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مطالعۀ میزان لغات و خطاهای لغوی فراگیران زبان دوم

چکیده:

توصیف واژگان ذهنی (mental lexicon) و نحوۀ رشد و گسترش آن در زبان دوم نظر محقّقین گوناگونی را به خود معطوف داشته است. هم‌اکنون برخی از این پژوهشگران بر این باورند که مؤلّفه‌های محدودی چون حجم واژگان، میزان دستیابی به آنها و نیز کیفیّت ارتباط بین واژه‌ها می‌تواند برای توصیف علمی واژگان ذهنی کافی شناخته شود.

این تحقیق با تکیه بر مؤلّفه‌های فوق، واژگان ذهنی زبان انگلیسی دانش‌آموزان دبیرستانها را از نظر کمی و کیفی و شیوۀ شکل‌گیری آن مورد بررسی قرار داده است.

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در این راستا تعداد ۱۳۲ نفر از دانش‌آموزان سال دوم نواحی مختلف دبیرستانهای اصفهان به طور تصادفی انتخاب گردیدند و در پاسخ به آزمونهای تهیّه شده در این زمینه شرکت جستند.

تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها نشان می‌دهد که این گروه از فراگیران زبان از نظر مؤلّفه‌های فوق در روند یادگیری واژگان با کمبودها و مشکلات متعدّد و متفاوتی روبرو هستند.

بخش پایانی این نوشتار به بررسی نوع و علل احتمالی بـروز ایـن مشکلات می‌پردازد و پیشنهاداتی را در جهت رفع آنها ارائه می‌نماید.

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imperfect learning or inadequate noticing, it is recommended that explicit vocabulary instruction occupy a more prominent position in foreign language teaching programs. To help L2 learners build a more solid lexical background, especially as pertains to the reading ability, it is suggested that we teachers, too, adopt a more positive attitude towards foreign language lexical knowledge. Once we are convinced that words are central to the learning of a language, finding appropriate means and ways cannot be far away.

this model can close the gap between word-centered and global approaches in the investigation of the mental lexicon.

This study undertook to explore these three dimensions of the mental lexicons among L2 junior high school students.

The results so far indicate that L2 learners, mental lexicons are very limited, with the average learner's vocabulary size falling below an expectable threshold level required for meaningful communication.

Analysis of the learners' protocols helped identify a number of factors which can either facilitate of hinder the learning and retention of foreign language vocabulary. Most prominent among these are word transparency, frequency, noticing, attitude of the learner toward L2 vocabulary, level of processing, type of context, degree of word abstractness, misformy and, especially, imperfect learning, which, in a sense, can be interpreted to account for many of the preceding problems. Further research in the area can, of course, determine the contribution of these and perhaps several other responsible factors.

Considering confusion errors, the findings tend to show that learners move gradually from a phase of partial knowledge to a state of full integration and automaticity.

Since many lexical errors, can alwo be attributed to

Conclusion:

Mapping word onto meaning, as Henriksen (1999) argues, is the first and the most important phase of lexical acquisition. It is at this stage, it is assumed, that knowledge of words begins to find representations in the lexical memory in the form of one or more entries, i.e., phonological, semantic, and/or orthographic. An essential question raised by researchers in vocabulary acquisition, therefore, concerns how these entries are organized, accessed and used. Several models have been proposed in this connection so far.

Meara (1996) suggests that a model with three dimensions might be enough to provide a rich categorization of a learner's mental competence. According to him, such a model should:

a) specify how big learners' mental lexicons are,

b) decide how automatically words could be accessed, and

c) provide a simple measure of the strength of links among the lexical items.

Henriksen (1999) proposes a model with the same number of dimensions. In this model, however, the three proposed dimensions are: a)partial-precise dimension, b)depth of processing, and c)receptive-productive dimension. He argues that

contexts, some items such as "jerk", "promise", and "prefer" are mentioned only once.

10. Many L2 learners tend to hear or see words in terms of what they have already mastered, that is, they impose their own prior knowledge on the input, thus, failing to notice meaningful differences in sounds or letters. This problem can, however, be attributed to a number of other factors, including problems with orthography, pronunciation, inattention, reckless gussing, wrong strategies or, more importantly, imperfect learning. Table II. below reflects some of these problems.

word	Interpretation	word	Interpretation
aside	acid	prefer	prepare,prophet
pot	put	explain	plane
match	much	offer	after
mouth	mouse	type	tape
waist	west	against	again
earn	learn	guess	guest
nose	noise	beast	best
reason	person'	life	live
bulb	boil	successful	success
scare	scarf	real	really
sense	since	go away	go one way
free	fire	take apart	participate
while	wheel	get into trouble	travel

Table II. Words which Learners have mistaken for some other lexical items

instance, "move" can be used instead of "jerk", or if "earn" can be replaced by "get", and "require" by "ask", why not be satisfied with the easiest, which is usually the one learned first?

