

Increasing Vocabulary through Key Words Method Application

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Abstract:

This article investigates Keyword Method research and analyses whether the method can be implemented in the genuine classroom situations and whether the method also affects the motivation of the learners. Due to the fact that the Keyword Method is a memory learning strategy which is supposed to apply the workings of the brain, these results were examined and an attempt was made to retain the beneficial effects of this strategy by linking theories of memory as substructure in the fields of psychology, philosophy and the neurosciences. The findings that can be taken from this cross-disciplinary literature research might retain the conclusion that the obvious effectiveness of the Keyword Method is founded on sound scientific principles.

The concept of the method was then explored to establish its vital elements and the characteristics which are needed to make it effective for the application in the classroom. Research on the effectiveness of the method on vocabulary acquisition has been carried out in the past in the fields of laboratory and quasi-classroom situations with some encouraging results. Most of the investigations in this field were carried out within the investigative research theories, some other experiments were carried out to retain empirical evidence to try to answer the question of vocabulary learning and a questionnaire and three interviews to address the issue of motivation. (Джусупов Н.М. 2017, с.519- 530.). Experiments revealed that the Keyword Method enhances learning new words to a great extent compared to other methods, and that it has a straightforward effect on the motivation of the learners. These all definitely leads to the suggestion of further investigation into the Keyword Method and especially current teaching methodology and techniques. It has become obvious that incidental learning rarely takes place in the classroom since the learners normally are expected to sit a test or exam. Moreover, the differentiation between the two concepts is mistaken in many cases (Hulstijn, 2001). More importantly, the great majority of learners of a foreign language in the classroom do so in monolingual classes, with their teacher who is a non-native speaker of English and without any English speaking environment outside it. The result reveal that the learners almost always acquire new vocabulary intentionally. When they

encounter a new word in the text, they ask for the interpretation or translation, either from their supervisors or from their fellow learners. When they do not feel the success because the other learners do not know the word either and the teacher refuses to translate, they usually use a dictionary. Whatever the background behind incidental learning is, the teacher usually agrees to translate. This can even be observed in multilingual classrooms, if the teacher uses the language(s) of some of his/her learners. Learners will always find a way to interpret or translate, although in modern L2 methodology translation has been proven unsuccessful

There is also the issue of misunderstanding in incidental learning from academic texts. It is even more difficult to 'unlearn' wrong pronunciation of a word that has only been read in context and not heard. These problems cause misunderstanding with the classroom learner (Eliy, 1995). An even more serious problem might occur when learners deduce wrong and inappropriate meanings from context but do not realize it, as they tend to be sure they have the correct interpretation. This can have some unexpected results in later communication. Schatz & Baldwin state as early as 1986 that context key words are unreliable predictors of word meanings and that most of the traditional assumptions about the teaching of context keys should be rigorously re-examined. There appears to be no alternative to contextual learning of a great many new words in a relatively short period of time (Groot, 2000). However, guessing from context is still a popular way of teaching vocabulary nowadays. It connects with the concept of elaboration. Concentration on aspects of the new word and its textual; environment (the bod it keeps with other words) is supposed to facilitate acquisition . Learning-in-context relies heavily on revising , re-presenting of vocabulary aspects by the teacher, and therefore memorization of them by the learner. For meaningful memorization to take place, a great amount of vocabulary has to be encountered for particular words to occur again and again. There is the other problem regarding the language teacher's/learner's point of view. The texts which are used in the classroom are preferably authentic (literature, essays or newspaper articles etc.) and it is precisely the skill of a good writer to use differentiative words to define the same concept. This decreases the opportunity for the learners to memorize the words further. Instruction of the method that is being suggested compensates this by adding some additional element. From the arguments above it can easily be seen why teachers regard the problem of intentional learning as mainly irrelevant in many contexts and the matter that is only of quick interest outside the scientific research. The very moment a teacher is involved in language teaching, the issue of incidental learning largely inactivates. This brings around the question of why the debate about intentional learning acquired such prominence in educational process. Despite there is some research on vocabulary learning through reading and writing there is, surprisingly, no empirical research available about the efficiency of learning within the context in the classroom over a longer period of time (at least one semester or more).

Many of the researches are concerned with the acquisition of vocabulary in the native language of the learners, and not with that of foreign vocabulary. Another debate of big importance to the classroom is that of whether it is more practical for learners to be provided with the keyword and the image by the teacher, or whether it is more beneficial that the learners form these two by themselves. Again, learners through the practices agree that self-generated images are better, but research on the matter has produced inaccurate results. Reese (1977:131-4) surveyed 10 experiments but found little superiority for each of the strategy. The reason for this is probably that the necessary conditions have to be of the same quality(degree of interaction, concreteness, vividness, etc.). The reason why this research is not very important for the classroom is that strategies are obviously difficult to teach and success is also doubtful, although it is generally accepted as important to teach appropriate learning strategies (e.g. Brown, 1994; Oxford, 1989). One of the main problems the teacher faces when trying to teach learning strategies is comparison. Most of the researches of the method suggest that keyword and images have to be provided by the teacher (or teaching handouts) to have a clear effect on each learner in the class. When analyzing the two results, the inclusion seems to be that the vast majority of language learners will not use the

key words methods (and some other techniques) on a systematic basis if the keywords and images are not provided, i.e. if only the rules and the strategy itself is explained and utilized. This confirms negativity about teaching learning strategies. However, these findings coincide with often-quoted research results on learning that only competent learners use key words in situations where it is profitable to use them (Pressley & Levin, 1977). Although Butler et al. (1973) carried out an experiment with the key words method in 1973, well before Atkinson & Raugh (1975; 1975) and without using the term, it was the role of Atkinson & Raugh who experimented and heightened the awareness of assimilation method for vocabulary learning and, consequently, triggered a theory of experiments to such an extent that one could see further classroom research into the effects of the method.

