

Investigating the Use of Lexical Semantic Relations to Enhance Vocabulary Instruction at the 3rd Grade Secondary Level in the Sudan (A Case Study of Khartoum Locality Schools)

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ABSTRACT :

This paper aimed to discuss the actual use of lexical semantic relations, as an amusing technique, to enhance teaching new words in Secondary Schools in Sudan. Moreover, it discussed teachers' attitude towards vocabulary instruction and students' attitudes, observed by teachers, when new words are introduced. The questionnaire percentage and frequency of responses of its three parts were discussed. The mean, t-test and standard deviation were calculated using SPSS software. The pre-test and post-test, alongside with the control group, were compared to determine any significance. The structured interview was analyzed and used to support the main findings of the study.

Key words: lexical- Semantic – Vocabulary- Instruction- Grade

مستخلص باللغة العربية:

هدفت هذه الورقة إلى مناقشة الاستخدام الواقعي للعلاقات المعجمية الدلالية ، على أساس أنها تقنية مسلية للزيادة من قيمة الكلمات الجديدة في اللغة الانجليزية بالمدارس الثانوية بالسودان. أضيف إلى ذلك أنها تناقش اتجاهات المعلمين والطلاب نحو تعليم المفردات الجديدة التي تتم ملاحظتها من المعلمين عند تقديم الكلمات الجديدة . تمت مناقشة النسبة المئوية والتكرارات للثلاث أجزاء من الاستبيان ، كذلك الوسيط ، إختبارات (ت)، والانحراف المعياري . تم تحسيبها بواسطة الحزمة الاحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية ، بجانب الاختبارين القبلي والبعدي للمجموعة الضابطة والتجريبية و مقارنتها ، كما تم تحليل بنية المقابلة واستخدامها لدعم نتائج البحث .

الكلمات المفتاحية: دلالي – معجمي – مفردات – تعليم – فرقة

INTERODUCTION :

What necessitated this study was the present atrocious drop of the general standard of the English Language at all levels: Basic, Secondary and Tertiary (Al-Busairi, 2009: 1). The students always complain of lack of words when they are asked to write an essay or discuss a topic in pairs. Among so many reasons, the English Language is one of the main subjects in the Sudan Secondary School Certificate Examinations. Hence there is an overwhelming concern, especially on the part of parents, who worry much, about the appalling drop of the English Language standard of their children's achievement, mainly at the Secondary

level. Students need to master the English Language four main skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Moreover, the common factor among all these is the word-store (vocabulary) which enables students to perform the four mentioned skills effectively. Harmer (2001) states that "if language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and flesh". A strong vocabulary is a source of power. Words can make one a better reader, writer, speaker, thinker and learner. They can dramatically increase one's chances of success in school and in job. Words do not come automatically. They

must be learned in a program of regular study. When someone commits themselves to learn words, honestly and actively, they will not enrich their vocabulary- they will enrich their entire life as well (Nist & Mohr, 2002: 6).

Pikulski and Templeton (2004) state that perhaps the greatest tools we can give students for succeeding, not only in their education but more generally in life, is a large, rich vocabulary and skills for using those words”

Problem of the Study:

Teaching vocabulary is not just a mechanic process; it is, rather, a lively and dynamic activity. It is said that we think with words so vocabulary should be taught. Teachers need to use different and effective techniques and activities to encourage motivation in the classroom and later outside the classroom itself. There are a lot of techniques and activities that teachers can use to teach vocabulary. So it is the responsibility of teachers to employ the techniques and activities suitable for any teaching environment. The main question is : to what extent the use of lexical semantic relations enhance vocabulary instruction at the 3rd grade secondary level in the Sudan?

Aims of the Study:

The study aims at investigating:

1. To what extent semantic relations are used to teach vocabulary.
2. What attitudes do most teachers show towards vocabulary instruction.
3. What attitudes do students show when new words are introduced.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed that:

1. Semantic relations are used, to some extent, to teach vocabulary.

2. Most teachers show a variety of attitudes towards vocabulary instruction.

3. Students show various attitudes when new words are introduced.

Limitations

This study is limited to the Secondary Level English Language syllabus textbook (Spine Series Book 6) which is taught to Third years in addition to the accompanying Teachers’ Book 6. The location is Khartoum Locality in the Khartoum State, Sudan. The teachers and students were also limited to Khartoum Locality.