7. Idiomatic expressions represent the more difficult aspects of language learning. Many L2 learners in this study have shown to consider these expressions as combinations of individual words which have the same composite meaning. Not one student in this study, for instance, has taken "run out of" to mean "finish", which is the meaning given in their text with plenty examples and the picture of a woman pointing to an empty jar on a shelf and saying: "We have run out of sugar."

8. As can be inferred from the preceding discussions, frequency does seem to play a significant role in vocabulary acquisition, but what is ultimately retained seems to depend on many other factors including the number of exposures, the kind of context, the conceptual load of the items, the learner's interest, and the amount of noticing.

9. As far as the introduction of new lexical items are concerned, no two words in the learners' textbook are introduced or treated under identical conditions and not all contexts are equally revealing. While the words "banana" and "puzzle" and "toy" are repeated more than 10 times and in different

"پـــول"/pul/, "money", which incidentally has a homophonous counterpart in English in the form of "pool", has not shown to be any easier to remember, while "sugar", whose equivalent phonemic representation in Farsi is /Shekar/ and has the same conceptual meaning, although mentioned only twice and only in exercises, appears at the very top of the list in Table I.

If two words have more or less the same forms in L2, the learning of one can hinder the acquisition of the other for some learners. In this study, in a class of 28 students, exactly half of the learners took "soap" to mean "soup", although the word "سـوپ",/sup/,"soup" is also used in Farsi and carries the same core meaning. Base on these results, one can predict that words such as "carton" and "cartoon" will lead to the same confusion.

Regarding similarity synonymy in L2, al though no two words in any language can be used interchangeably in all different contexts, it seems that L2 learners, perhaps for reasons of economy, usually content themselves with the item which is learned first, or proves to be the easiest. It seems to be the case that a word in a list of synonymous items, when learnt, blocks the acquisition of the others, especially if distinctions among them are not taught or noticed. If, for

df.$=2$, $\alpha=0.05$. However, for the percentages of the top 20 relatively harder lexical items the chi-square value was not significant at the alpha level of 0.05, $X^2=2.8$, df.$=3$,
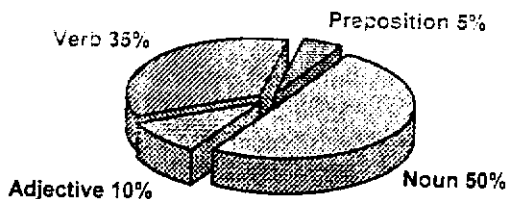

Figure IV. Parts of speech which have shown to be relatively the most difficult to acquire

5. Regarding the acquisition of concrete vs abstract words, the data shows that the former are learnt faster provided that what the term refers to is clearly established. In the Table above the word pot appears at the bottom of the list perhaps because the L2 learner has difficulty deciding how many different objects it can refer to since in his/her L1 different terms are used for what "pot" signifies.

6. Availability of similar forms in terms of pronunciation in L1 and L2 does not contribute to faster vocabulary acquisition, unless their meanings are also similar. For instance, the word

Words and emphasized in prereading activities in the same text. It, therefore, seem that, under equal conditions, it is the conceptual structure of the term rather than its length which usually determines the degree of its learnability and retention.

4. With respect to the acquisition of the order of different parts of speech, as Figure III below shows, nouns are learned first, adjectives next and verbs last. The learners' responses show that if a word is used as a noun or adjective, or a verb, it is the meaning of the noun form which is accessed first. Figure IV, which presents the most difficult items for the learners to acquire and/or retain, shows that verbs are the hardest to learn.

Verb 15%
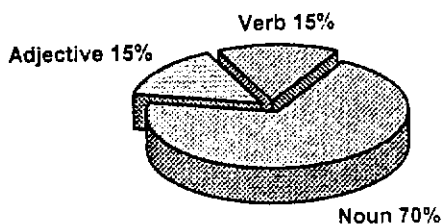
Adjective 15%

Noun 70%

Figure III. Order of the Acquisition of Different Parts of Speech

For the percentages of the top 20 relatively easier lexical items the chi-square value indicated a significant difference, $X^2=60.36$,

different. Out of the 20 words which have proved problematic, 15 appear in the last three lessons, which are usually covered towards the end of the course. In addition, 10 out of these 20 lexical items are those which have been introduced not in the reading passages but in various drills and grammar exercises instead.

