

vocabulary learning groups where members work together and encourage each other.

### 8. Incidental learning from exposure

In contrast to explicit approaches to vocabulary teaching and learning, the key to an incidental learning approach is to make sure learners get maximum exposure to language. In input-poor EFL environments, having students read more is probably the best way of doing this. Research shows that incidental learning from reading adds up significantly over time but is relatively slow compared to explicit learning (Horst, 2005). It appears that, on average, it takes 7–10 exposures to a word to learn the initial form-meaning link, which would require a great deal of reading. In fact, one study estimates that L2 learners would have to read more than eight million words of text, or about 420 novels, to increase their vocabulary size by 2,000 words. This is clearly a daunting prospect, and thus, it is probably best not to rely upon incidental learning as the primary source for learning new words. Rather, incidental learning seems to be better at enhancing knowledge of words that have already been introduced because it fills in the contextual knowledge that cannot be easily taught explicitly. Repeated exposures in different contexts consolidate fragile initial learning, moving it along the path of incremental development. In other words, reading may not lead to the learning of many new words, but it is very useful in developing and enriching partially known vocabulary.

There are a number of ways teachers can be proactive in maximizing incidental learning from exposure. The most obvious way is to simply maximize the exposure itself by establishing an extensive reading program. Research shows that substantial vocabulary learning can be derived from such a program. In fact, one study reported that participants learned more than half of the unfamiliar words they encountered in the graded readers they read (Horst, 2005).

Furthermore, extensive reading facilitates more than just vocabulary growth; it has been shown to improve reading speed and attitudes toward reading as well. Teachers can also train their learners in lexical inferencing strategies. If teachers are creating their own materials, then unknown words can be glossed for students in the text. The best place to do this seems to be in the margins, and it doesn't appear to matter much if the gloss is in the L1 or L2 (Yoshii, 2006). But perhaps the most effective way of improving incidental learning is to reinforce it afterward with explicit learning post-tasks. Numerous studies show that this incidental + explicit approach leads to far better results than just incidental learning alone (Mondria, 2003). This emphasizes the point that every vocabulary program

needs to have explicit and incidental elements, which may be most effective if integrated together.

### 9. Conclusion

Teachers need to take a broader view of what vocabulary instruction entails, and take proactive charge of both explicit and incidental vocabulary development. It is important to acknowledge the incremental nature of vocabulary learning, and to understand that an effective vocabulary learning program needs to be principled, long term, and have high vocabulary learning expectations. There will never be one "best" teaching method, but teachers will not go wrong following the overall principle of maximizing sustained engagement with words.

### References

- Hall, C.J. (2002). The automatic cognate form assumption: Evidence for the parasitic model of vocabulary development. *IRAL* 40: 69-87.
- Hemchua, S. and Schmitt, N. (2006). An analysis of lexical errors in the English compositions of Thai learners. *Prospect* 21, 3: 3-25.
- Horst, M. (2005). Learning L2 vocabulary through extensive reading: A measurement study. *Canadian Modern Language Review* 61, 3: 355-382.
- Hulstijn, J. and Laufer, B. (2001). Some empirical evidence for the involvement load hypothesis in vocabulary acquisition. *Language Learning* 51, 3: 539-558.
- Koda, K. (1997). Orthographic knowledge in L2 lexical processing. In Coady, J. and Huckin, T. (eds.) *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Laufer, B. (1988). The concept of "synforms" (similar lexical forms) in vocabulary acquisition. *Language and Education* 2, 2: 113-132.
- Laufer, B. and Shmueli, K. (1997). Memorizing new words: Does teaching have anything to do with it? *RELJ Journal* 28: 89-108.
- Leech, J., Rayson, P., and Wilson, A. (2001). *Word Frequencies in Written and Spoken English*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Mondria, J.-A. (2003). The effects of inferring, verifying, and memorizing on the retention of L2 word meanings. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 25: 473-499.
- Nation, I.S.P. (1990). *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*. New York: Heinle and Heinle.
- Nation, I.S.P. (2006). How large a vocabulary is needed for reading and listening? *Canadian Modern Language Review* 63, 1: 59-82.
- Nation, P. and Newton, J. (1997). Teaching vocabulary. In Coady, J. and Huckin, T. (eds.) *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ramachandran, S.D. and Rahim, H.A. (2004). Meaning recall and retention: The impact of the translation method on elementary level learners' vocabulary learning. *RELJ Journal* 35, 2: 161-178.
- Schmitt, D. and Schmitt, N. (2005). *Focus on Vocabulary: Mastering the Academic Word List*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Schmitt, N. (1997). Vocabulary learning strategies. In Schmitt, N. and McCarthy, M. (eds.) *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition, and Pedagogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sunderman, G. and Kroll, J.F. (2006). First language activation during second language lexical processing. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 28: 387-422.
- Yoshii, M. (2006). L1 and L2 glosses: Their effects on incidental vocabulary learning. *Language Learning And Technology* 10, 3: 85-101.

