Konopak (1987, 73), 'this relationship is not hereditary but adopted until formalized by the people using the word.' As an example Schmitt (ibid.) mentions a word 'giraffe', a long-necked animal with spots which lives in Africa, it might be called in other words, such as pen, mouse or even a desk but only the word Giraffe gives any association with the real animal with the distinctions of a Giraffe to the people who speak English. Nevertheless, the relationship between a word and its referent is not usually accurate and direct, there are some cases where the 'referent' is a single, unique item and the meaning can be precisely reflected usually by proper nouns. As Schmitt (ibid.) explains that often it is a class or category, for example 'cat, love, or uniform.' There exist many types and styles of uniforms, hence, the word uniform cannot be attributed to every uniform there is, the term uniform represents the idea of what a uniform usually is, a standardized type of clothing, but different cultures and spheres where uniforms are used have different colours, as well as tabs, if it is a military uniform. As Schmitt (2000: 23) argues, to describe the meaning of a word, it is needed to describe the context it stands for. 'The traditional view is that words can be defined by isolating the attributes that are essential to the relevant concept, and that taken together are sufficient to describe it.' In other words, as stated by Aitchison

(1987) it is called the “fixed meaning”, nevertheless it is not a very suitable approach, it only serves well when the referent is a unique and unit, such as the proper nouns (The Monument of Liberty, Latvia, The University of Latvia). In other words, fixed meaning is applied to words which only can have ONE meaning which is concrete and is not to be misinterpreted for anything else.

To see how the semantic features work Schmitt (2000: 24), offers a good example of a common house – hold animal, a “cat” the word cat must be attributed to all cats, not a single cat which would make the meaning irrelevant, since there are no identical cats as well as there are many breeds of cats, such as the “Sphinx” which completely differs from a common house cat known to us Europeans (it has no fur, has large ears and would be referred by the majority of the people as not good looking for a cat). In order to cover the characteristics of a cat, we must describe the category of cats, in other words, this category is called semantic features. Schmitt offers us a good way to illustrate the cat’s semantic features using a figure by marking all features a cat must have to be a cat with (+) and all the features a cat does not possess with a (-), as well as questionable features with a (?).

Figure 1

|     | Four legs | Whiskers | Fury | Claws | Large | Chases mice | Drinks milk | Aloof | Pants with tongue out | Meows |
|-----|-----------|----------|------|-------|-------|-------------|-------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
| Cat | +         | +        | +    | +     | -     | ?           | +           | ?     | -                     | +     |

Schmitt (ibid.) elaborates that when writing all these semantic features for a cat, we might conclude that the cat has a fixed meaning, nevertheless defining all features for a cat is almost impossible, the most common cat has all the (+) features, but they are not vital for being a cat, there exist cats who are mute and cannot meow, as well as declawed cats ,without fur, as well as cats with no tail, looking at these aspects, it is difficult to really define what exactly a cat should look or be like. In reality, any common cat is likely to possess some of the previously mentioned

characteristics and not others; nevertheless, the meaning of cat is not fixed but as Schmitt states “flexible.”

Aitchison (1987) calls this flexibility – “fuzzy-meaning.” As an example he mentions two words – “walking and running”, the state of walking is easy to see, but when walking becomes running is hard to determine. This example demonstrates the fuzzy boundary between two rather closely related words. Every person has his or her point of view when walking becomes running, therefore it is almost impossible to determine the precise moment when one action becomes another.

#### 1.4.1 Technical Vocabulary

In this small subchapter the researcher would like to demonstrate the nature of the technical vocabulary. As Schmitt (ibid.: 23) explains, the technical vocabulary consists of terminology which is connected to a certain field that requires precise definitions, such as law terms “habeas corpus,” and “bail”, also engineering terms, such as “harmonic dissonance” and “pi.”

According to (Online 3), habeas corpus means:

‘[...] literally in Latin "you have the body" is a term that represents an important right granted to individuals in America. Basically, a writ of habeas corpus is a judicial mandate requiring that a prisoner be brought before the court to determine whether the government has the right to continue detaining them. The individual being held or their representative can petition the court for such a writ.’

Schmitt (2000: 24) claims that these terms are referred to as jargon and are important to the specific field or work they are used and required. As Benson & Greaves (1981) state that ‘these terms have been defined accurately by the field they are used in and they have fixed meanings.’

#### 1.4.2 Onomatopoeic Words

In this subchapter the onomatopoeic nature of words is examined which is an exception in which words have an essential connection with their referents. According to the internet dictionary, onomatopoeic words mean – ‘The formation or use of words

such as *buzz* or *murmur* that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to.’ (Online 4) As stated by Schmitt (2000: 23), these words try to resemble the sound they represent, for example ‘boom’, ‘chirp’ and ‘whoosh’ and even here the connection among them is not perfect. The cause of this misconnection is that different languages have different onomatopoeic words for the same item, such as, the sound of a rooster for an English-speaker would sound such as ‘cock-a-doodle-do’, for a Spaniard – ‘cucuricū’, for a Swede – ‘kukuliku’, for Japanese – ‘kokikoko’, but for a Latvian the sound of a rooster would sound like ‘kikerigī’, some parallels can be drawn with these due to the fact that they all look very similar.

### **1.5 Formal and Informal Vocabulary**

This subchapter will deal with the formal and informal language. It is important to know whether formal or informal words should be used and in which situations. As stated by (Online 5), the formal language is mostly used in writing not in communication. This is considered to be the academic style used mainly in textbooks, contracts, business letters, research papers and essays. The formal language orally is used only in official or serious occasions, for example at the university graduation ceremony, the formal vocabulary is more complex than informal, due to the fact that it requires to use many complicated words which are not normally used in daily-life conversations, an example of formal and informal words would be “establish and set up.” In writing the formal sentences are usually longer than informal sentences, also passive voice is used to make the text more neutral, avoiding using personal pronoun “I” “you” and “we,” as well as the usage of contradicted forms is strictly forbidden. On the other hand, informal language is spoken by the majority of people in their daily lives; it is mostly used among friends. Informal language uses simpler grammatical structures, as well as vacant sentences and phrases.

### **1.6 Word Families**

This subchapter will deal about word families in the English language, the definition, as well as examples of them. Schmitt (2000: 3) argues that words have

many meanings due to word families. According to (Online 6), word families are: ‘A group of languages descended from the same parent language, such as the Indo-European language family.’ In other words, word families are words which are closely related. According to (Online 7), words can be subdivided into two groups:

1. Similarity in form
2. Related meanings

Several examples with two divisions provided by (Online 6): *word - wordy - word* (verb) - *wording - word-list* (but not: *worth, worry*) these examples are similar in form.

Related meanings - *family - familiar - unfamiliar - familiarity - familiarise* (but not: *famine, famous*)

‘Each of these families is bonded by a common root word, although the resultant connections of meaning are also an important bonding feature.’ (ibid.)

The understanding of word families gives the learner an opportunity to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words much better than without previous knowledge, as an example, it can be guessed that somebody is using a **paintbrush**, the person using the item is called the **painter**, and an example provided by (Online 7) would be a word **unteachability**, it can be guessed from other word families that “ity” means a state of something or someone and “un” means not being able to perform something or lack of something, “abil” ability – skill, and “teach” is to instruct someone. At first the word seems rather complex, but dividing it to parts helps the learner to comprehend its meaning from guessing.

This chapter comprised several of the most important characteristics of the vocabulary and language per se, the definition of vocabulary, the meanings of words, the estimate amount of words in the English vocabulary, several types of vocabulary, such as formal, informal, as well as technical vocabulary, the semantics or the meaning of words, as well as word families. To learn a language one must be aware of these principles.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **VOCABULARY ACQUISITION STRATEGIES**

This chapter will comprise several vocabulary acquisition strategies, applied during the course of time, their pros and cons, as well as their efficiency in the vocabulary acquisition process. First of all let us look what the acquisition is, according to the dictionary, it is “the act or process of achieving mastery of a language or a linguistic rule or element: child language acquisition; second language acquisition.” [Online 17]

According to Schmitt (2000: 10), people all over the world have been learning their second languages from the times of Romans, which is the earliest recording in the two thousand year long period of time. They used many approaches to acquire their language, and each approach had its different distinctions on which vocabulary item to pay more attention. At some times the vocabulary was cherished more than anything in the language, on the other hand, sometimes it was completely neglected, turning the attention to different parts of the language, such as the grammar.

According to Schmitt (2000: 132) one of the approaches of facilitating vocabulary learning is vocabulary learning strategies or VLS. To his mind, many learners use strategies for vocabulary learning, 'especially when compared to language tasks that integrate several linguistic skills (e.g., oral presentation that involves

composing the speech content, producing comprehensible pronunciation, fielding questions, etc.). It is due to the fact that the discrete nature of the vocabulary learning which is compared to more complex language activities, thus, making it easier to administer strategies effectively, furthermore, another cause might be due to the emphasis which classrooms create by applying separate activities over activities which imply the coordination of several diverse elements into a whole, thus separate activities lack coherence.

Schmitt (*ibid.*) claims that the most common vocabulary learning strategies are rather simple, such as: memorization, repetition, or even taking notes on vocabulary. These are considered to be mechanical strategies and are rather simple in use and many people prefer to use these over complex ones such as approaches which require ‘active manipulation of information’, such as keyword method, imagery or inferencing, and according to (Online 8), inferencing is ‘An act or process deriving logical conclusions from statements known or assumed to be true.’ The learners often use ‘shallow’ strategies, over ‘deep’ ones which are usually less effective, for example, by using associations or the keyword method, which may preserve the target units better than even rote memorization.

According to the dictionary “rote memorization” is: **1.** A memorizing process using routine or repetition, often without full attention or comprehension: learn by rote.

## **2. Mechanical routine. (Online 9)**

According to Schmitt (2000: 132), ‘if a generalization can be made, shallower activities may be more suitable for beginners, because they contain less material that may only distract a novice, whereas intermediate or advanced learners can benefit from the context usually included in deeper activities.’ Mostly multiple VLS are used at the same time, due to the fact that good learners use many variations of strategies, ‘structure their vocabulary learning, review and practice target words [...]’ In addition they know the semantic relationships among previously learned second language words as well as new words; nevertheless, poor learners usually do not possess this skill.