Also, comparison of the two sets of words indicates that, in general, the words in Figure II are more conceptually loaded than those in Figure I.

These comparisons seem to suggest that factors such as insufficient noticing, inadequate exposure, and the conceptual structure of the lexical item to be learned, can be responsible for the students failure to acquire certain lexical items. In addition, these findings cast doubt on the value of incidental learning emphasized in some resarch studies (for a review see Henriksen, 1999), especially where learners are test-oriented and study, as in this case, words which are expected to appear in the reading sections of the test.

3. The number of syllables in a word does not seem to play a determining role in the process of vocabulary acquisition. For instance compare the ranks of "gold" vs "jerk", both one-syllable words appearing only once in the textbook, with "medicine" or "terrible", which are introduced under New
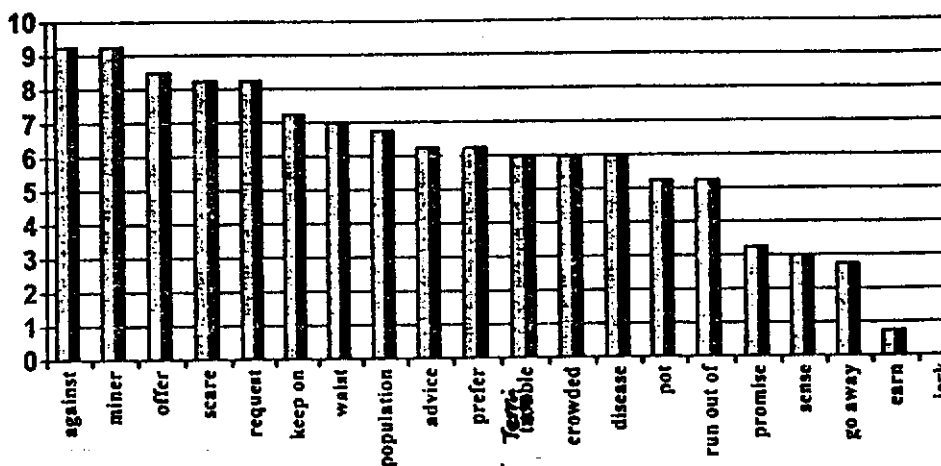
Figure II. Words which have shown to be relatively more difficult to acquire.

As for Table I, out of the twenty items shown to be the easiest:

a) four words-sugar, puzzle, record, and complete-are more or less transparent or borrowed items,

b) four words are explicitly taught under New Words and appear in the related reading passages, and

c) only three of the words -polite, record and coin-, which are introduced in the last two lessons of the book and perhaps less practised because of a possible shortage of time, appear in this list.

In Figure II, however, the situation seems to be quite

Analysis of the data led to the following results, which for purposes of clarity and economy, will be presented and briefly interpreted and discussed under each item.

1. The mean of 5.44 out of the possible 20 is indicative of the small size of mental lexicons among these learners. There are, however, variations between schools and classes. The highest mean obtained was 8.89 and the lowest 3.9.

2. Some words seem to be more difficult for most learners to acquire than others but at this point it is difficult to point to a set of factors as exclusively responsible.

Yet a comparison of the top twenty words (Figure I) with the bottom 20 items (Figure II) can provide some clues to the understanding of the organisation of the mental lexicons in such learners.
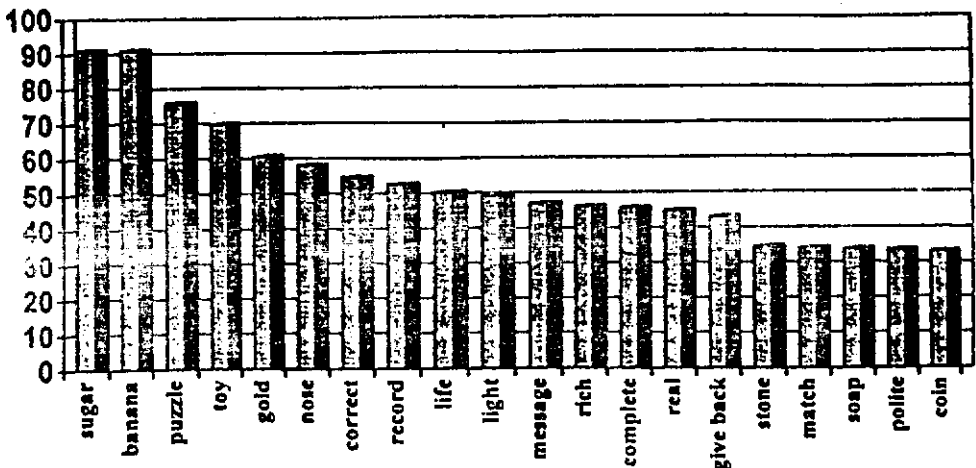

