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The Relation between Breadth and Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge and EFL Learner's Speaking Performance

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Abstract. The present article is an attempt to highlight the sustained attention to the EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge and its development, as well as its relation to the development of speaking performance. It intends to determine whether breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge are related to EFL learners' speaking performance, and to examine which one of these variables, that is, depth or breadth of vocabulary knowledge, makes a more important contribution to foreign language learners' speaking performance. It also attempts to investigate whether there is a relationship between these two vocabulary knowledge dimensions. Finally, the study tries to determine whether there are any differences between ESL and EFL learners' development of the vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: *vocabulary acquisition, vocabulary breadth, vocabulary depth, speaking performance.*

The importance of vocabulary acquisition for EFL learners is indisputably regarded as essential in language learning nowadays. However, there were times when vocabulary learning was either completely neglected in language classrooms or at least tolerated. At the present time vocabulary is viewed as a significant element of language development and considered a decisive feature of foreign language proficiency.

Foreign language vocabulary acquisition has become an increasingly challenging subject of discussion and research, including such issue as vocabulary assessment in language testing [10, 11]. Vocabulary size has also been found to correlate with reading comprehension as well as with writing ability [16, 9]. In addition, previous studies have demonstrated that vocabulary has connections with listening [6]. Moreover, vocabulary has been recognised as one of the essential and fundamental components of communication [5, 19]. According to Meara [12] studies of vocabulary have dramatically increased over the past 20 years.

However, to date, there are still questions that either have not been raised but exist in the EFL teaching and learning practice, or only few studies have focused on them. One of such issues is the relationship between the EFL students' vocabulary knowledge and their speaking performance.

Therefore, the current article is an attempt to highlight certain issues of vocabulary knowledge of EFL learners and focus on the correlation between vocabulary and speaking performance with a shift on the quality of the vocabulary needed to achieve fluency in a foreign language.

One of the major interests addressed by researchers is the number of words a foreign language learner needs to communicate successfully. Vocabulary size has received more attention than the quality of vocabulary. Accordingly, most of the researchers and language teaching specialists focus their attention on the vocabulary size rather than on the the quality of vocabulary.

As Nation [15] states the number of words that educated native speakers of English know is around 20,000 word families and for each year of their early life they add on average 1,000 word families. Studies of word frequency counts reveal that knowledge of the 2,000 most frequent word families constitutes a threshold of the words required for basic oral communication. These 2,000 word families make up about 87% of written texts and about 80% of typical academic texts [13]. The studies looking at

the relationship between vocabulary size and reading comprehension show that a student ought to know about 3,000 word families to comprehend most texts. This number, which represents around 4,800 lexical items, is termed the 'threshold vocabulary'. Once this level has been reached, it is proposed that learners will be fully capable of applying context-guessing and other learning strategies, and as such might be considered to have reached the point at which intentional learning has stopped to be an efficient use of class time [11].

Linguists agree that about 4,000-5,000 word families are necessary for comprehending academic texts [20]. In addition, Hazenberg, S., & Hulstijn, J.H. [8] estimate that a base of at least 10,000 word families, half of what an average native speaker knows, is needed to study at the university level. A university graduate has a vocabulary of around 20,000 word families. The gap between an adult learner of English as a foreign language and that of a native speaker is usually very large, since EFL learners usually know less than 5000 word families.

A survey to measure the student's vocabulary size was carried out at the Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute [24]. The participants of this study were Hungarian learners of English. To estimate the word-power of the English major students Nation and Laufer's Vocabulary Levels Test [11] was chosen as the Productive Vocabulary Level Test requires the student to produce the word as they would if they were speaking, and thus seems to more realistically indicate natural language use. It ensures that the learner does not produce an alternative that might fit the context and be unaffected by any similar word or a word from the word family. According to the survey the average vocabulary of a student was estimated at around 3700-4000 words. This is the number of words needed to comprehend most texts and even certain academic texts. Everybody who is involved in foreign language teaching agrees that EFL learners need explicit instruction. However, in practice, it is frequently assumed that speaking performance can be developed mostly by enriching the student's vocabulary. On the one hand, acquiring adequate words to build one's vocabulary is crucial to both second and foreign language learners. On the other hand, whereas ESL learners are exposed to the English language and they learn to use it by being surrounded by native language speakers, the situation is quite different with foreign language learners who do not have exposure to the language and learn it only in the foreign language classroom. In the case of foreign language learners native-

like fluency and grammatical accuracy are difficult to achieve without knowledge of collocations. However, since these collocations occur randomly and have quite unpredictable nature, language learners face seemingly insurmountable difficulties in acquiring English. For instance, it is correct in English to speak about *burning desire* and *blazing row* but is incorrect to speak about *blazing desire* or *burning row*; we say *heavy smoker/traffic/suitcase/rain/timetable/meal* but we do not say *strong smoker/traffic/suitcase/rain/timetable/meal*, though at the same time *strong* collocates with *influence/views/support/accents* and so on. However, in order to become fluent and accurate speakers of English it is necessary to learn these collocations. The aforementioned survey shows that even though the students have a sufficient vocabulary the learners' lack of knowledge of collocational patterns of lexical items results in experiencing serious difficulties in speaking.