Schmitt (*ibid.*) elaborates that when choosing which of the strategies to apply or suggest to learners, we need to pay attention to the ‘overall learning context.’ There

are a number of factors which are important how effective the learning strategy will be, such as the proficiency level of the first language, the motivation of students, the culture of students, as well as purposes for learning the second language, including the nature of the second language itself and the tasks and texts that are applied. It is very important that there is cooperation between the learner and the teacher, due to the fact that research was carried out which shows that students who did not apply rote memorization were worse than those students who used rote memorization or repetition approach. Another aspect which should be taken into account is the learning culture of the students, due to the fact that there are diverse culture groups and usually they have different opinions whether the applied strategies are useful for them. ‘Proficiency level has also been shown to be quite important, with one study showing word lists better for beginning students, and contextualized words better for more advanced students.’ Furthermore Schmitt claims that another suggestion would be to teach high-frequency words, and low-level words might be learned incidentally by reading or listening, which will require strategies that help students to determine words meanings, for example, by guessing.

## 2.1 Examples of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

There exist very many Vocabulary Learning Strategies in the world today. Schmitt offers us a glimpse of several VLS.

### 2.1.1 Cognitive Strategies

| Strategy Group | Strategy                               |
|----------------|--|
| COG            | Verbal repetition                      |
| COG            | Written repetition                     |
| COG            | Word lists                             |
| COG            | Put English labels on physical objects |
| COG            | Keep a vocabulary notebook             |

*Table 2.1.1 Schmitt (2000: 135)*

The Cognitive Strategies, or (COG), and as stated by the Oxford dictionary are: ‘Manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner.’ (Oxford, 1990: 43) In other words Cognitive strategies are one of the ways which help people

better to learn the language, for example one might associate newly encountered word with something funny or vice versa, something horrible. As seen on the table, a person may use verbal repetition, written repetition, word lists, put down newly encountered words in a notebook or even put English labels on certain objects, thus memorizing their names.

### 2.1.2 Metacognitive Strategies

| Strategy Group | Strategy  |
|----------------|---|
| MET            | Use English-language media (songs, movies, newscasts, etc.) |
| MET            | Use spaced word practice (expanding rehearsal)              |
| MET            | Test oneself with word tests                                |
| MET            | Skip or pass new word                                       |
| MET            | Continue to study word over time                            |

*Table 2.1.2 (ibid.)*

According to Asher (ibid.) *the* Metacognitive Strategies or (MET), these strategies 'involve a conscious overview of the learning process and making decisions about planning, monitoring, or evaluating the best ways to study.' These strategies deal with the most efficient methods which help to study and test a person in order to improve one's knowledge. In addition, these strategies are worth applying when deciding which of the words are worth to study. One might use songs, movies or other interactive methods in the language he or she is learning, or word practice, as well as make a test and apply it to test yourself, these strategies are several which are suggested to use from the Metacognitive strategies.

### 2.1.3 Visual Memory Strategies

| Strategy Group | Strategy                                       |
|----------------|--|
| MEM            | Connect word to a previous personal experience |
| MEM            | Associate the word with its coordinates        |
| MEM            | Connect the word to its synonyms and antonyms  |
| MEM            | Use semantic maps                              |
| MEM            | Image word form                                |

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| MEM | Image word's meaning                     |
| MEM | Use Keyword Method                       |
| MEM | Group words together to study them       |
| MEM | Study the spelling of a word             |
| MEM | Say new word aloud when studying         |
| MEM | Use physical action when learning a word |

*Table 2.1.3 (ibid.)*

Memory Strategies (MEM), otherwise known as Mnemonics allow the word to be remembered with the help of some 'previously learned knowledge, into many kinds of existing knowledge (e.g., previous experiences or known words) or images can be custom-made for retrieval (e.g., images of the word's form or meaning attributes).' (ibid.) Furthermore, grouping is one of the several ways to help learners to remember words, due to the fact that learners organize words into groups, usually without prompting and it improves learners' ability to recall words. Some of the strategies mentioned in the table are to connect a word to a previous personal experience, previously mentioned grouping, or even saying the word loud as you are learning it, visual media such as the television and books are also based on the visual memory, due to the fact that you recall what has happened there, thus, remembering certain words that have remained in your memory.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT IN VOCABULARY LEARNING**

This subchapter will deal with the historical development of strategies applied in the vocabulary acquisition. According to the dictionary, vocabulary learning is a process in which “knowledge or skill gained through schooling or study” [Online 19]

##### 3.2.1 The Grammar Translation Method

According to ESL Glossary (Online 10), the Grammar Translation Method is an ineffective method and was applied to teach the ancient languages such as Latin, this method focused on the translation of grammatical forms, memorization of vocabulary, as well as grammatical rules and conjugations, the main goal in this method is accuracy over fluency, i.e. form not meaning. Most of its learning is done in native language, which leads to ineffective language learning, nevertheless nowadays this method is still adapted in some parts of Asia, thus the result is that many students

are unable to communicate in simple conversations, nevertheless they possess a good grammatical knowledge.

Both researchers Howatt (1984) and Rivers (1981) argue that the Grammar Translation Method was first applied in the public schools of Prussia to teach modern languages at the end of the eighteenth century. The main objectives were to make students ready to read and write classical texts as well as to prepare them for the standardized exams.

Howatt (ibid.) claims that similarly to the courses of Greek and Latin, this approach applied the usage of classical literature, due to the fact that it had a vast intellectual content, nevertheless, the students would not actually use the classic languages but it was considered that they would benefit from it intellectually and it was a good mental exercise. Students were given explanations of grammar in their native languages as well as bilingual vocabulary lists to memorize, this method prepared them to translate texts from the classical languages in their native tongue.

Rivers (1981), on the other hand claims that the lessons consisted of reading materials, lists of words with translations in the native language of the students, as well as a test in the end.

Coady & Huckin (1997: 6) argue that the skills were evaluated according to the students' ability to 'analyze the syntactic structure' but the most important requirement was the conjugation of verbs.

According to Rivers (1981), the Grammar Translation Method applied the samples of literary language which used archaic sentence structures and outdated vocabulary; nevertheless, the students were 'exposed to a wide variety of literary vocabulary.'

As stated by Kelly (1969: 30), Greek and Latin word roots were considered a rather big challenge and earned their respects; it was compared as to discover the truth in the court.

Coady & Huckin (1997: 6) claim that bilingual word lists (*vocabularies*) 'were used as instructional aid to students rather than as reference', in addition; they were organized according to semantic fields.

Kelly (1969: 30) explains that ‘during the period of Grammar Translation methodology, bilingual dictionaries became common as reference tools.’

Coady & Huckin (1997: 6), on the other hand claim that ‘as more was understood about language families and the natural process of language change in the twentieth century, scholars began to emphasize the dangers of cognates, but this change in perspective was gradual.’

Coady & Huckin (ibid.) argue that the Grammar Translation Method was well applied in the twentieth century, it was used as the basic language instruction in the United States and Europe, and nevertheless, this method received many criticisms for many years. The main criticism in the mid 1800s was the inattention to the realistic oral language instruction.

Rivers (1983: 116) argues that could be possible if the students, for example would create ‘very detailed sequences of appropriate actions in relation to objects stating aloud exactly what they were doing with what.’

Rivers (ibid.) argues that Francois Gouin presented words in semantic fields in the interest of teaching a verb’s collocations along with the verb, emphasizing that general terms are ‘the terms of luxury’ and the language can go without them.

Sweet (1899/1964: 2), on the other hand claims that Thomas Prendergast was one of the many who opposed the archaic vocabulary lists and in 1864 in his manual “The Mastery of Languages, or the Art of Speaking Foreign Tongues Idiomatically” listed the most common words in the English language which were based on his intuition, nevertheless, his work was considered to be a failure and did not deliver what it promised, thus, did not make a big impact on the language teaching.

Howatt (1984) argues that despite the criticisms that Thomas Prendergast received, his contribution was surprisingly very precise. Howatt compared Prendergast’s list to the lists compiled by Thorndike and Lorge in 1944, the result was amazing, overall of 214 words 82 % of Prendergast’s words were included in the first 500 most frequent words used in the list of Thorndike and Lorge.

Coady & Huckin (1997: 7) acknowledge that the list of Prendergast was an important turn in the language teaching, due to the fact that it assisted the language teaching and learning when simplicity of the language was considered to be poor and

everyday language was scorned and before it was normal to think in terms of common words.

### 3.2.2 The Reform Movement

The Reform Movement concentrated to apply new methods of language teaching, due to the fact that the Grammar Translation Method failed to provide the learners with efficient language acquisition.

Coady & Huckin (1997: 7) argue that although Grammar Translation Method was one of the most important methods of language teaching in the 1920s, it was soon to be replaced by other methods. In the 1880s there was enough intellectual leadership from linguists such as Henry Sweet to establish the Reform Movement.

Sweet (1899/1964: 3) elaborates that previous reactions against Grammar Translation failed due to the fact that there was insufficient knowledge about the language as science.

Howatt (1984) adds that the primary objective of the reformers was spoken language and phonetic training. The ability to precisely pronounce a word or a sentence was considered the main goal. The curriculum which Sweet developed was applied in the teachings of that time.

Coady & Huckin (1997: 7) argue that Sweet's system began with the Mechanical Stage, in which students had to study phonetics and transcription, later the next stage was the acquisition of grammar and very basic vocabulary, the third stage was the Idiomatic Stage, in which students studied the vocabulary in greater detail, the fourth and fifth stage were the Literary and Archaic stages in which students studied philology. The lessons of Sweet were based on carefully-controlled spoken language in which students could not use separate words and short, isolated sentences.

Sweet (1899/1964: 97), on the other hand claims that despite the language consists of words, people do not speak in words but in sentences. Looking on it from a scientific point of view, the sentence is the unit of a language not the word and from phonetic aspect – words do not exist.

Kelly (1969: 30) suggests that it is a possibility that the Reformers' abandonment was that the words became associated reality rather than with other words or syntactic patterns. They chose words according to their simplicity and usefulness, in addition, Sweet had a suggestion to conduct vocabulary lists which would be based on statistical measures.

Howatt (1984: 187), on the other hand argues that that Sweet truly believed that practical words such as 'household items and articles of clothing' were considered to be not important, as well as commonplace and warned that the students might be distracted by them.

### 3.2.3 The Direct Method

The McMillan dictionary explains that the Direct Method is 'a way of teaching a foreign language to someone in which you only use the foreign language.' (Online 11) In other words, the teacher only uses the second language in order to communicate and teach the student.

According to Richards & Rodgers (1986), the direct method is best known for several natural methods which were introduced in the end of the nineteenth century and benefited from the debate that was during the Reform Movement, nevertheless Sweet and other intellectuals did not considered it to be a part of the linguistic theory.