Figure I. Words which have shown to be relatively easier to acquire.

gaive back	43.05	dry	10.25
stone	35.00	guess	09.50
match	34.50	against	09.25
soap	34.25	miner	09.25
polite	34.00	offer	08.50
coin	33.50	scare	08.25
aside	32.75	request	08.25
thumb	32.50	keep on	07.25
around	32.25	waist	07.00
free	31.50	population	06.75
math	30.50	advice	06.25
ill	30.25	prefer	06.25
bulb	28.43	get into trouble	06.00
go hungry	28.25	crowded	06.00
metal	28.00	disease	06.00
bowl	26.50	pot	05.25
neck	25.25	run out of	05.25
explain	24.25	promise	03.25
jump	23.50	sense	03.00
mouth	22.50	go away	02.75
receive	21.25	earn	0.75
take apart	21.25	jerk	0.00
reason	19.25		
tiny	18.25		total:75
medicine	15.75		

and also the approaches adopted for the introduction of new

lexical items.

Results:

Table I. below presents the results of the translation task

administered to high school juniors one semester after their last

exposure to English.

Table I. Stutents reactions to the translation task

word	Percentage of correct answers	word	Percentage of correct answers
sugar	91.25	terrible	15.00
banana	91.25	tape	14.75
puzzle	76.25	till	14.75
toy	70.25	wet	14.25
gold	61.00	go on a trip	14.25
nose	58.50	successful	14.00
correct	55.00	trustworthy	13.50
record	53.00	pool	13.25
life	50.57	repair	13.00
light	49.50	while	12.75
message	47.50	loaf	11.50
rich	46.50	cruel	11.00
complete	46.00	according to	10.50
real	45.25	muscle	10.25

Learning:

Learning is the process by which relatively permanent changes occur in behavioral potential as a result of experience (Anderson, 1995:4).

Memory:

Memory is the relatively permanent record of the experience that underlies learning (Anderson, 1995:5).

Data Analysis:

For the analysis of the data obtained the following steps were taken:

1. The subjects' responses to the test items were assessed and graded on a scale ranging from 0 to 20 and the means and percentages of correct responses of every class, school, district and field of study were computed.

2. The learners' various reactions to individual words were studied in order to explore the processes and strategies that they employed and also the problems they faced in the acquisition of L2 vocabulary.

3. The content of the learners' English textbook, Book II, was analyzed to determine the amount of exposure, type of context,

d) Since mapping meaning onto form is "a central process for establishing a store of lexical entries" (Henriksen, 1999: 309) it was this aspect of lexical acquisition which this test basically attempted to measure.

e) Attaching the core meaning to the form is usually the first phase of vocabulary learning that L1 Children, too, seem to use in the development of their L2 mental lexicons. Different meanings and possibilities are added to the lexicons through time as they grow up and gain the necessary experience with the world and the language.

Word meaning, learning, and memory defined

Word Meaning:

For the purpose of this study, the meaning of a word is taken to be its core meaning. (It is practically impossible to devise enough test batteries to measure every possible meaning of every individual item, especially when sample are large.) The core meaning according to Schmitt's (2000) is "... the common meaning shared by members of a society. The fact that people can define words in isolation proves that some meaning information is attached to a word by societal conventions THAT IS NOT DEPENDENT ON THE CONTEXT" [emphasis is mine] (p.27).

prepositions (5%), adverbs (1%), conjunctions (1%), and phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions (7%). (Figures have been rounded.). For assessing precise knowledge of core meaning no context was used (see below).

The Task:

A translation task using 75 of the lexical items discussed above was administered to the subjects at the beginning of the semester prior to their exposure to the next English course. They were required to supply the equivalent meaning/meanings of the English words in Farsi.