The results of these influential and effective experiments are clearly reproduced here: In an investigation (1975) the subjects (college language learners) had to learn 120 new Russian words, divided into three comprising 40-word sub-vocabularies for presentation in separate days (three study-test experiments). The controlling group, which used their own learning strategies, received the Russian word and its equivalent in English on a computer screen, the keyword groups were additionally presented with a keyword. In the test period the subjects were presented with the Russian word and had to find the English equivalent within 30 seconds. A test for all the words was conducted on the other day. It became clear that the keyword group scored significantly better. Hall, Wilson & Patterson (1981) report that the key words method enhances learning when the words are presented in a sequence (paced), but shows no additional advantage when the words are given together and the learners have to learn them in the same allocated time. They conclude that in the latter case the subjects have time to use some of their own learning strategies instead of adhering to the instructions. Questionnaires created for both groups revealed that some learners of the keyword group did not follow all the instructions to use the key words method only (three did not use it at all) and that some learners of the control group used a variety of strategies. This makes it clear that interpretive research has to accept the existence of a number of variables that cannot be controlled. Pressley et al. (1982) repeated these experiments using a different vocabulary. He is of the opinion that the quality of the wordlist was the main factor that prevented the key words method from showing its superiority. Hall et al. had included in their wordlist numerous items that possess natural language aspects (as in loan words) that language learners could have easily detected and used. 'It certainly is possible that such indicators could be as powerful as, or even more powerful than, keyword mediators...'. In other words, students could have used other than key words memorization. (Джусупов М. с 351-358)

However, the majority of the research literature reports that the method is superior to any other vocabulary learning strategy, although some reservations persist, the quality of the keywords as provided by the experimenters is the word assimilation process that cannot be kept constant – and this affects the outcome of the studies. Gruneberg et al. (2000) had images rated several independent assumptions for the memorability of some words. A significant difference was found between the 'positive' and the 'negative' images, with the good keywords being rated as being of significant memorability. In subsequent retention tests it was found that the positive word images condition provided significantly higher levels of both receptive and productive learning assumptions compared with the 'negative' images and learning condition.

Successful keyword strategy characteristics

Phonetic similarity

As it is clear, the keyword should be phonetically similar (not necessarily identical though) to the target word (e.g. rot-goat) and the learners have to be able to form a link between them. An ineffective example, as taken from a keyword language course (Gruneberg & Coldwell, 1995) is

goat – gut (good) and the learner is expected to imagine a good goat. This happens when one concentrates solely on a keyword and disregards the criteria as listed below.

The aspect of Uniqueness

The association should be original to avoid the possibility of interference with the other associations.

Sensorical nature

For most people the image will be predominantly visual, since visual memory is seen as the strongest by most practitioners such as smells, sounds, movements etc. should be included wherever possible.

Interactivity aspect

The connection between the objects should be the primeval feature of the image , as disconnected images do not work well.

Simplicity

The simpler the connection, the better. Lack of simplicity is a frequent difficulty that most students experience

Creativity

Being creative involves the learner much more in the association and increases depth of processing. Students bring their natural creativity to the classroom and this should be incorporated by involving them in the search for a keyword if possible

Involvement

The process of memorization is intimately linked with conscious experience. The more strongly the learner experiences something, the better he/she will memorize it. From the above it is that the example good goat violates almost all of these criterias. For people who see a goat as a good animal there is nothing unusual, a goat is not unique and seeing a goat is not a rare event either. There is no sensory and assimilative element involved, no memorization, no interaction, no creativity and no involvement. It was therefore unlikely to increase memory and was consequently rejected by most of the learners.

Application of one keyword for differential target words.

Clear evidence suggests that it is not the isolated keyword but the image (elaboration) that usually causes vocabulary retention. The keyword is only used to activate this elaboration. It therefore seems logical to assume that one keyword can be utilized for different target words (e.g. Gote = goat, coat, cot etc.), regarding there is a sufficient interval between the different uses to eliminate interference. The length and usage of this interval is determined by the time it takes for the target word to be firmly memorized in the learner's long-term memory , i.e. the learner no longer needs the keyword to recall the target word. This interval will certainly be influenced by individual factors.

Simplified types of keywords

Any keyword can be embedded in a phrase, a film, a book title, a name etc. in the target language the learner can identify and use. This is another example which suggests that it is not the single keyword that aids memory but the imagination it triggers. When presenting the target word easy, the phrase take it easy or the film title Easy Riders acquire totally different meanings. Most of the keywords and images given in published material tend to be of poor quality. Most of the time this gives the impression that careful choice of these is not of paramount importance. Perhaps this

comes as the main factor why the key words method is often rejected by classroom practitioners. They equate the poor quality of the keywords and images with the method.

This article has shown that the key words method can be applied to exploit its full potential in the classroom if it is used skillfully and with attention to the criteria that have been shown to make it efficient (with its integration into the syllabus). These issues should be seen more under the aspect of motivation and practicality than that of memory research. Since the main concern of the teachers is their students, they are well advised to take the account of their opinions and impressions about the lessons.

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