Larsen- Freeman (1986) elaborates that it was developed in the United States by Sauver and popularized by Berlitz, this method applied that interaction is the most important part of the language learning. In the classrooms, the teacher and the students were exchanging questions and answers using simple, everyday vocabulary and sentences. Reading was taught throughout the whole language course and was developed through practicing and using the language.

Richards & Rodgers (1986) claim that there existed criticisms against the direct Method, such as the oversimplification of the similarities between L1 and L2 and lack of attention of the practical exercises in the classroom.

Howatt (1984: 201) adds that in Sauveur's 1874 Teacher's Manual, "An Introduction to the Teaching of Living Languages without Grammar or Dictionary", he suggested two approaches of language teaching to teachers, that they should only ask serious questions that may elicit the answers in which the teacher has interest, in

addition, questions needed to be coherent to one another, in such a way that each answer may give rise to a new question, thus providing the chance to learn from context.

Howatt (*ibid.*: 206) claims that the vocabulary applied in this method by Berlitz in his first few lessons was very simple and familiar, for example, the vocabulary was based on the objects in the classroom, or the students', clothing, appearance or body parts following by simple and common adjectives, e.g. big, small, etc.

Several researchers, Rivers (1983), Richards & Rodgers (1986) elaborate that 'concrete vocabulary was explained with labeled pictures and demonstration, while abstract vocabulary was taught through the associating of ideas.'

Kelly (1969: 30) claims also that charts and pictures were used during this period, first in the classroom and then in language textbooks. Objects were also used to demonstrate meaning of a word.

Howatt (1984: 201), on the other hand claims that many traditional method users never adjusted to the Direct Method and criticized it for being insignificant, it never was used in common schools of the United States or Europe, nevertheless this method gained popularity in private schools, for example, the Berlitz Schools.

#### 3.2.4 The Reading Method/Situational Language Acquisition

According to Rivers (1981), the 1920s and 1930s was the time for Reading Method which was developed in the United States and Situational Language Teaching in Great Britain. The main objective of this method was to develop reading skills due to the fact that many American students had very poor reading skills.

Coady & Huckin (1997: 9) argue that similarly, in Great Britain, Michael West called for the improvement of vocabulary skills; in addition he criticized direct methodologists for paying more attention to speech without providing directives for contents.

West (1930: 514), on the other hand claims that the most important thing when learning a language is the vocabulary acquisition as well as practice using it, but a major problem was what vocabulary and none of the modern textbooks available at the time did not solve the problem.

Coady & Huckin (1997: 9) argue that West stated that ‘foreign language learners did not have even a basic thousand-word vocabulary after three years of study[...].’

West (1930: 511) clarifies that, (1) Their time was spent on activities that were not helping them speak the language; (2) they were learning words that were not useful to them; and (3) they were not “fully mastering” the words they were learning.

Meara (1980) considers that West’s recommendation was to use word-frequency lists as the basis for the selection and order of vocabulary in student materials. In 1953 West recommended to use Thorndike’s word-frequency list, nevertheless the list is old the main words have not changed since 1936. Even now this list is considered to be very accurate and is still in use despite many updated lists which have been conducted by the help of computer technology.

Richards & Rodgers (1986: 33) claim that at the same time, British linguists H. E. Palmer and A. S. Hornby, were very influential in the United States and Great Britain and their goal was to develop a more scientific basis for oral methods which were popularized by direct methodologists. They considered that a language should be taught by practicing basic structures in situation-type activities, speaking was considered to be very important and was used as often as possible.

According to Coady & Huckin (1997:10), vocabulary was considered one of the most important parts of second language learning and ‘a priority was put on developing scientific and rational basis for selecting the vocabulary content of language courses.’

### 3.2.5 The Audio-lingual Method

According to (Online 12), the Audio-lingual Method is ‘Relating to or involving a system of language acquisition that focuses intensively on listening and speaking.’ In other words, this method concentrates to teach the learners’ communication skills.

Coady & Huckin (1997: 10) explain that the audio-lingual method was developed during the World War II by American linguists. The founder was Charles Fries, adapted this approach to pedagogical grammar, Fries described it as a practical interpretation of the ‘principles of modern linguistic science.’

Coady & Huckin (ibid.: 10-11) claim that the audio-lingual method paid systematic attention to pronunciation and intensive drilling of basic sentence patterns. Students were taught grammatical rules by various examples and drills rather than with the help of deep analysis and memorization of rules, this course according to Fries, consisted of three months of tough training and intensive study of the language. New vocabulary was presented through drills, but only as many words were provided to make the drill possible and more efficient.

According to Rivers (1983: 118), the assumption seemed to be that the structural frames could be ‘fleshed out with words at a later stage when students were more certain of their lexical needs in particular situations.’

Fries (1945: 38) claims that ‘the linguistic student should never make the mistake of identifying a language with its dictionary.’

In other words according to Coady & Huckin (1997: 11), Fries considered that language learners oversimplified isolated words. He attributed the oversimplification of vocabulary issues to three false claims about the nature of the language. “First, it is falsely assumed that words have exact equivalents in different languages.” Fries argued that the only words that convey exactly the same meaning from one language to another are highly technical words. “Second, it is assumed that a word is a single meaning unit.” In fact, Fries pointed out that English words usually have from fifteen to twenty meanings. The third false assumption is that each word has a “basic or real” meaning and that all other meanings are either figurative or illegitimate.

In fact, Fries (1945: 43) claimed that words are ‘symbols that derive their whole content and their limitations of meaning from the situations in which they are used.’

Coady & Huckin (1997: 11) argue that it was considered that learning excessive amounts of vocabulary in the language learning process may give students a false sense of security, meaning that they feel that they know everything and are sure of themselves.

Rivers (1968/1981: 254) suggests that excessive vocabulary learning early in the course gives students the impression that the most important part of a language is the vocabulary. Students often fail to realize that the meaning is often expressed with several words, groups or combinations and the meaning of the word is hard to determine if it is separated from its context.

Coady & Huckin (1997: 11) argue that Rivers recommended practice with morphological variations and syntactic structures using well-known vocabulary so that students would not be distracted from concentration on the target structures. She also suggested that new vocabulary should be introduced first in oral activities, also to reuse words that can aid students later.

Coady & Huckin (ibid.) elaborate that Freeman Twaddell who was a colleague of Fries, supported Fries's concern that language learners often overvalue word knowledge and consider it to be the knowledge of the language, thus he claimed that teachers and theoreticians have exaggerated the role of vocabulary and thus downgraded it by emphasizing the teaching of grammar. The splitting of this point of view has been observed in the teaching curriculum and materials that attribute lexical items to illustrate grammatical topics, thus not giving proper attention to communicative value.

Twaddell (1980: 442) claims that people who are adult learners have 'an infantile vocabulary and an adult mentality.'

Coady & Huckin (ibid.: 12) claim that Twaddell's [...] 'recommendation for addressing this problem is not to abandon the primacy of grammatical structures in the process of teaching a language, but rather to teach skills of compensation: "guessing word meanings and tolerating vagueness."'

### 3.2.6 Communicative Language Teaching

This method is similar to Audio-lingual Method, due to the fact that both use communication as means of teaching the language.

Coady & Huckin (ibid.: 12) argue that a major crossing in linguistic theory was performed by Noam Chomsky's publication "Syntactic Structures" in 1957 and in his work Chomsky introduced the theory that language is represented in the speaker's 'mental grammar by an abstract set of rules that is most clearly reflected in a speaker's unconscious beliefs and statements about use of language.'

According to Coady & Huchin (ibid.) Noam Chomsky did not pay much attention to the nature of the language and its use in real communication, nevertheless his work reflected the creativity of language and challenged the behaviorist theoreticians. Chomsky's opponent, Dell Hymes in response to his statement created the concept of communicative competence, which was completely vice versa to Chomsky's model, thus it introduced the language learners with socialistic and pragmatic approaches which as stated by Hymes prove to have effective results of the language use. 'Communicative competence is defined as the internalized knowledge of the situational appropriateness of language.'

Furthermore, both Coady & Huchin (ibid.: 13) claim that the main focus of the language teaching changed to communicative skill rather than the governance of structures. Communicative language teaching is aimed to make 'communicative competence the goal of language teaching and to develop procedures for teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication.'

Stern (1981), on the other hand argues that these communicative methods all have a single objective, thus to aid the language learners by bringing them closer to the language as well as to facilitate fluency rather than accuracy.

Coady & Huckin (ibid.: 13) elaborate that Wilga Rivers had described her own perception on this issue in 1983, by stating that there are insufficient practices which help to acquire skills without real communication.

According to Rivers (1983: 43), that there has been one failure in the past with her students who performed good in pseudo-communication, despite the assumption 'that there would then be automatic transfer to performance in interaction (both in the reception and expression of messages).'

Rivers (*ibid.*: 120) argues about previously mentioned Stern's argument about fluency over accuracy, nevertheless Rivers has suggested to language teachers to pay more attention to words, and would be the best way to help learners 'communicate meaning.'

Coady & Huckin (1997: 13) consider that similarly Widdowson (1978) claimed that native speakers are able to better comprehend ungrammatical expressions with accurate vocabulary than those speakers with inaccurate vocabulary but perfect grammar, suffice to say that vocabulary has not been the primary objective in the language research or methodology, but the attention has been given more to the correct use of communicative categories and language as discourse. A British linguist David Wilkins (1972) demonstrated two systems or categories of meaning involved in communication, these categories are notional categories or concepts such as time, quantity and space and functional categories or acts such as requests or denials.

Wilkins (1974: 19-20) suggests that [...] 'the ability to refer to concrete and conceptual entities is as fundamental to language as it is the capacity provided by the grammar to relate such entities to one another.' To learn a language it is required to master the vocabulary as well as the grammar.

Coady & Huckin (*ibid.*: 14) acknowledge that Wilkins suggested that the only way to master the lexical system is the same as to master the syntactic system and the learner must be exposed to the language as much as possible.

An American linguist Edward Anthony (1973: 13) also has stated that any user of the English language is provided with cultural patterns of behavior which can help learners to share the experience with other people who come or belong to the exact culture and belong to precisely the same patterns of behavior.

Coady & Huckin (*ibid.*: 14) elaborate that 'Communicative methods reflect these concerns in various ways, such as by basing course content on activities that are contextualized, by focusing on the discourse level rather than the sentence level, and by providing students with opportunities to develop strategies for interpreting and using the language as it is actually used by native speakers.'