First : The Theoretical Frame of the Study

Lexical Semantics

Some scholars (Beck, McKeown, Omanson and Pople, 1985) had shown that effective vocabulary instruction places an emphasis on the semantic relations among words by highlighting words central to the understanding of the text, providing students with frequent, meaningful encounters with words. Gairns and Redman (1986: 32) provide some reasons why sense relations are ‘of paramount importance’. They argue that grouping items together using sense relations such as synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy, etc. will help give coherence to the lesson. They also help to make deduction about unknown items; moreover they can provide greater precision in guiding students towards meaning and in helping them to define the boundaries that separate lexical items.

Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary instruction is often eliminated from developmental

education curriculum and left to teachers to handle it themselves, taught on a limited basis or ignored completely by some teachers. Stahl and Nagy (2006: viii) state that “to have the desired impact, vocabulary instruction must not only teach words, but also help students develop an interest in words”. Despite the importance of learning vocabulary, teachers have a hard time teaching vocabulary (Johnson and Johnson, 2011: xv). Whether teachers like or not, the present teaching methods should be reconsidered; and teachers should try something else. Beck et al. (2002) cited in Pikulski and Templeton (2005) state that “all the available evidence indicates that there is little emphasis on the acquisition of vocabulary in school curricula”. This is also noticeable concerning Spine series for there is no clear cut instruction on how to teach vocabulary. One the other hand Gairns (1986: 171) states that

Although historically the importance of vocabulary has been minimised, some of the more recently published ELT course books have adopted a systematic approach

to vocabulary learning and have become increasingly aware of the importance of developing vocabulary strategies. One of the most important goals of vocabulary development at the secondary as well as the basic school levels should not only to increase the breadth of students’ vocabularies, but also to increase the depth of their word knowledge. Therefore, vocabulary instruction should insure that students have a deep level of word understanding that permits them to

apply this knowledge to real-life situations. Therefore the researcher proposed using paradigmatic and syntagmatic lexical relations to teach new words because the items used would challenge students and motivate their interests (this is supported by the interview conducted).

There are several aspects of lexis that need to be taken into consideration when teaching vocabulary such as knowing the boundaries between conceptual meaning, polysemy, homonymy, homophony, synonymy, Affective meaning, translation, chunks of language, grammar of vocabulary, Collocation, etc. (Gairns and Redman, 1986; Moras, 2001). Many researchers today (e.g. Nation (1990), Sökmen (1997), Ellis (1997) seem to support intentional learning for highly frequent words and the teaching of learning strategies to cope with less frequent ones. Greenwood (2004: 28) states that “[t]here is a great divide between what we know about vocabulary instruction and what we (often, still) do”. There are areas of vocabulary instruction that tend to be neglected or ignored by most of the teachers.

The Procedures of the research :

Methodology of the research:

The Sample of the research:

This study took place in Khartoum Locality, Khartoum State, Sudan. The participants were 53 secondary school teachers of which 22 persons (41.51%) were female and 31 person (58.49%) were male. Moreover, one hundred students (60% boys and 40% girls) were tested to support the questionnaire findings.

The Tools of the Study

1/Questionnaire:

An adapted questionnaire was employed as a measuring instrument in addition to a test and a structured interview with sample students. The teachers and students were randomly selected. The participants were asked to answer all the items of the questionnaire, giving their own perceptions about their attitudes towards English Vocabulary instruction and their actual use of semantic relations to present new words. The students were required to answer the items of the test. The interview was carried out in a relaxed and a friendly atmosphere.

2/ Test:

The instruments used to measure data were a questionnaire, a test and a structured interview. The questionnaire focused on the attitudes of teachers and students towards English vocabulary instruction and English language learning. Moreover, it aimed to explore the differences in the participants' attitudes by their gender, years of experience, training and qualifications. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The items were put in a 5-point Likert scale from Level 1: Strongly Disagree to Level 5: Agree.

The test and the interview were used to support the questionnaire findings.

3/ Interview

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). Descriptive statistics was conducted to determine the frequency, the mean, the variance and the standard deviation of the gathered data Chi-square test was used with section (C) to determine the correlation of items and the rank of each item.

Discussion

Section A: The questionnaire

It is quite obvious that most of the respondents agree or strongly agree, with a varying degree, to all of the statements (with high significance). Mean ranges between 3.6792 and 4.6604. Statement 5 shows middle significance, mean = 2.3208 and $t = -1.112$, where only ten teachers agree or strongly agree. This indicates that most of the teachers have a positive attitude towards the statements of this section. The following table (1) shows in detail the mean, the standard deviation (SD) and the T-test values with the degree of significance of each statement of Section A of the questionnaire.