Moreover, their speech might be characterised as inaccurate and sloppy. The assumption is that students lack components of vocabulary depth, collocation competence, in particular. Beyond doubt vocabulary size is a significant contributor to proficiency in speaking for both ESL and EFL learners whereas vocabulary depth can be considered decisive for EFL learner. Hence, learning to use collocations properly is one of the main aims of vocabulary depth components with foreign language learners as compared to ESL learners. Schmitt and McCarthy [22] and Schmitt [23] propose that knowledge of form, and meaning may be obtained before some of the other aspects such as collocation and register in the process of developing vocabulary. Although it can be assumed that the same prediction be made for foreign language acquisition, the results of the survey and the speaking performance of the surveyed students do not meet the requirements of this assumption.

In the case of foreign language students knowledge of collocations is decisive. For them thematically based instruction of collocations seems to be the most efficient. Guided by the idea of frequency, key words might be chosen on a certain subject and presented to students with their most frequently used collocations in three categories, namely N+N, Adj.+N and V+N since these are the most difficult to acquire for the learners. For instance, collocations may be arranged in the following way:

Climate and weather		
N+N	Adj.+N	N+V
1. Climate		
change	mild/extreme/warm/dry/	vary/change
of suspicion/hostility/	tropical/equatorial/ social/	
distrust/opinion	political/economic/	
2. Weather		
forecast/outlook/	stormy/changeable/	break/change in
conditions/	unpredictable/unsettled/	the~
Snow		
fall/cloud/storm/bank/	melting/heavy/scattered/	covered with ~/
blizzard/drift		blocked by ~

Another problem with the surveyed EFL learners is the difficulty they encounter while trying to further increase their vocabulary after having acquired around 3700-4000 words.

Next issue of vocabulary breadth development worth discussing is the teaching of high frequency words of the

language as defined by Nation. In the language teaching classroom many share Nation's point of view who claims that high frequency words of the language are an immediate high priority and there is little sense in focusing on other vocabulary until these are well learned. Nation [13] argues that only after these high frequency words are learned, the next focus for the teacher is on helping the learners develop strategies to comprehend and learn the low frequency words of the language. Practice shows that this "step-by-step" vocabulary learning technique as suggested by Nation might also contribute to the phenomenon of "fossilizing" these words to such an extent, that students tend to use these words only despite having quite a wide vocabulary. Therefore learning synonyms, antonyms, and word collocations is suggested from the very first stages of acquiring a foreign language. Obviously, age factor as well as proficiency levels of the learner should be considered.

Since not enough attention is given to the factors that inhibit or facilitate the production of spoken language even having a relatively rich vocabulary, students have difficulties in speaking performance. Although vocabulary size is a significant contributor to proficiency in speaking vocabulary depth knowledge can be considered crucial for EFL learners.

However, when vocabulary knowledge is divided into breadth and depth of vocabulary, it should not be forgotten that this division is not a distinctive one. Breadth of vocabulary knowledge is referred to the quantity or number of words learners know at a certain level of language competence while depth of vocabulary knowledge is defined as a learner's levels knowledge of various aspects of a given word. Besides, it is about how they associate and interact with each other. This would include, apart from how words collocate, idioms and multiple possible meanings. Although the amount of empirical research on vocabulary acquisition is increasing, there is still disagreement over a number of issues, including the notion of word knowledge. The first attempt to find a definition was made by Richards, J.C. [18]. However, it is almost impossible either to cover all of the word knowledge categories, or to learn them. Research in the mere area of vocabulary knowledge is approached from different perspectives. One creative line of research, among others, is definitely concerned the two dimensions of vocabulary knowledge, i.e., breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. A word includes many aspects to be gradually learned by language learners, such as its pronunciation, spelling, register, stylistic and morphological features [7], and knowledge of the word's syntactic and semantic relationships with other words in the language, including collocational meanings and knowledge of antonymy, synonymy, and hyponymy [17].

The complexity of vocabulary knowledge suggests that vocabulary size development is not enough to establish in-depth vocabulary knowledge. Instead, because words are complex, rich and intensive instruction that provides multiple exposures to the words within instructionally rich contexts is necessary in order for students to learn in-depth knowledge of vocabulary and improve their speaking performance.

The current review shows the roles of breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge and their significance in

developing EFL learner's speaking performance. At present both language teachers and researchers have realized that vocabulary is vital to language acquisition and it is worth investigating. The most promising directions seem to be the study of the correlation between vocabulary breadth and depth and their impact on language acquisition. However, unlike traditional instruction, which often involves teaching long definitions or synonyms of vocabulary, depth-vocabulary instruction is a rich instruction

that provides multiple exposures to the words within instructionally rich contexts. Contrary to the opinion that some aspects of ESL knowledge are acquired before others in the course of vocabulary depth instruction, in the case of EFL learners comprehensive instruction seems to be more adequate. Finally, since vocabulary acquisition is a systematic process, it requires on the part of the learners to constantly acquire vocabulary of the target language.

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Лизак К.

Взаимосвязь количественного и качественного состава лексики и развития навыков речи при изучении английского языка как иностранного

Аннотация. Настоящая статья является попыткой указать на необходимость постоянного внимания к лексике и его развития изучающими английский язык как иностранный, а также его связи с развитием навыков говорения как средства формирования коммуникативной компетенции. Она намерена определить влияют ли количественный и качественный состав лексики на развитие навыков говорения, и которая из данных составных имеет более важный вклад на формирование коммуникативной компетенции. Статья также пытается исследовать, есть ли связь между этими двумя составными лексики. В исследовании сделана попытка определить, существуют ли какие-либо различия в процессе развития лексики английского языка между изучающими язык как иностранный и теми учащимися, для которых английский является вторым языком.

Ключевые слова: количественный и качественный состав лексики, коммуникативная компетенция, навыки говорения.