Furthermore, Coady & Huckin (*ibid.*: 14-15) argue about the frequency-lists being applied, that those lists suggest that first 1000 to 2000 words make up a beginner's vocabulary, as well as there are some other issues, such as

(1) the most important words for language learners do not always appear in the first or second thousand words (e.g. *stupid and behavior* do not appear in the first 3000 words of previously mentioned Thorndike and Lorge's 1944 list); (2) the order of words in a frequency list does not always indicate the best order in which to teach words (e.g., *his* is the 74<sup>th</sup> word in the list and *hers* is the 4151<sup>st</sup> word; included in the first 1000 words of Thorndike and Lorge's list are *issue* [v], *stock*, and *Chicago*); and (3) word-frequency lists disagree according to the types of texts being analyzed. As a result of such problems, word-frequency lists appear to contradict an underlying assumption of communicative approaches: Since vocabulary development occurs naturally in L1 through contextualized, naturally sequenced language, it will develop with natural, communicative exposure to L2.'

### 3.2.7 The Natural Approach

According to (Online 13), the natural Approach was created by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Teller. 'The Natural Approach is a methodology for fostering second language acquisition which focuses on teaching communicative skills, both oral and written, and is based on Krashen's theory of language acquisition which assumes that speech emerges in four stages: (1) preproduction (listening and gestures), (2) early production (short phrases), (3) speech emergence (long phrases and sentences), and (4) intermediate fluency (conversation).'

Krashen & Teller (1983: 131) claim that 'the Natural Approach is 'similar to other communicative approaches being developed.'

Furthermore, Krashen & Teller (ibid.: 131) that this method's purpose is to enable a beginner student to achieve decent levels of oral communication in the classroom.

On the other hand, Coady & Huckin (ibid.: 15) consider that this approach is based on a theoretical model consisting of five hypotheses: (1) the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis (the distinction between "natural" acquisition as seen in L1 and the formal learning that emphasizes conscious rules and error correction); (2) the Natural Order Hypothesis (that grammatical structures tend to be naturally acquired in a somewhat predictable order without artificial sequencing of

input), (3) the Monitor Hypothesis (that conscious learning has the limited function of “monitoring” or editing language performance); (4) the Input Hypothesis (that language is acquired when input is in an interesting and relevant context that is slightly above one’s current level of competence); and (5) the Affective Filter Hypothesis (that attitudinal factors are related to language acquisition; acquirers with a “low-affective filter” – an optimal attitude – will be more receptive and more likely to interact with confidence). Natural Approach emphasizes the vocabulary over grammar, since the vocabulary is ‘the bearer of meaning’

Krashen & Teller (1983: 155) claim that the acquisition is perceived well if the input is understandable and understanding is based on the skill to recognize the meaning of ‘key elements in the utterance.’

Krashen & Teller (ibid.: 156) argue that the attention of students is not turned to vocabulary learning but on communication, thus by communicating students acquire the true vocabulary.

Krashen (1993b: 23) claims that the most important thing in the vocabulary acquisition is the reading process, it is the best method used to acquire new words in the reader’s vocabulary.

To sum up, Coady & Huckin (ibid.) claim that the priorities of methods applied in the language teaching have changed in the course of time; nevertheless there have been disagreements about the use of formal against colloquial language, against memorization versus internalization of language forms, as well as against the usefulness of structures or words and language description. Nevertheless, the vocabulary training was not the main goal in second language research and methodology, in addition, the linguists and other researchers hope that one day the role of vocabulary will be acknowledged and the attention given as it should.

## CHAPTER 4

### VOCABULARY TESTING

This chapter comprises several methods of vocabulary assessment methods, which test the knowledge of the language learners.

#### 4.1 Types of Tests

It takes certain skills to develop a good test for language learners; they need to ‘[...] assess knowledge of the meaning of a specific set of words.’ Read (2000: 78)

Furthermore, the test needs to be targeted to a specific area, either it is a test which measures the knowledge of a specific field, for example, technical vocabulary or vocabulary with highly formal words or even words of the vocabulary in general, and a precisely made test may give the best results. Read offers us a glimpse of several examples what tests should be like according to the provided examples.

‘(1) [Chose the best answer, from the four choices given.]

After the heavy rain, many parts of the city were \_\_\_\_.

- a. flooded   b. washed   c. drowned   d. watered

(2) [Write the missing word in the space provided.]

At last the climbers reached the s\_\_\_\_\_ of the mountain.

(3) [Chose the correct answer, from the four choices given.]

We could see the place \_\_\_\_ she had the accident.

- a. which   b. where   c. whether   d. what

(4) [Rewrite the sentence in another way, beginning with the words given.]

It was difficult to play on the wet field.

Playing\_\_\_\_\_ . ‘ (ibid.: 95-96)

These examples demonstrate 3 types of tests, a multiple choice, fill the gaps and paraphrase; they can even be combined to cover all these types of questions.

#### 4.1.1 Multiple-choice vocabulary items

According to Read 2000: 77), the multiple-choice format [...]’is one of the most widely used methods of vocabulary assessment, both for native speakers and for second language learners.’

It is a very effective type of testing the students who access either their native or 2<sup>nd</sup> or even multiple languages, nevertheless this method does not allow the knowledge of the students` to be fully tested, hence, there exist the variant of guessing even if the student may not know the right answer they still can chose any variant or such as one of the criticism methods the researcher will mention below, the students may apply the elimination method, by discarding answers they are sure that is not the right answer, thus leaving them with a higher percentage rate of guessing a correct answer.

Nevertheless, there are people who still criticize this method, such as Wesche and Paribakht (1996: 17), who claim that ‘it is difficult to construct multiple- choice tests; they require analysis, as well as time-consuming field-testing and fining.’

In addition, the learner might know another meaning or meanings of the word but not the one which is required and in this sense is the only meaning. There exists also a process called elimination in which the student excludes words he or she is certain of that are not the correct answer and has a 25% chance of guessing the right answer, if there are 4 answers to chose from.

Furthermore, Weshe and Paribakht add that ‘these tests only check the students’ knowledge of distracters but not their skills to locate the right meaning of the target word. The learner may miss an item either for lack of knowledge of words

or lack of understanding of syntax in the distracters. This format permits only a very limited sampling of the learner's total vocabulary (for example, a 25-item multiple-choice test samples one word in 400 from a 10.000-word vocabulary).'

According to the online dictionary, a distracter is 'One of the incorrect answers presented as a choice in a multiple-choice test.' (Online 14)

Read (2000: 78) considers that the previously mentioned arguments conclude that nevertheless the criticisms, multiple-choice items will remain widely used among test developers, not only for vocabulary learners, but also for every other aspect of the language, due to the fact that multiple-choice items are very convenient to administer and easy to evaluate, as well it is very convenient for students only to circle one answer, they do not need to write long passages to answer a question. Despite the popularity of multiple-choice items, there has been little research done, especially in the second language learning

Read (ibid.) inquires if 'one aspect that has been investigated in a small number of studies can be summed up in the question: can we identify variables that influence the difficulty of multiple-choice vocabulary items for second language learners?'

Goodrich (1997) similarly to Weshe and Paribakht's (1996) fourth criticism mentioned previously, undertook a research and focused on the effectiveness of eight distracter types in multiple-choice items and subjected them to his Arabic-speaking learners of English. The research showed that 'the most attractive distracters turned out to be words generally not attracted by false cognates [relatives], by arbitrarily [in a random manner] chosen distracters or by words with similar spelling to the correct answer (e.g., beard for bread).'

Furthermore, when Goodrich compared his test which contained only five distracter types with a test which contained only one ineffective type; he found proof that the previous version was a better measure of the learner's proficiency. In addition, this research proves that distracters have too much influence on how the multiple-choice items measure the vocabulary knowledge.

#### **4.2 The Construct Validity of Vocabulary Tests**

Read (2000: 78) claims that vocabulary tests are only measures of the lexical knowledge and nothing more, however, the difference between vocabulary and other language ability tests is not simple to reflect only by 'statistical analysis.' Farr and Carey (1986) claimed that researchers have discovered a 'high degree of overlap between tests of vocabulary and the other subskills involved in reading.' To demonstrate that vocabulary knowledge is a systematic procedure to study the relationships between vocabulary and other language tests, thus involving the most essential kind of research that language testers take upon.

The multiple-choice tests is one of the most widely used methods of vocabulary assessment for L1 and L2 speakers, nevertheless the creation of such tasks are difficult to conduct and to apply to a specific sphere not only vocabulary assessment which the teacher wants the students to acquire, either they are certain words of the vocabulary, or parts of grammar or syntax, etc. This testing method is very popular, nevertheless it is not very effective, due to the fact that multiple choice answers give the students a chance of guessing or elimination of certain answer(s), thus their knowledge is not fully tested and the results are not objective. In short, vocabulary tests are only measures of the lexical knowledge and nothing more.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CASE STUDY**

#### **5.1 Background**

One of the most important aspects of the language is the strategies and methods which are applied in order to acquire a specific skill, either reading, writing, or even speaking. Nevertheless, one of the most difficulties that a learner may come across is the vocabulary.

#### **5.2 Purpose of the Research**

The aim of this research is to query whether the respondents gain more benefit applying certain strategies in order to acquire the vocabulary, such as, cognitive, metacognitive, as well as visual aid or even other language learning strategies which they consider to be helpful while learning new words as well as their preferences in the choice of texts, whether they prefer the text to be with a rich and complex vocabulary or vice versa, rather simple and easily understandable, as well as, whether the respondents prefer television over books and the amount of time they devote to

their chosen item. Finally, the test to assess the respondents' knowledge in Academic English.

### **5.3 Research Questions.**

As an example the research questions were taken on the basis of Yukinari Shimoyama's research "Vocabulary Learning Strategy Use of Unknown Words by Japanese Learners of English" [Online 20]

- 1) How good is your English? From scale 1 – 10, 1 is beginner and 10 is advanced
- 2) How often do you watch TV in English according to 1 – 10 scale, 1 (never) and 10 (always)?
- 3) How often do you read books in English according to 1 - 10 scale, 1 (never) and 10 (always)?
- 4) Which strategies do you use when learning vocabulary?
- 5) While reading, do you periodically check whether the material is making sense to you?
- 6) When you encounter an unknown word while reading or watching television, do you use reference materials (Dictionary, textbooks, computer program, etc.) to help solve the comprehension problem?
- 7) Do you devote your time for pleasure reading?
- 8) When you come across an English word that looks or sounds similar in your native tongue, do you think about how meanings are related?
- 9) Would you consider that you learn new words better from watching television or reading books?
- 10) When you come across an unknown word(s) and the text can be comprehended from the context, do you look up the unknown word(s)?
- 11) Would you consider that subtitled television programs help better to acquire the vocabulary?
- 12) What kind of books do you prefer?