Table 1 Section A: Mean, SD, T-test and Significance

No	statement	Mean	SD	t	df	Significance	Inter.
1	New words are introduced in a funny and amusing way.	3.8113	1.12757	8.467	52	.000	high
2	Teachers group words together to	3.7170	.98795	8.968	52	.000	high

	introduce new ones						
3	Teachers use word parts (suffixes, prefixes) to teach new words	4.0377	1.07350	10.428	52	.000	high
4	To emphasize certain words, teachers read aloud.	4.4340	.79686	17.669	52	.000	high
5	Meanings of new words are given in Arabic to help students to understand.	2.3208	1.17299	-1.112	52	.271	middle
6	Teachers ask students to guess word meaning.	4.6604	.47811	32.896	52	.000	high
7	Games are used to improve vocabulary acquisition.	4.1132	1.04992	11.186	52	.000	high
8	Teachers connect words with students' experience.	4.4717	.63862	22.477	52	.000	high
9	Teachers ask students to complete sentences with target words.	3.9057	.92537	11.059	52	.000	high
10	Previously taught words	4.0755	1.05337	10.889	52	.000	high

	are revised before introducing new ones.						
11	Teachers refer to words already found in previous Spine books.	4.0189	.95052	11.633	52	.000	high
12	Students are encouraged to look up new words in a dictionary.	3.6792	1.31227	6.542	52	.000	high
13	Vocabulary instruction is planned in advance.	3.7925	.90636	10.381	52	.000	high
14	Teachers write new words on the board.	4.6604	.47811	32.896	52	.000	high
15	Teachers tend to test newly taught words.	4.3962	.68891	20.038	52	.000	high

Results in terms of Variables: Section A.

To find out the significance of gender in determining the attitudes of male and female teachers while choosing one of the alternatives, an independent sample test was carried out. When comparing the two groups, it was found that gender showed no significant difference. Likewise, in order to determine the importance of qualifications in directing the choice of the statements of this section, one-way ANOVA test was done. When comparing male and female groups, it was concluded that

there was no significant difference. On the other hand, Spearman correlation coefficient was carried out to find out the relationship between Years of Experience and teachers attitudes. It was found that this variant had a considerable effect. It showed positive correlation and the mean difference was significant at the .05 level. This showed that experience was incremental and had positive impact on the attitudes teachers showed towards different

techniques of presenting and teaching different new words.

Section B

This section attempted to elicit students' attitudes observed by teachers inside classrooms when new words are introduced. The students showed different attitudes. It is clear that statement 1 holds rank 1 (mean= 4.1132, $t= 11.386$) as 27 respondents (51%) chose always, second to this is statement 9 (mean= 3.6604, $t= 6.651$) as 18 respondents (34%) ticked

'always' box. The least statements that did not seem to be preferred by students were number 10 (mean= 2.6792, $t= .827$) and 11 (mean= 2.4340, $t= -.376$). All statements showed high significance except statements 6, 10 and 11 which showed middle significance. The following table (2) shows in detail the mean, the standard deviation (SD) and the T-test values with the degree of significance of each of the eleven statements.

Table 1. Section B: Mean, SD, T-test and Significance

No	statement	Mean	SD	t	df	Significance	Inter.
1	Students use notebooks to register new words.	4.1132	1.03144	11.386	52	.000	high
2	Students give definition of new words in English.	3.5283	1.21851	6.144	52	.000	high
3	Students ask "What is the meaning of this word?"	3.7547	.89670	10.187	52	.000	high
4	Students ask for the meanings of new English words in Arabic	3.3774	1.27440	5.012	52	.000	high
5	Students, when asked, give the meanings of new English words in Arabic.	3.0943	1.54751	2.796	52	.007	high
6	Students write, on the book, the meanings in Arabic right above the newly taught English words.	2.8113	1.44191	1.572	52	.122	middle
7	Students say that they do not understand texts when new words are explained in English.	3.3208	1.22118	4.893	52	.000	high
8	Students translate into Arabic new English words even if these words are explained in English.	3.2075	1.32082	3.900	52	.000	high
9	Students write meanings of new English words in isolation (i.e. not in sentences).	3.6604	1.27012	6.651	52	.000	high
10	Students organize	2.6792	1.57838	.827	52	.412	middle

	meanings of new words in an understandable way.						
11	Students feel bored when new words are explained.	2.4340	1.27866	-.376	52	.708	middle

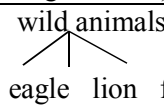
Results in terms of Variables: Section B.