The application of his task was based on the following considerations:

a) Translation tasks were reported to yield a better measure of precise word comprehension in such contexts (e.g.Henrikesen: ibid).

b) Translations from L1 to L2, or L2 to L1 are most frequently used instruments for the assessment of receptive/productive vocabulary knowledge in similar situations (Henriksen, 1999).

c) Many participants at this stage of language acquisition lacked the necessary language proficiency to enable them to express themselves satisfactorily in English.

Method

Subjects

Participants in this study were 132 junior ESL learners from 5 randomly selected high schools in Districts I and II in Isfahan. These subjects had not taken an English course in the preceding semester. The incentives for the selection of this particular group at this particular point in time were:

a) to use a more or less homogeneous group of learners as they were still approximately 2 years away from the highly competitive university entrance exams which require that many candidates attend private institutes, and extra classes and take various preparatory tests, and

b) to obtain the data which can better reflect learners' long-term retention, indicating deeper levels of processing which are subject to less attrition.

Instrument:

Use was made of a randomly selected sample of lexical items comprising 26.67 per cent of the total number of 350 words appearing in the vocabulary list of English Book II, which the subjects had studied in the previous year, was used. These words comprised of nouns (45%), verbs (20%), abjectives (18%),

Research Qustions:

1. What is the size and quality of L2 mental lexicon among Iranian high school students?

2. Are there lexical items which are relatively difficult for the average learner?

3. Does the length of a word affect its subsequent acquisition?

4. Is there a difference in the order of the acquisition of different parts of speech?

5. Does the semantic load of a word, i.e.abstract vs concrete, affect its retention?

6. Does similarity in word forms in L1 and L2 enhance their acquisition?

7. Do idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs hinder acquisition?

8. What is the role of frequency of exposure in vocabulary acquisition?

9. Is there a difference in the acquisition and retention of words ppearing in the reading passages in question and those used within the different exercises following each lesson?

10. Does noticing make a difference?

separate trait view (i.e., the word centered approaches, and the more global orientations), suggests that the following three dimensions are adequate for the characterization of lexical knowledge:

1. The partial-precise knowledge dimension,

2. The depth of knowledge dimension,

3. The receptive productive dimension

Dimensions 1 and 2 are related to the acquisition of word meaning while dimension three reflects the level of accessibility of lexical items operationalized through different receptive-productive tasks.

To Henriksen (1999) learning word meaning involves two interrelated processes: a)adding to lexical store and b)reordering and changing the lexical store through a process of network building.

This study, using the ideas presented in Henriksen's model, attempts to:

a) assess the breadth of the EFL learners' mental lexicons, a central inssue in any study of the this nature, and

b) explore the possible factors which either facilitate or hinder lexical acquisition. To achieve these aims, it seeks to find possible answers to the following 10 interelated questions:

the size and the quality of the L2 mental lexicons among Iranian high school students, was motivated by the line of research followed by writers and researchers such as Richards (1976), Meara (1996), Wetsche and Paribakht (e.g.1996) and Henrikson (1999).

It must, however, be mentioned at the outset that the models these researchers propose reflect more or less different outlooks and approaches. For instance, while writers such as Richards(1976) concentrate on knowledge of individual words, thus following a word centered approach, others like Meara(1996) take a more global position and concentrate not on individual lexical items but on the size, depth, and also the structure of the total network. Or, whereas some researchers think of lexical knowledge as moving along a continuum in the process of its development(e.g.Palmberg, 1987) others view it as passing through several stages (Wetsche and Paribakht, 1996) or shifting from state to state (Meara, 1996). Again, while Meara's (1996a) model uses a two dimensions approach, namely, breadth and organization, to characterize the mental lexicon, Henrikson (1999) proposes a three dimensions model for the same purpose.

In this latest model, which is the basis of the present study, Henriksen (1999), who is intent upon closing the gap between the

communication is contingent upon an understanding of the behaviour of the total network, that is, an appreciation of the highly complex associations and interactions among all lexical items.

However, despite this basic requirement, many of our students in EFL reading classes seem not to have mastered an adequate vocabulary size so crucial for mastering all language skills, including reading. Many L2 learners start their university education with vocabulary sizes well below a minimum acceptable level required for reading purposes.

It, therefore, seems reasonable to expect research studies in foreign language education in our country, where the emphasis has quite appropriately been placed on the development of the reading skill, to concentrate on vocabulary acquisition as it is this component of language education which has not received sufficient attention in the past 40 or 50 years, following the international trend.