### **5.4 Method**

In order to answer these questions, the participants are instructed to fill out a questionnaire about Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition, as well as carry out a proficiency test in order to note their proficiency in Academic English.

#### 5.4.1 Participants

The participants for this research were 31 students, 14 students (2010) from the University of Latvia, English Philology full time department and 17 Master students of Linguistics, Radboud University Nijmegen (the Netherlands).

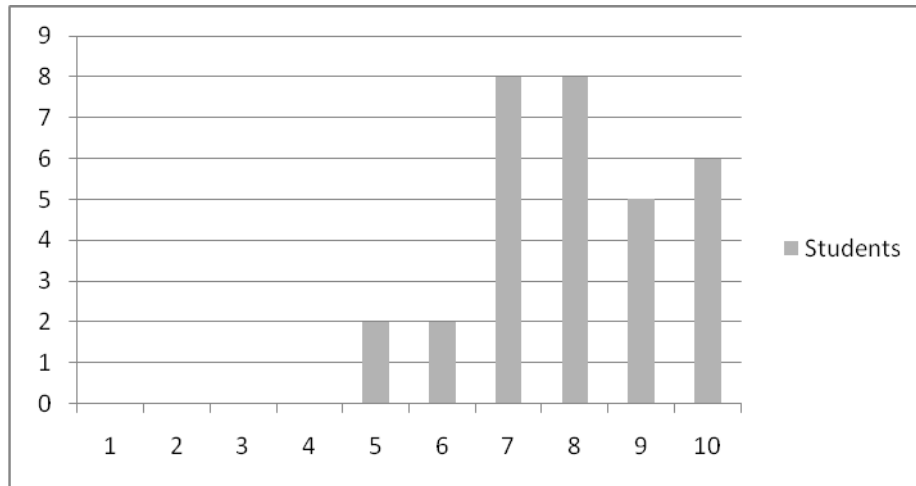
#### 5.4.2 Proficiency Test

Proficiency test on Academic English, this test was conducted by Norbert Schmitt (2000: 199 – 200), in order to assess the knowledge of Academic English for learners who study English as a second language. The test is a multiple choice and consists of 10 questions concerning Academic English. Each questions has 3 items which should be attributed to 3 of the 6 given answers, thus the guessing chances of students of the correct answer is rather small.

### **5.5 Analysis of the Questionnaires**

The first question was “How good is your English? From scale 1 – 10, 1 is beginner and 10 is advanced.”

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Question**

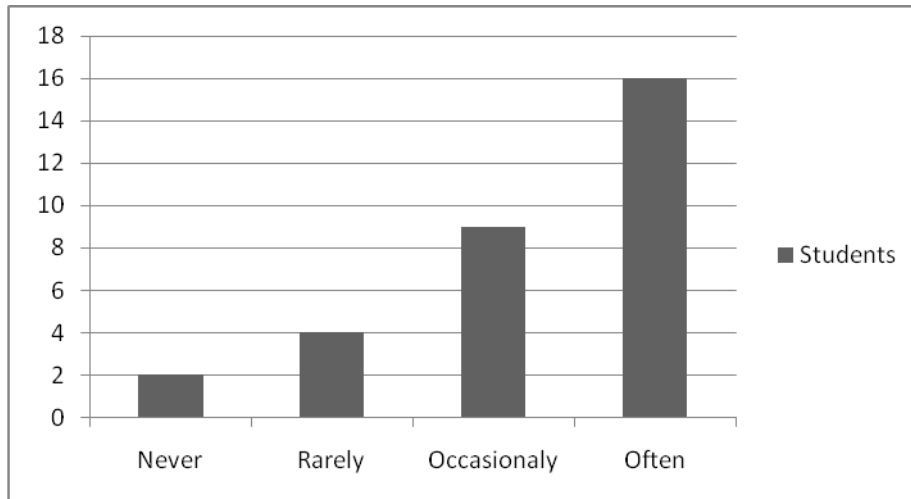


*Figure 5.1 Results of the Questionnaire*

Analyzing the 1<sup>st</sup> question, the results are as follows, there are no respondents with 1 to 4 English knowledge level, however there are (2) students with 5 and 6 knowledge levels, the majority of respondents are from levels 7 to 8 which appears to be the average among respondents, furthermore, (5) students have level 9 English language knowledge and (6) students have the highest – level 10 language knowledge. The average levels are more or less adequate for 2<sup>nd</sup> language learners hence their language skills are still in the process of development.

The second question was “How often do you watch TV in English according to 1-10 scale, 1 (never) and 10 (always)?”

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Question**

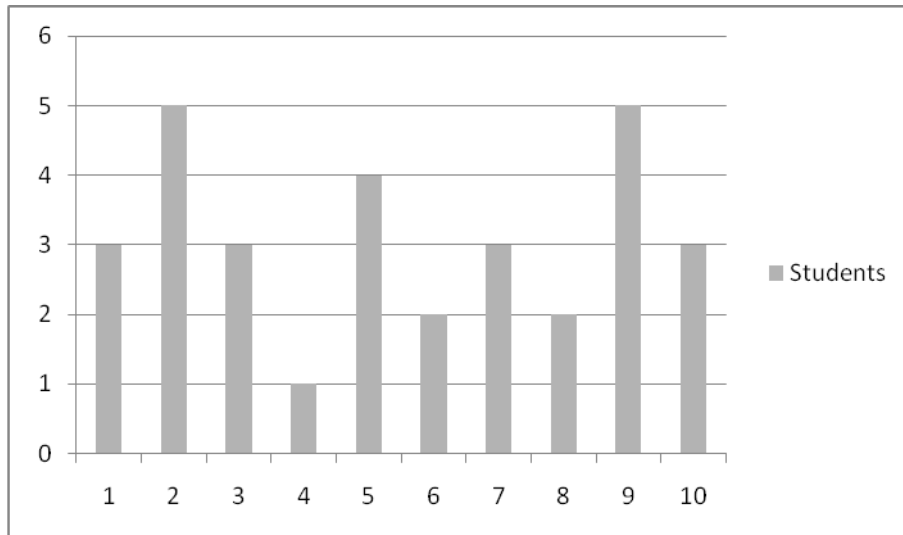


*Figure 5.2 Results of the Questionnaire*

This figure demonstrates that the majority tends to watch the television in English rather often. Only (2) students replied that he or she does not watch television at all, on the other hand, all the other respondents replied that they watch it each less or more frequently than others but more than half of the students watch it regularly.

The third question was “How often do you read books in English according to 1-10 scale, 1 (never) and 10 (always)? “

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Question**



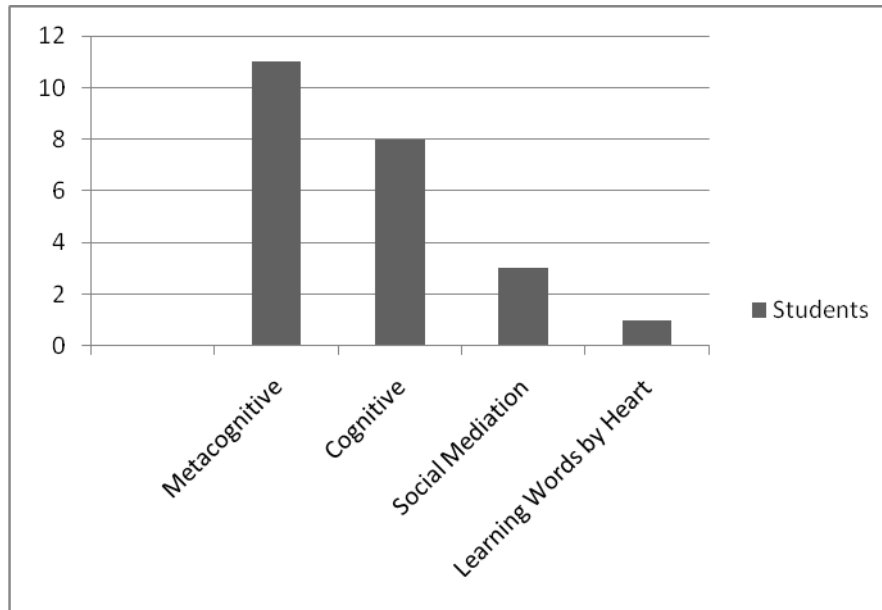
*Figure 5.3 Results of the Questionnaire*

The figure of the 3<sup>rd</sup> question clearly shows that approximately half of the respondents read books into English at a scale from 1 to 5, thus never or very rarely, furthermore, the other half reads books into English from scales 6 to 10 or frequent or even always.

If compared to watching television into English, there are more people who prefer television rather than reading books.

The 4<sup>th</sup> question was “Which strategies do you use when learning vocabulary?”

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Question**

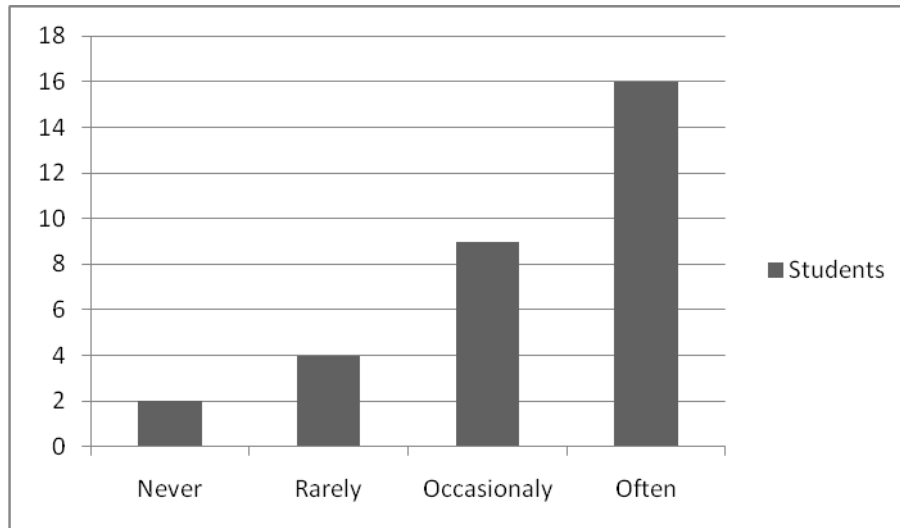


*Figure 5.4 Results of the Questionnaire*

The analysis of the 4<sup>th</sup> question about the strategies which the respondents apply to learn vocabulary demonstrate that the majority of students apply the Metacognitive strategy, or in other words, a strategy which involves planning and direct learning at a general level, overall 11 students chose exactly this option. The second most popular answer was cognitive strategy which involves logics and reasoning, overall 8 respondents chose this approach. Finally, the two last strategies social Mediation and Learning by Heart, Social mediation was chosen by 3 students, it involves a communication or a dispute between two or more persons, furthermore, Learning by Heart is generally a memorization of set of words or phrases, most commonly referred to as “cramming” and this strategy was chosen only by 1 person.

