

Untutored Vocabulary Acquisition and L2 Reading Ability

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While vocabulary knowledge is often recognized as necessary for successful reading in a foreign language, research on the procedures appropriate for the systematic teaching of vocabulary in an EFL reading program is still lacking. This article describes a self-instruction procedure designed to provide students of science and technology at tertiary level with a basic vocabulary of around 1000 items. In general the technique, known here as *untutored vocabulary acquisition*, appears to be an efficient method for bridging the gap between the vocabulary which beginning L2 students possess and that required to read L2 scientific and technical texts with ease.

INTRODUCTION

Goodman's metaphor that 'reading is a guessing game' (Goodman, 1967) has exerted great influence on EFL/ESL reading research. Such influence has been felt at three instructional levels: (1) the design of reading course design (2) the methodological procedures used in the teaching of reading courses, and (3) the evaluation of students' reading comprehension.

Models based on Goodman's notion of reading (see for instance, Clarke and Silberstein, 1977 and especially Coody, 1979) hold that fluent readers predict as they read and do not rely on word by word decoding. While these models, known as top-down models, place greater emphasis on conceptually-driven aspects of the reading process, they tend to underestimate the role of data-driven aspects of reading. In dealing with word knowledge, for instance, advocates of top-down models have been telling teachers that guessing the meaning of unknown words provides both a rich way into comprehension and an efficient method for vocabulary learning. The effect of this advice on EFL reading programs is that curriculum designers and teachers feel that they need not be concerned with forms of vocabulary development other than those through which the guessing game is played. As a consequence, (1) objectives on vocabulary development are seldom, if ever, considered a vital part of reading programs; (2) direct and systematic methods of vocabulary teaching/learning have been ignored; and (3) items testing quick, automatic access to word storage are generally absent from reading comprehension tests. So it does not seem an exaggeration to claim that vocabulary development has been excluded from the three above-mentioned instructional levels.

However, with the advent of interactive models of reading, vocabulary is beginning to gain a more positive status. Essentially, what interactive models posit is that

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