The study reported here is only one small, and yet hopefully, basic step taken in this direction.

The Study:

This study, which is a part of an ongoing project to assess

the expected clues are either missing, unusable, only partially available, supperssed or even misleading (Laufer, 1997) and that good comprehension of some academic texts usually requires an understanding of around 98% of lexical items used in the text (Huckin & Coady, 1999).

There is no general agreement, however, over the actual size of vocabulary needed for academic studies. Nation and Waring (1997) argue that if one expects to reach a reading comprehension level approximating that of a native speaker, one should be in control of a large vocabulary size ranging between 15,000 to 20,000 word families. Hazenberg and Hulstijn (1996) think that 10,000 words constitute only a minimum threshold level. Coady (1997) believes that a good knowledge of at least 5,000 core words, around 8,000 lexical items, in addition to good reading skills, are needed before one can begin to guess the meaning of the unknown words in a context. All these figures, although exhibiting rather large variations, cast serious doubts on the earlier views advocating smaller vocabulary sizes (e.g.control vocabulary movement). The need for a wider range of vocabulary becomes readily apparent when one considers the fact that words in a language behave as coherent members of a system of signs which closely interact with one another. Thus, effective

meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen

in any meaningful way (viii).

In a similar vein, Zimmerman (1997:13) quotes Widdowson (1978) as claiming that native speakers can "better understand ungrammatical utterances with accurate vocabulary than those with accurate grammar but inaccurate vocabulary." Lewis (1998) argues that language "consists of grammaticalized lexis and not lexicalized grammar". Many other scholars and teachers in the field have already voiced their concern over the victimization of vocabulary and called for serious research in the area (e.g.Nation & Waring, 1997).

A glance at the professional journals which have appeared in the past several decades, however, can readily reveal the fact that only a very small proportion of the articles in the field of language teaching/learning are concerned with lexical acquisition in any serious manner.

This lack of interest in vocabulary acquisition research quite naturally has affected pedagogy. Many language teachers have been led to believe that L2 students with a minimum knowledge of words can interact with a text, efficiently and effectively, only if they learn the strategies of guessing meanings from the context. Such teachers are perhaps unmindful of the fact that in many texts

communications, whether through spoken or written discourse, depends on the ability to comprehend and use these words effectively. In reading, through which we receive most of our formal and often informal education, lexical knowledge has consistently been shown to be a good predictor of success (e.g.Nation & Coady, 1988; Laufer, 1991a) at all levels.

In foreign language education, too, words play a central role since many learners expect to use the acquired language mainly to access, through reading, the information and knowledge which is otherwise unavailable in their own language. By the same token, comprehension of these texts demands, among other things, mastery of large vocabulary, a key element not only in language learning (Schmitt 2000), but also in reading comprehension.

In spite of its paramount importance, however, lexical competence had not received its due attention until quite recently. Many scholars in the field seemed to prefer to work on areas such as phonology and syntax, since these areas were "more serious candidates for theorizing" (Richards:77), although as McCarthy (1990) notes:

> *No matter how well the student learns grammar,*
> *no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are*
> *mastered, without words to express a wider range of*

foreign language, came from 5 randomly selected schools in two different districts. To measure their long-term retention, they were assigned a translation task incorporating 26 percent of the total number of the words which they had studied in different contexts 4 months before.

The results of this study show that the mental lexicons under examination are quite limited, and that the links holding between the words are not as strong as deemed necessary.

Finally, a number of factors found to be involved in either the facilitation or hinderance of L2 vocabulary acquisition and retention are discussed and then some suggestions are offered to improve the situation.

Introduction:

We speak in words and write in words. Most of us also think and dream using words. In many circles word power is considered to be synonymous with intellectual power. In an age of information explosion and speedy transfer of knowledge and technology, therefore, when hundreds, if not thousands, of new words and expressions are being formed, borrowed, or coined every day, it becomes absolutely necessary to master a large number or these words. Needless to say, success in daily

Dr. M. Koosha[*]

Second Language Lexical Development:
A Study of L2 Learners' Vocabulary Size and Lexical Errors

Abstract:

Researchers in second language vocabulary acquisition have suggested that a limited number of dimensions such as size, degree of automaticity, and strength of links between lexical items can be regarded as sufficient for any practical description of the mental lexicon.

This study attempts to explore the mental lexicons of L2 junior high school learners in terms of the three dimensions cited above. The learners, who were 132 students studying English as a

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