The 5<sup>th</sup> question was “While reading, do you periodically check whether the material is making sense to you?”

### **5<sup>th</sup> Question**

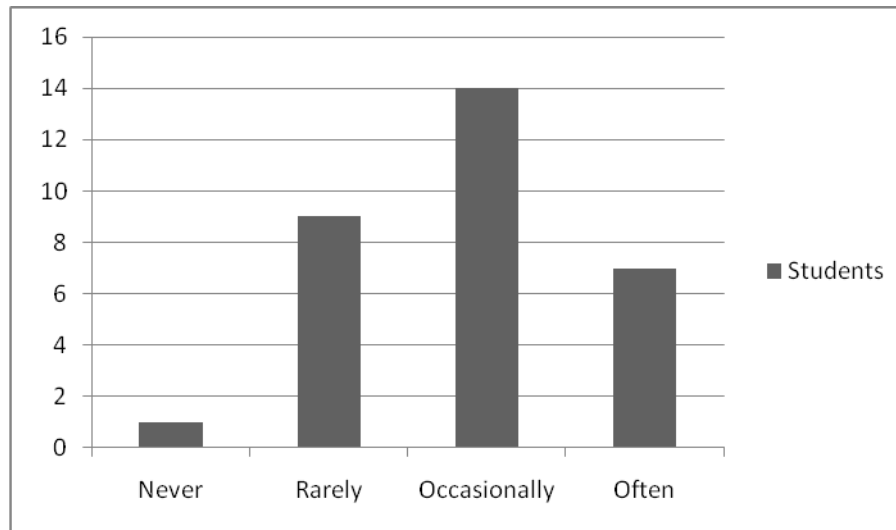


*Figure 5.5 Results of the Questionnaire*

The 5<sup>th</sup> figure displays the results of how periodically the students check if the material they are reading makes sense to them, i.e. if they understand everything they are reading. Surprisingly there are only 2 respondents who answered that they never check whether the material is making any sense to them, as well as 4 persons responded that they check it rarely, which may lead to insufficient vocabulary acquisition. On the other hand, the majority of students replied that they check it occasionally (9) and often (16). Those students who chose often have a very high chance of acquiring vocabulary more effectively than the rest.

The 6<sup>th</sup> question was “When you encounter an unknown word while reading or watching television, do you use any reference materials (Dictionary, textbooks, computer programs, etc.) to help solve the comprehension problem?”

### 6<sup>th</sup> Question

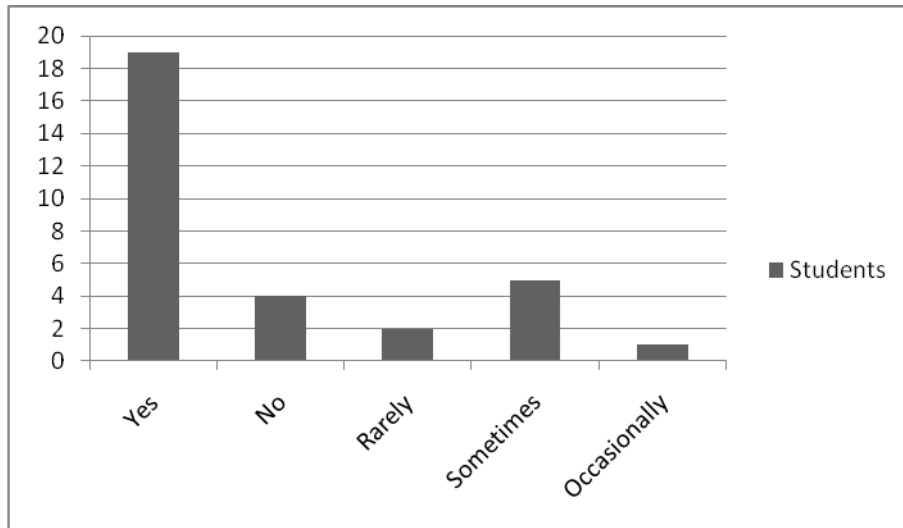


*Figure 5.6 Results of the Questionnaire*

The analysis of this question reveals that surprisingly quite a lot of respondents answered never (1) or rarely (9), on the other hand, the majority did chose occasionally (14) or even often (7) which means that it is important for them to know the meaning a new word they have just come across.

The 7<sup>th</sup> question was “Do you devote your time for pleasure reading?”

### 7<sup>th</sup> Question

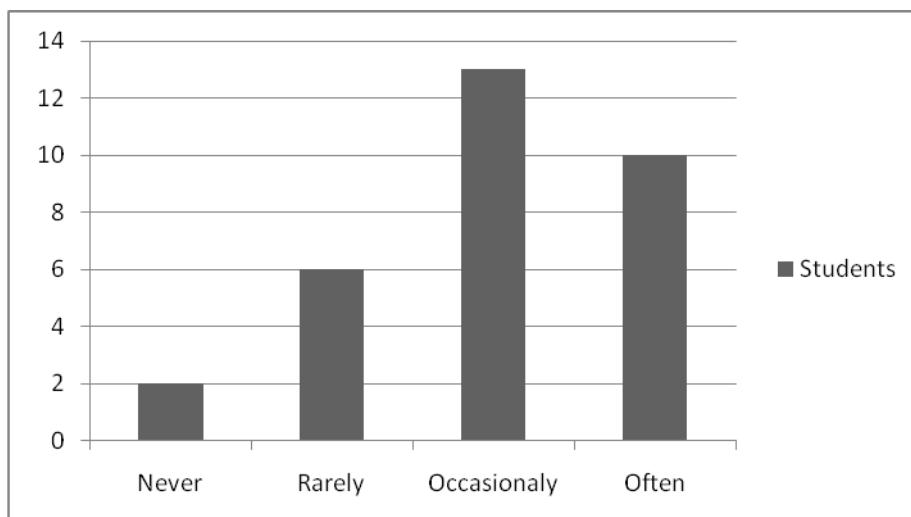


*Figure 5.7 Results of the Questionnaire*

According to the figure, the majority of students devote their time for pleasure reading, either in their native language, English or even other languages, depends how many languages they know, nevertheless reading in any language helps not only to strengthen and improve one's vocabulary and language but may also aid them to acquire new vocabulary. The majority (19) students do devote their time for pleasure reading, on the other hand (4) students do not, (2) do it rarely, (5) sometimes and only (1) occasionally.

The 8<sup>th</sup> question was “When you come across an English word that looks or sounds similar in your native tongue, do you think about how the meanings are related?”

### **8<sup>th</sup> Question**

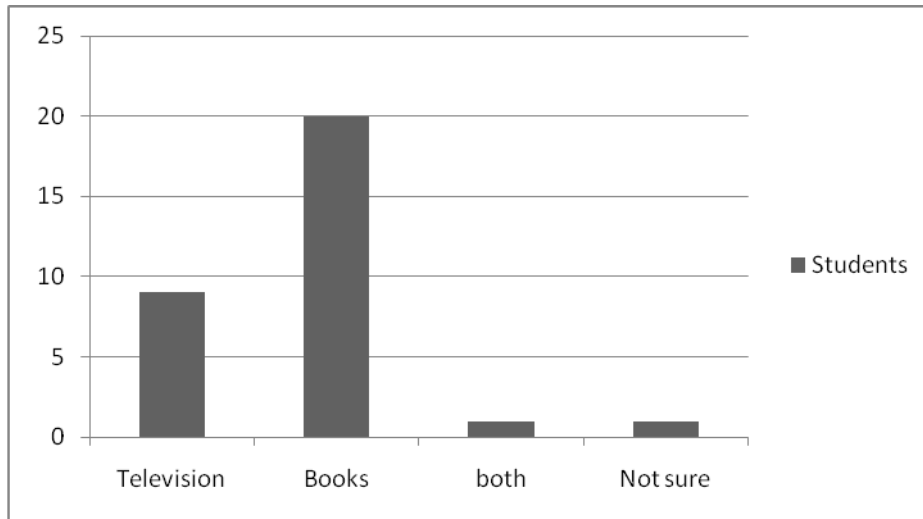


*Figure 5.8 Results of the Questionnaire*

The analysis of this question reveals that the majority of respondents are concerned whether the similar looking or sounding words in English and native tongue have related meaning. (13) students replied that they do check it occasionally and slightly less (10) check it often, on the other hand only (2) respondents are not concerned if there might be any related meanings and (6) do it rarely. There are numerous words in many languages which have similar sounds or meanings, and they are usually a struggle for the translator. Many of those words are called “false friends” which have similar or identical spelling or pronunciation in both languages, such as “talon”, in English it means a sharp hooked claw, especially on a bird of prey, but for a Latvian speaker it is usually associated with “talons” which means a ticket, voucher, and coupon. In this case the spelling is nearly identical as well as pronunciation but the meanings are different.

The 9<sup>th</sup> question was “Would you consider that you learn new words better from watching television or reading books?”