When comparing the two groups, it was found that 'gender' showed no significant difference (p. value= 0.755). Almost all teachers (male and female) observed the same attitudes students showed when new words were introduced. In addition, 'qualifications' showed no significance in directing the choice of the statements of section B, one-way ANOVA test was made. When comparing male and female groups, it was concluded that there was no significant difference (p. value= 0.119). In order to find out the relationship between 'years of experience' of teachers and the attitudes of students, Spearman correlation coefficient was carried out. It was found that this variant had no effect since students' attitudes did not vary much from year to year. Students' attitudes did not alter so long as the same methods were used and the same syllabus was to be implemented every year.

Section C

This section attempted to find out teachers' actual use of lexical semantic items in classrooms when they introduced new words. It consists of 10 statements and the expected responses range between always, often, sometimes, rarely and never. Synonymy (mean= 4.3962, t= 41.667) and antonymy (mean= 4.3585, t= 36.093), ranked 1 and 2 respectively as the most used lexical relations to introduce new words. This is no wonder, since the interviewed students found them the easiest sections of the test. The least used of all are homophony (mean= 3.4717) and idioms (mean= 3.4340). The students found homophony the most confusing but amusing part of the test. The following table (3) showed in detail the mean, the standard deviation (SD) and the T-test values with the degree of significance of each of the ten statements.

Table 3Section C: Mean, SD, T-test and Significance

No	statement	Mean	SD	t	df	Significance	Inter.
1	synonymy (such as big, large, huge)	4.3962	.76811	41.667	52	.000	high
2	antonymy (such as hot/cold, high/low)	4.3585	.87912	36.093	52	.000	high
3	hyponymy (inclusion such as family: father, mother, son, daughter, etc.)	4.0566	1.09921	26.867	52	.000	high
4	taxonomy: <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>	4.1509	1.13334	26.664	52	.000	high
5	meronymy (part < whole: finger is part of hand)	4.0566	.92850	31.807	52	.000	high
6	homophony (plain/plane, steal/steel)	3.4717	1.24967	20.225	52	.000	high
7	homography (<i>bat</i> : flying mammal/ <i>bat</i> : wooden stick used in baseball)	3.7925	1.04437	26.436	52	.000	high

8	polysemy (bank: river side/ bank: financial institution)	3.7358	1.19536	22.752	52	.000	high
9	collocations (black market, make a complaint)	3.7547	1.09027	25.072	52	.000	high
10	idioms (as busy as a bee, paint the town red).	3.4340	1.36592	18.302	52	.000	high

Results in terms of Variables: Section C.

When comparing the two groups for this section, it was found that 'gender' showed no significant difference (p . value= 0.955). Almost all the teachers (male and female) had a tendency to use one or more relationships to teach new vocabulary. 'Qualifications' variant, on the other hand, was not regarded as a decisive factor in analyzing the statements since all teachers (male and female) with their different qualifications were capable of using lexical semantic relations when introducing new words. The researcher could associate this to the training these teachers had claimed to receive. So as to decide the relationship between 'years of experience' and the application of semantic relations by different teachers, Spearman correlation coefficient was carried out. It was found that this variant had no considerable effect since teachers had already been trained. The researcher predicted that teachers had received adequate training on how to introduce new words and what methods suitable to achieve this goal. P . value showed no significant correlation at 0.444.

The Test

Comparing it with the pre-test results, it is found that there is a little increase-between 7% to 3% - in the percentage of the boys who passed and failed part

A, whereas there is a decrease of 8% of the number of girls who passed and failed the same part. The percentage of the boys who passed part B increased by 10% whereas no change is shown on the girls' side. The percentage of the boys who passed part C stayed stable but the girls' percentage increased by 5%. There is a slight change (2%) in the percentage of the boys who passed part D whereas the percentage of the girls increased by 10%. These slight changes in the percentages are expected since the students are made aware of these kinds of relations. Moreover, some of them gained confidence because no part is left unanswered no matter the answer is correct or not. Although the overall increase of the percentage (between 2% to 10%) is so insignificant, it gave the researcher an indication that these types of lexical relations are easy to grasp; therefore, they should be used to build up students' reservoir of new words. Moreover, these relations are amusing and could create a comfortable atmosphere inside the classroom. This would affect students' attitudes and motivation positively. The students are familiar with some of these relations at an early stage, but neglected at a certain phase by teachers, students or both. This also indicated that teachers need to implement explicit teaching of vocabulary using different development strategies in order to refresh students memories in order to acquire a good

deal of new words. It is asserted that learning occurs more easily, when the learner has a positive attitude towards the language and towards learning itself.

The Results:

1. Teachers will find it rewarding to teach vocabulary intentionally.
2. Teachers will encourage and provide entertainment to students while teaching vocabulary using different semantic relations.
3. Teachers will benefit from the fact that the students do not hate vocabulary instruction.

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