### **9<sup>th</sup> Question**

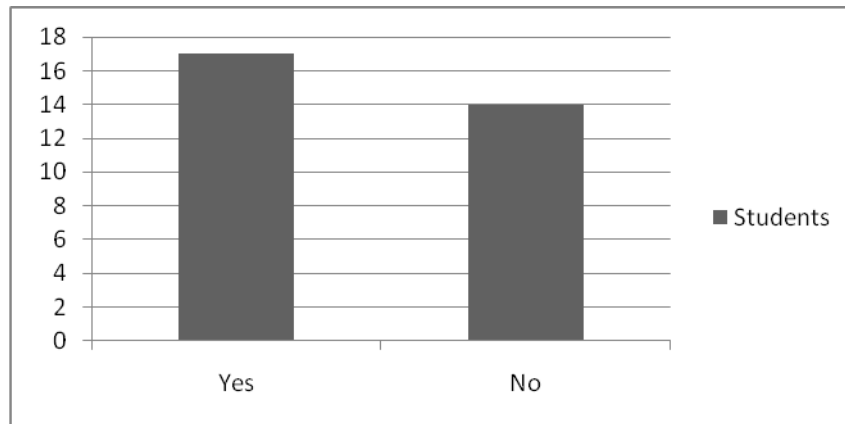


*Figure 5.9 Results of the Questionnaire*

The results of responses about the 9<sup>th</sup> question are that (20) from (31) respondents answered that they learn new words better from books than from television, which the researcher found interesting. To his mind television is a better source to acquire new words since it provides not only speech but also mimics and actions which aid the acquisition of new words but on the other hand in books there are only words and you cannot hear the actual pronunciation of a them but you can only pronounce it as you consider it to be correct, as well as in books readers rely greatly on understanding something from the context, as well as readers rely on dictionaries which is quite time-consuming. In addition, only (9) students answered that they learn better from the television and (1) from both.

The 10<sup>th</sup> question was “When you come across an unknown word(s) and the text can be comprehended from the context, do you look up the unknown word(s)?”

### 10<sup>th</sup> Question

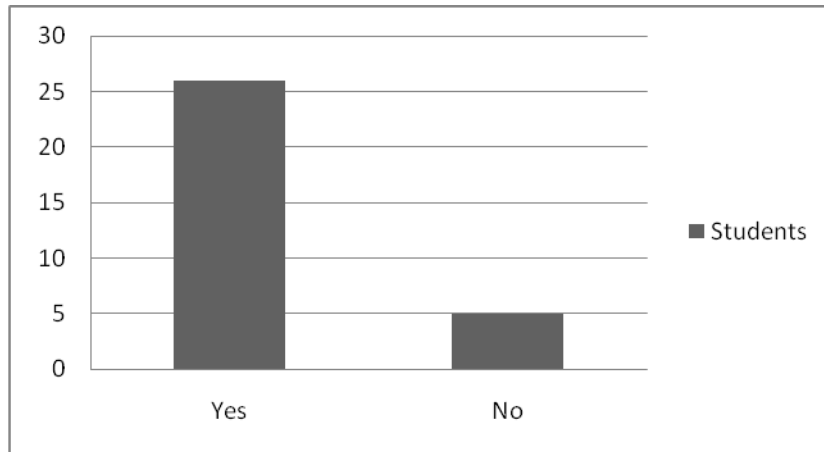


*Figure 5.10 Results of the Questionnaire*

The results of the 10<sup>th</sup> question are rather similar slightly more than a half (17) of respondents look up an unknown word or words even though the text can be understood without knowing a specific word which help them to acquire new words more efficiently and precisely by eliminating the chance of guessing what the unknown word might mean and thus prevent any false meanings. On the other hand, (14) students do not look up any unknown words, thus they learn less new words or even with the help of guessing and context wrong meanings.

The 11<sup>th</sup> question was “Would you consider that subtitled television programs help better to acquire the vocabulary?”

### 11<sup>th</sup> Question

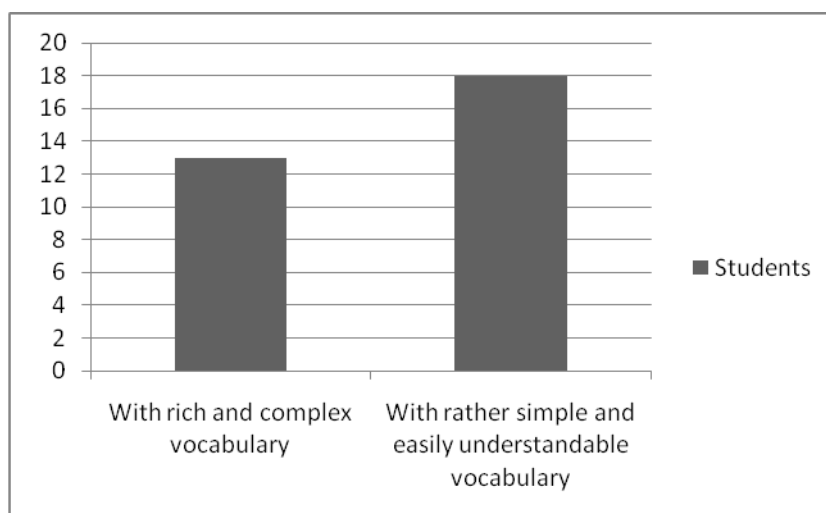


*Figure 5.11 Results of the Questionnaire*

The answers to the 11<sup>th</sup> question were surprising since the majority of the respondents chose books over television. (26) Students agreed that subtitled television programs aid the vocabulary learning. The researcher considers that it is due to the fact that subtitles remind them about books and usually people pay more attention to the text below than other things that are happening on the screen, hence it is similar to reading a book with an additional acoustic environment (speech). On the other hand, only (5) students disagreed that subtitled television programs help better to acquire the vocabulary; it might be because they do not prefer watching television at all, hence considers subtitles as an excessive feature.

The last, 12<sup>th</sup> question was “What kind of books do you prefer?”

### **12<sup>th</sup> Question**



*Figure 5.12 Results of the Questionnaire*

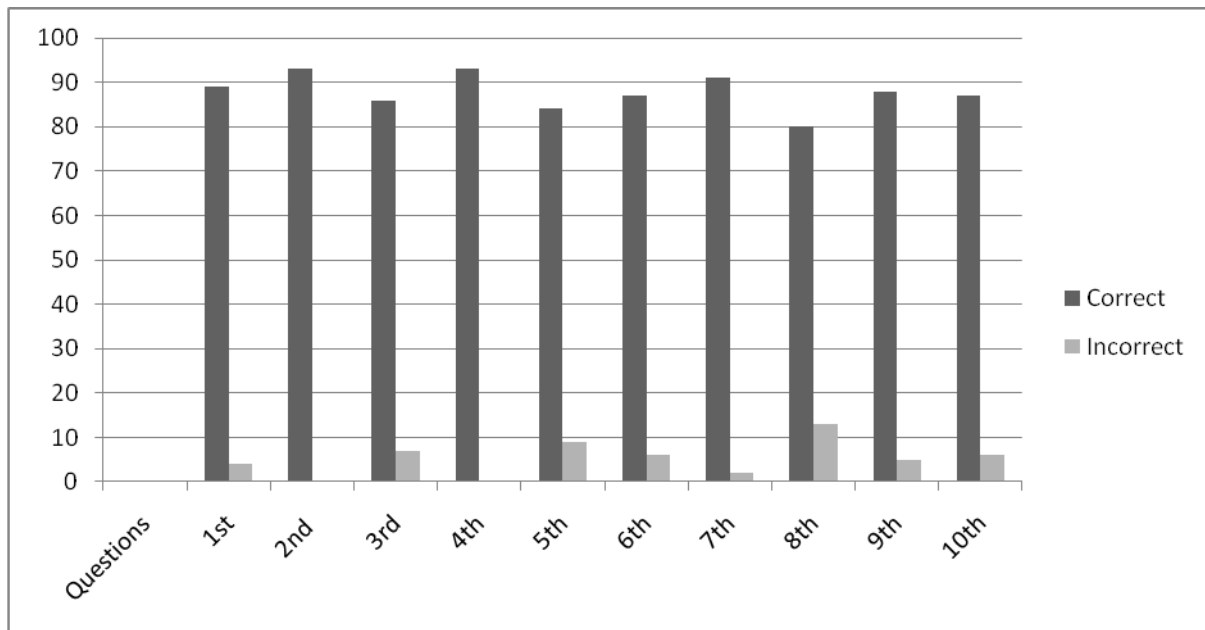
The question about the complexity of books revealed that the majority (18) of the respondents prefer books to be with a rather simple and easily understandable vocabulary, on the other hand, (13) students prefer books to be with rich and complex vocabulary. The most appropriate books for language learners would be exactly those with rich and complex vocabulary, due to the fact that many of them are not easily understood just by context or guessing and a dictionary should be taken into account.

#### **4.6 Analysis of the Proficiency Test**

The students were tested on the knowledge of their Academic English based on Norbert Schmitt's proficiency test (2000: 199 – 200).

Overall the students were given 10 multiple choice questions, each consisting of 3 items and 6 possible answers. Overall the students' answers were satisfactory and their knowledge of the Academic English was good. The throughout analysis about each question is not required; hence it only measures their knowledge of Academic English and proves that they are eligible to fill in the questionnaire and results are

objective. Each question consists of 3 sub questions. The compiled results are as follows.



*Figure 5.13 Results of the Proficiency Test*

The results clearly show that there are not many mistakes made by the students, however, there were several questions which seemed quite difficult, the most mistakes were on the 8<sup>th</sup> question, as well as 5<sup>th</sup>, nevertheless, the overall results were excellent.

Comparing the results of the questionnaire and the proficiency test, it can be said that some of students have less knowledge of the Academic English than other students due to their mistakes in the test, nevertheless, the results of the questionnaire were quite interesting because there can be drawn a line between two groups, 1) which like to watch television better than reading books and 2) vice versa, prefer reading books rather than watching television, in addition, there is no doubt that nearly all the

students agree upon that subtitled television programs help better to acquire vocabulary, furthermore, it was interesting that nearly half of students replied that when they encounter an unknown word(s) but the text can be comprehended from the context, they do not look up the meaning(s), nevertheless, other half of the students do look up the unknown word(s).

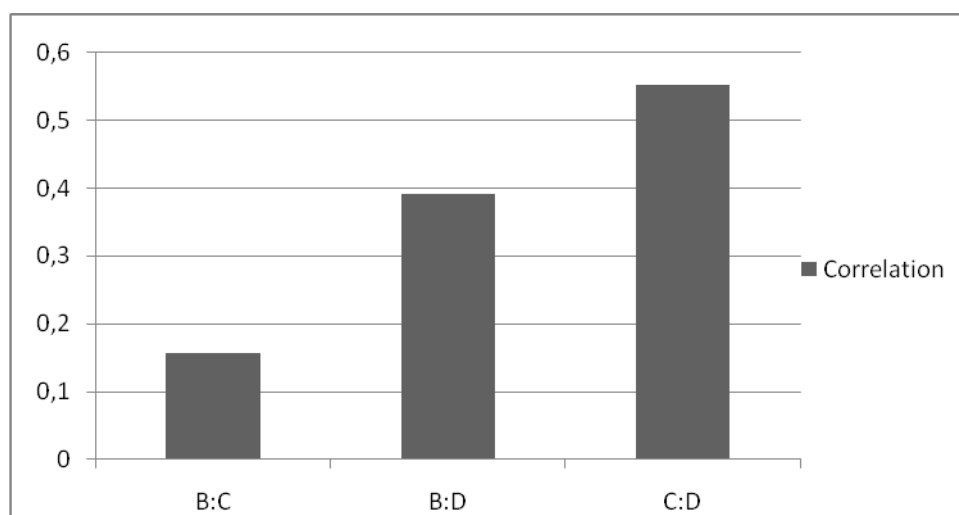
#### 4.7 Correlation Between Questions (1,2,3)

The most important aspects of the questionnaire were the questions (1, 2, 3) in order to see the correlation between the proficiency of their English language and frequency the students watch television and read books.

According to (Online 16), ‘Correlation is a statistical technique that can show whether and how strongly pairs of variables are related.’

“The main result of a correlation is called the **correlation coefficient** (or "r"). It ranges from -1.0 to +1.0. The closer r is to +1 or -1, the more closely the two variables are related.” (ibid.)

The results of previously mentioned questions demonstrate the correlation between the 3 items (English proficiency, book and television frequency)



*Figure 5.7.1 Correlation between Questions (1,2,3)*

- A = The amount of students
- B = Language proficiency level
- C= Television frequency
- D= Book frequency

The results are as follows: the most significant correlation was between television and books, because all the students read books or watch television despite the varying frequency as well as the impact it leaves on the vocabulary acquisition, in this case the inclination is more towards books than television the correlation coefficient peaking at **(0.55)** for both items. The correlation between language proficiency and book frequency was higher than television frequency **(0.39)** which proves the fact that students acquire vocabulary better with the help of books rather than television. Finally, the correlation between language proficiency and television frequency, the coefficient was only at **(0.15)** which on the other hand proves that there is not a significant tool to acquire vocabulary.

In addition, there are some who consider that television has negative effects which influence the learning capacity of the students and can be noted in Ron Kaufman`s (2000) (Online 15) research, nevertheless, he argues about the writing and reading skill acquisition but writing and reading is an immense part of the vocabulary acquisition, he states that especially children are targeted by the television cable operators, as well as video game publishers as the majority of the consumer society, thus children will not be able to avoid the impact of media. Nevertheless there are media which is good in many ways to help learners to acquire vocabulary, despite there are the old teaching methods which completely neglect the use of media in the learning process. Kaufman claims that ‘if children spend their time watching TV and playing video games they are not spending a great deal of time reading and writing.’ Which on the other hand leaves a great impact on the education and as the U.S. Kaufman adds that Department of Education`s National Centre for Educational Statistics (NCES) statistics demonstrated, that student achievement in the recent years

has gradually plummeted. In addition, The NCES 1998 Writing Report Card reflected that 16 percent of 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and 22 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders have not mastered even the basic writing skills. Furthermore, NCES 1998 Reading Report Card demonstrated that in grades 4, 8 and 12, no more than only 40 percent had reached the proficient level of reading. The advanced level, on the other hand, was reached only by a slight percentage of the previously mentioned grades. This research demonstrates the negative impact of the media (television and computer games). Despite this criticisms, the knowledge and level of reading and writing of students depends not only if they watch television, but what exactly they watch, for example there are a vast majority of educational programs not only programs where the person is not required to do much thinking. Kaufman argues that this study from NCES is quite disturbing; nevertheless it does not demonstrate the knowledge of the entire population, but only a slight percentage. He claims that in order to become a good reader or writer it is required to practice these skills. In addition, Kaufman states that ‘Households that value literacy and push the children to read will have kids that excel in this area.’ Kaufman claims that a research has been released in November 1999, which demonstrated that children between 2 and 18 years old are exposed to approximately to 6 and a half hours every day to a vast majority of media, which includes the television and computer games, nevertheless the television is used more frequently than any other media source.

## CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this research was to examine the strategies of the second vocabulary acquisition, as well as the assessment of the vocabulary via various tests. Vocabulary acquisition has had a long history in its development and it is still in the process of evolving. The hypothesis was that the most effective approach to acquire the vocabulary is a combination of cognitive, metacognitive, as well as visual memory strategies. The theoretical research demonstrated that the vocabulary and its acquisition is quite complex, the nature of the vocabulary, as well as the examples how it has been taught throughout the course of time, with its pros and cons.

Furthermore, the types of tests which are applied not only to teach the vocabulary but also to assess the learner's knowledge as well. The case study examined several vital questions which are an integral part in the vocabulary acquisition. One of the most important questions (4<sup>th</sup>) of the case study demonstrated that the majority of the students prefer to use the metacognitive strategies while learning the vocabulary, on the other hand the least favorite was learning words by heart. Furthermore, it can be said that the respondents have a rather good English Language knowledge, especially Academic English based on the test results, nevertheless, there were some questions the students had difficulties with.

The analysis of the questionnaires, especially the correlation between the first three questions was rather surprising, due to the fact that the majority of respondents prefer to read books rather than watch television, nevertheless there were a number of students who still prefer television rather than books but it can be concluded that each individual has his or her own way of learning vocabulary whether it is applying a certain strategy or just by acquiring the vocabulary incidentally such as it is in many cases via watching television or reading books or even with the help of social mediation. In brief, the amount of respondents was 31, all of which were only

students. A further research can be done in order to survey people from different social background, for example high school students or even university students that do not study the English language that might be their next specialty.

## THESIS

1. One of the most important characteristics in the nature of vocabulary is word meaning, pronunciation as well as spelling and grammar.
2. The size of the vocabulary per se is changing all the time, thus, developing, due to the fact that many new words enter the language and old fashioned words are discarded, therefore it is quite difficult to determine the precise amount of words in the English language.
3. Words in the English language have many meanings due to word families.
4. People all over the world have been learning their second languages from the times of Romans, which is the earliest recording in the two thousand year long period of time.
5. There are a number of factors which are important how effective the learning strategy will be, such as the proficiency level of the first language, the motivation of students, the culture of students, as well as purposes for learning the second language, including the nature of the second language itself and the tasks and texts that are applied.
6. It takes certain skills to develop a good test for language learners, it is needed to assess knowledge of the meaning of a specific set of words.
7. The multiple choice test is one of the most widely used methods of vocabulary assessment, both for native speakers and for second language learners.
8. Vocabulary tests are only measures of the lexical knowledge and nothing more.
9. There are media which is good in many ways to help learners to acquire vocabulary, despite there are the old teaching methods which completely neglect the use of media in the learning process.

10. The television is used more frequently than any other media source.

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## APPENDICES

## **Appendix 1**

### **Questionnaire**

#### Questionnaire + Test

The purpose of this questionnaire is to clarify whether watching television is more beneficial than reading books in order to acquire second language vocabulary more efficiently.

#### Test

This test measures the knowledge of academic vocabulary; please select the number of a similar word from the first column and write it adjacent to the word from the second column. "X" is given as an example:

## X

1. bitter
2. independent [ 6 ] small
3. lovely [ 3 ] beautiful
4. merry [ 5 ] liked by many people
5. popular
6. slight

## A

1. benefit
2. labor [ ] work
3. percent [ ] part of 100
4. principle [ ] general idea used to guide one's actions
5. source
6. survey

## B

1. element
2. fund [ ] money for a special purpose
3. layer [ ] skilled way of doing something
4. philosophy [ ] study of the meaning of life
5. proportion
6. technique

## C

1. consent
2. enforcement [ ] total
3. investigation [ ] agreement or permission
4. parameter [ ] trying to find information about something
5. sum
6. trend

## D

1. decade
2. fee [ ] 10 years
3. file [ ] subject of a discussion
4. incidence [ ] money paid for services
5. perspective
6. topic

## E

1. colleague
2. erosion [ ] action against the law
3. format [ ] wearing away gradually
4. inclination [ ] shape or size of something
5. panel
6. violation

## F

1. achieve
2. conceive [ ] change
3. grant [ ] connect together
4. link [ ] finish successfully
5. modify
6. offset

## G

1. convert
2. design [ ] keep out
3. exclude [ ] stay alive
4. facilitate [ ] change from one thing into another
5. indicative
6. survive

## H

1. anticipate
2. compile [ ] control something skillfully
3. convince [ ] expect something will happen
4. denote [ ] produce books and newspapers
5. manipulate
6. publish

## I

1. equivalent
2. financial [ ] most important
3. forthcoming [ ] concerning sight
4. primary [ ] concerning money
5. random
6. visual

## J

1. alternative
2. ambiguous [ ] last or most important
3. empirical [ ] something different that can be chosen
4. ethnic [ ] concerning people from a certain nation
5. mutual
6. ultimate

Schmitt (2000: 199 – 200)

## **Appendix 2**

### **Test Worksheet**

#### Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions by writing your answer in the brackets or when the brackets are not provided, mark the answer you have chosen in **bold**.



8) When you come across an English word that looks or sounds similar in your native tongue, do you think about how meanings are related?

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Occasionally
- d) Often

9) Would you consider that you learn new words better from watching television or reading books?

- a) Watching Television
- b) Reading books

10) When you come across an unknown word(s) and the text can be comprehended from the context, do you look up the unknown word(s)?

- a) yes
- b) no

11) Would you consider that subtitled television programs help better to acquire the vocabulary?

- a) yes
- b) no

12) What kind of books do you prefer?

- a) With rich and complex vocabulary
- b) With rather simple and easily understandable vocabulary

Thank You! ☺

Bakalaura darbs „Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition” (Otrās valodas vārdu krājuma apguve) izstrādāts LU Humanitāro zinātņu fakultātē.

Ar savu parakstu apliecinu, ka pētījums veikts patstāvīgi, izmantoti tikai tajā norādītie informācijas avoti un iesniegtā darba elektroniskā kopija atbilst izdrukai.

Autors: Gundars Kokss

20.12.2010

Rekomendēju darbu aizstāvēšanai

Vadītāja: asociētā profesore Dr. phil. Vita Kalnbērziņa

20.12.2010

Recenzents:

Darbs iesniegts Anglistikas nodaļā 06.01.2011

Studiju metodiķe: Sintija Zankovska

Darbs aizstāvēts bakalaura gala pārbaudījuma komisijas sēdē

.....prot. Nr....., vērtējums.....

Komisijas sekretāre: