INSTRUCTING RECEPTIVE PHRASE KNOWLEDGE THROUGH REPETITION VS. REPEATED EXPOSURES; A CASE OF MARITIME ENGLISH COURSE FOR IRANIAN SEAFARERS

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Abstract:

The outcome of different vocabulary learning strategies might be different for different vocabulary forms, such phrases or single word items. Similarly, the depth of vocabulary knowledge (receptive vs. productive) is also another important factor that is neglected in many of researches dealing with vocabulary learning strategies. This study focused on learning vocabulary with the form of "phrase". The study aimed to evaluate the different functions of rote learning and repeated exposures on producing receptive vocabulary knowledge. 23 leaners of a Maritime English course were chosen as the participants of this study. They were instructed 14 vocabulary items, in two different lists of A and B, one list is instructed through traditional word list repetition and another one through multiple exposures. The learners were asked at the end of the course to translate the given phrases of the two lists in their first language. The number of correct answers of each list incited the effectiveness of related method of treatment. It was appeared that repeating the phrases from a list is more effective in growing receptive knowledge, although there was not a tremendous difference in the results.

Keywords: receptive phrase knowledge, vocabulary learning strategies, repetition, repeated exposures

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1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

Many of researches dealing with vocabulary learning strategies tend to consider it as a single notion. However, this might be misleading in evaluating the effectiveness of different strategies and techniques. In fact, some scholars have rightly distinguished the different levels of vocabulary knowledge as well as different form of vocabulary items. As far as the different levels of vocabulary knowledge is concerned, one seemingly evident duality of vocabulary knowledge is the Passive (receptive) versus active (productive) capability of EFl learners. Receptive vocabulary is the words and phrases students can understand their meaning in their first language. Productive vocabulary refers to the words and phrases that the students can use correctly in their writing or oral communications. This is the idea that expressed by several scholars; for instance, Sedita (2005) believes that when a student really knows a word, he knows more than the word's definition. He also knows how that word functions in different contexts. Kersten (2010) believes that active vocabulary knowledge and passive vocabulary knowledge are often distinguished as receptive and productive knowledge. When it comes to the form of vocabulary, most EFL teachers and learners take it for single word learning. However, Ur (1996), believes in a more comprehensive notion of vocabulary and expresses that a new vocabulary item could be more than a single word; for example: post office and mother-in law, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea.

Apart from differentiation in the form of the vocabulary and the depth of its knowledge, several learning strategies are suggested for this purpose; among witch rote learning as well as repeated exposures are mentionable. Both these two strategies have their own pros and cons. Rote learning, i.e. Learning words from a list as Baleghizadeh and Ashoori (2010) expressed, is one of the old-fashioned vocabulary learning strategies. However, it is under severe criticisms since the advent of communicative language learning. For instance, Pincas (1996) and Thompson (1987) who studied in the field of second language learning as well as classroom teaching methodology; did not express a favorable attitude toward this technique. The results of a study done in Saudi Arabia by Alharthi, (2014) revealed that the use of rote learning (repeating an English item with its Arabic translation) resulted in more attrition in receptive word knowledge**.** The importance of memorization however, is not ignorable in vocabulary learning, as Shen (2003) believes; words will have a little chance to be produced if they are not memorized effectively by the learner. Gu (2003) goes further in describing the importance of the rote method (list learning method) as follows: "*Quantities of initial*

vocabulary can be learned both efficiently and quickly by methods such as rote learning which are not always considered to be repeatable. It may be dangerous to underestimate such capacity." (p. 7)

Most researches done in relation to good vocabulary instruction have found consistently that students need multiple exposures to a word to learn it properly (Lawrence, 2009; Nagy, Herman, and Anderson, 1985). Armbruster (2002) also found that repeated exposures to vocabulary in many contexts improve word learning, as the instruction that promotes active engagement with vocabulary. Archer (2014) expressed that one of the elements of effective vocabulary instruction is for teachers to ensure that their students have repeated exposures to key vocabulary. However, similar to rote, this strategy has also its opponents. For instance, Hall (1992) observed that there is a considerably low correlation (.36) between number of exposure to the word and their retention.

This purpose of this study is to compare the effectiveness of rote learning (repeating vocabulary from a list) and repeated exposures, on learning phrases, if the objective of the course is only growing passive vocabulary knowledge. The findings of this study clarify which one of these strategies results in a higher passive vocabulary growth, in case of phrase learning.

1.2. Research Question

Does passive phrase knowledge grows higher through repetition or through repeated exposures?

2. Literature review

2.1. Vocabulary knowledge: Passive (Receptive) vs. Active (Productive)

One of popular dualities of vocabulary knowledge is the Passive (receptive) - versus active (productive) capability of EFL learners. Receptive vocabulary is the words and phrases students can understand their meaning in their first language. Productive vocabulary refers to the words and phrases that the students can use correctly in their writing or oral communications. Paribakht and Wesche (1996) accepted the Gass (1988) framework of vocabulary development which specifies the stages of vocabulary acquisition from first exposure to output:

1. *Apperceived input:* is when students are made to "notice" the vocabulary and then connect it to past learning.
2. *Comprehended input* is similar to Krashen's "comprehensible input" but goes a step further in assuring that the student has understood it.

3. *Intake* is when the student uses the vocabulary in various situations.

4. *Integration* is the internalization of the new vocabulary.

5. *Output* is the use of the lexical items in the student's production.

This framework defines the middle processes needed to move learners from the receptive stage to the productive stage.

Similarly, Sedita (2005) believes that when a student really knows a word, he knows more than the word's definition. He also knows how that word functions in different contexts. Dale and O'Rourke (1986) proposed a model of four levels of word knowledge:

1. I never saw it before;

2. I've heard of it, but I don't know what it means;

3. I recognize it in context – it has something to do witdh;

4. I know it.

Kersten (2010) defined knowing a word as including knowing its form and meaning. He also makes clear that active vocabulary knowledge and passive vocabulary knowledge are often distinguished as receptive and productive knowledge.

In conclusion, most researchers nowadays perceive lexical knowledge as a continuum consisting of several stages, starting with simple familiarity with a vocabulary item and ending with the ability to use it correctly in free production (Nation 2001; Laufer and Goldstein, 2004).

2.2. Phrase learning vs. single word

Most EFL learners mistakenly think of vocabulary as single word. Consequently, they perceive vocabulary learning as a process of learning the spelling and pronunciation of a word and its meaning in their first language. However, Ur (1996), believes in a more comprehensive notion of vocabulary.

Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language. However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than a single word: for example, post office and mother-in law, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea. There are also multi-word idioms such as call it a day, where the meaning of the phrase cannot be deduced from an analysis of the component words. A useful convention is to cover all such cases by talking 'items' rather than 'words' (p. 60). Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary has several definitions among with the following is relevant as far as this study is concerned:

"A short group of words which are often used together and have a particular meaning. For example "elective dictatorship" in this sentence: We are governed, in Lord Hailsham's famous phrase, by an 'elective dictatorship"

McIntosh, 2013

2.3. Different views about rote learning of vocabulary

Despite its historical prevalence, rote learning has been under severe criticisms since the advent of cognitive psychology and communicative language learning in recent decades. For instance, the studies of Pincas (1996) and Thompson (1987) in the field of second language learning as well as classroom teaching methodology; as cited by Shen (2003) seems not to have a favorable attitude toward this technique (Pincas 1996; Thompson 1987).

The results of an study done in Saudi Arabia by Alharthi, (2014) revealed that the use of rote learning (repeating an English item with its Arabic translation) resulted in more attrition in receptive word knowledge, while note taking strategies (writing an English item with its synonym and definition) emerged as a positive predictor of learners' retention in receptive and productive word knowledge. From the point of view of Alharthi (2014), It seems reasonable that a reduced amount of English in rote learning may produce low scores in their receptive word knowledge. In other words, repetition of this form, i.e. saying/writing the word with L1 translation many times, failed to strengthen the EFL graduates' word retention.

The importance of memorization is however, not ignorable in vocabulary learning, as Shen (2003) believes, words will have a little chance to be produced if they are not memorized effectively by the learner.

2.4. Learning words from a list

One of the old-fashioned vocabulary learning strategies is called list learning. It consists of a sheet of paper on which learners write both the L2 word and its meaning. Both teachers and learners can generate the strategy; however, the words are learned out of context and the main emphasis is on repetition and memorization, not meaningful learning. Some aspects of this strategy are mentioned by Gu (2003). First, he found answers to the question that how many exposures and repetitions are needed for learning through lists. He ascertained that word pairs in a list can be learned surprisingly within a short time. The next issue concerns the optimal number of vocabulary that can be studied and learned at one time. He declared that learning depends on the level of difficulty of words. In the case of easy words, lists containing 100 or more would be appropriate. Gu (2003) described the importance of the rote

method (list learning method) as follows: *"Quantities of initial vocabulary can be learned both efficiently and quickly by methods such as rote learning which are not always considered to be repeatable. It may be dangerous to underestimate such capacity."* (p. 7)

Wordlist or word card method as Qun (2014) believes is the prevailing technique at proposing intentional vocabulary learning strategy. In conversation (Editorial, 2005) of asking "10 best ideas" for ESL students to learn vocabulary, Laufer suggests wordlist and Nation advises word card. Fitzpatrick, Al-Qarni and Meara (2008) conducted a single-subject case to investigate wordlist learning, they concluded that wordlist method should not be dismissed as non-communicative, but be valued. Yet, no pragmatic learning manual of wordlist or word card method can be found or inferred from their comments and research procedures. Li (2004) discovers that 89% of Chinese college students apply wordlist method to study English vocabulary. However, Qun (2014) expressed that in her talk with many students, none of them can distinctively delineate the wordlist method that they are practicing.

As Gairns and Redman (1986) see it, rote learning is a memorization technique which is deeply rooted in the history in language learning: the repetition of target language items could be done either silently or aloud and may involve writing down the items several times. The target items are usually gathered in list form. In case of vocabulary learning, there will be a list of new words and their L1 translation. Behlol (2010) indicated that traditional way of vocabulary learning is based on the definitional approach; and it is carried out by looking up in a dictionary or glossary or drill. However, learning vocabulary from bilingual wordlists is not prevalent as the old days, since it is considered to be less effective in comparison with many newly emerging techniques in lights of communicative approach and its different view toward learning phenomenon.

However, learning words from a list does not seem to be losing it position thoroughly. The findings of Fitzpatrick (2008) proved the effectiveness of this method, and learning by word lists still appeared to be an effective way of learning vocabulary; and Miltion (2009) also added to this that one can learn a large amount of words very quickly in learning word lists. Gu (2003) investigates four questions about learning by word list: the number of repetitions needed to remember a word list; the optimum number of words to be studied at one time; the timing for repetition; and repeating aloud versus repeating silently.

2.5. "Multiple Exposures" vocabulary technique

The majority of the studies done in the field of vocabulary learning have found consistently that students need multiple exposures to a word to learn it properly

(Lawrence, 2009; Nagy, Herman, and Anderson, 1985). Although the learners may come to a basic understanding of a word after one encounters, all students need multiple exposures in different contexts to ensure that they grow a rich knowledge of the word (Perfetti and Hart, 2002).

To provide the multiple experiences students need, Lawrence, White, and Snow (2010) suggest that teachers should select just five to seven words to focus on each week, planning at the start of each week how to embed the word into writing or debate prompts, homework assignments, quizzes, and lessons. They also added based on the finding of their research that cross-content teaching teams can work together, with teachers in each content area taking responsibility for providing instruction on the target words one day of the week.

Armbruster (2002) also found that repeated exposures to vocabulary in many contexts improve word learning, as the instruction that promotes active engagement with vocabulary.

Archer (2014) expressed that one of the elements of effective vocabulary instruction is for teachers to ensure that their students have repeated exposures to key vocabulary. Vocabulary and conceptual knowledge are built gradually over time, and multiple exposures offer opportunities to revisit words and information and to relate words and ideas to one another. If students are to build a deep understanding of key vocabulary and its appropriate use, a single exposure will prove insufficient. Rather, students need to practice with words across lessons and in different contexts. Multiple exposures to vocabulary can be achieved through various ways, such as: independent reading, partner activities and teacher-led discussions.

Stahl (2004) explains the fact that vocabulary knowledge grows slowly and incrementally, and this requires multiple exposures to words, which means seeing them in different contexts and not simply their repetition along with their definitions or synonyms. Similarly, Sedita (2005) expressed that in order to fully learn a vocabulary item and its connotations; a learner needs multiple exposures to that item in a variety of contexts. In fact whenever one encounter a vocabulary item in a specific context; s/he remembers some aspects of it. As one encounters it repeatedly, s/he learns more and more about it until s/he has a vague concept of what it means. By the time s/he will be able to define that word. "*Vocabulary knowledge seems to grow gradually moving from the first meaningful exposure to a word to a full and flexible knowledge*" (Stahl, 1999).

However, not every researcher is in favorer of repeated exposures technique. In spite of these supportive results, some other studies raised doubts about its effectiveness. Hall (1992) for instance, found that there is a low correlation (.36) between number of exposure to the word and their retention. Zahar, Cobb, and Spada (2001) as

cited by Joe (2010), conducted an investigation in order to have a comparison between the quality (richness of context) and quantity of vocabulary encounters in input, which concluded that there is no such a reliable evidence showing that rich, directive contexts led to greater vocabulary enhancement. Similarly, Nagy et al (1985) insists that even in a single exposure to a word, a "substantial if partial" knowledge can be acquired.

3. Methodology

3.1. Method and design
The method of this study is quasi-experimental in nature, and the data are gathered in quantitative form.

3.2. Participants
23 staff of Chabahar port and maritime organization with maritime educational background participated in this study, as a maritime ESP course. Their national language was Persian, and their English language competency was at the low-intermediate level.

3.3. Instruments
Instruments required for this study consists of two phrase lists of A and B, as well as some relevant sources, as it will be explained in procedure section.

3.4. Procedure
As the first step, the participants were taken a general English test in order to make sure that their English proficiency levels are almost in the same range. This test was simply an interview and a simple speaking as well as a sentence writing test.

Then 14 technical and semi-technical phrases in relation to Maritime English was selected and divided in two different lists of A and B. the selected phrases were not very common, so they were expected to be new for the participants.

A. Pretest: the participants were taken a pretest of the two phrase lists of A and B in order to know the number of already known phrases among the participants.

B. Treatment: the treatment was done as a part of the maritime ESP course which took 8 sessions. Among the other activities of the class for the rest subject matters of the course, the participants were told to repeat the phrase in the list A, only once per session. But the phrases of list B were instructed in a different way. In each session they were given some short texts from textbooks, magazines, websites as well as newspaper headlines, graph explanations, etc. in which the phrases of list B appear. The frequency

of their occurrence kept equal to the number of repetition for the items of list A, I.e. 8 times for the whole period of the treatment.

C. Posttest: the aims of this study were to evaluate the effects of different treatments on growth of receptive (passive) vocabulary knowledge rather than active one. Therefor the participants in posttest were given the list of instructed phrases and were asked to write down their translation in their first language. The number of correct answers in any of A and B lists reveals the effectiveness of their related method of treatment.

4. Data analysis and discussions

4.1. Data analysis

Step 1. First, homogeneity of previous vocabulary knowledge of the participants for two different lists of phrases (A0 and B0) was checked, based on the pretest and a comparison between the related results of two different phrase lists.

Table 4.1: Paired Samples Statistics

pretest results for A0 and B0 phrase lists

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	A0-	.571	7	.78680	.29738
	B0	.428	7	.53452	.20203

Table 4.2: Paired Samples Test

pretest results for A0 and B0 phrase lists

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	.1428	.69007	.26082	-.49535	.78106	.548	6	.604

As it is in the Table 4.2, the mean difference of the two lists is 0.1428 which is not magnificent. Also the P value shown in the same table is 0.604 which is higher than 0.05. This means that the difference between the number of the known phrases among the two lists of A and B is insignificant. In other words, the vocabulary background knowledge of the participants is almost the same as far as these two lists of phrases are concerned. Therefore, it could be concluded that the chosen phrases are appropriate for the purpose of this study.

Step 2. Now the progress of the all participants in each of the two phrase lists is calculated.

Table 4.3: Paired Samples Test

Posttest results of passive vocabulary growth in A1 and B1 phrase lists

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	A1-A0	9.714	2.05866	.77810	7.81034	11.61823	12.485	6	.000
Pair 2	B1-B0	7.857	1.21499	.45922	6.73347	8.98082	17.110	6	.000

The very low amount of P value (0.000) in the Table 4.3 Implies that the growth in vocabulary knowledge of participants for both lists of phrases are significant, and the high amount of mean differences between pretests and posttests indicate the relative effectiveness of both methods.

Step 3. In this step we need to compute the latent variables of diffA and diffB, in which diffA = A1-A0 (the results of posttest minus the results of pretest for phrase list which was instructed through rote learning), and similarly diffB= B1-B0 (the results of posttest minus the results of pretest for phrase list which was instructed through exposures). Then the outcomes of the two methods were compared.

Table 4.4: Paired Samples Statistics

the passive outcomes of the two techniques

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	diffB1	9.714	7	2.05866	.77810
	diffB2	7.857	7	1.21499	.45922

Table 4.5: Paired Samples Test

The passive outcomes of the two techniques

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	diffB1 - diffB2	1.85714	1.57359	.59476	.40181	3.31247	3.122	6	.021

The P value of 0.021 in the table 4.5 which is lower than 0.05, expressed that the difference between the outcomes of two techniques is significant. The higher mean in the table 4.3 is 9.714 which is belongs to rote learning. This indicates that multiple exposures techniques does not result in a higher passive vocabulary growth, in case of phrase learning, compared with rote learning. In other words, rote learning proved to be more effective in phrase learning, if the ultimate purpose of learning gaining only passive vocabulary knowledge.
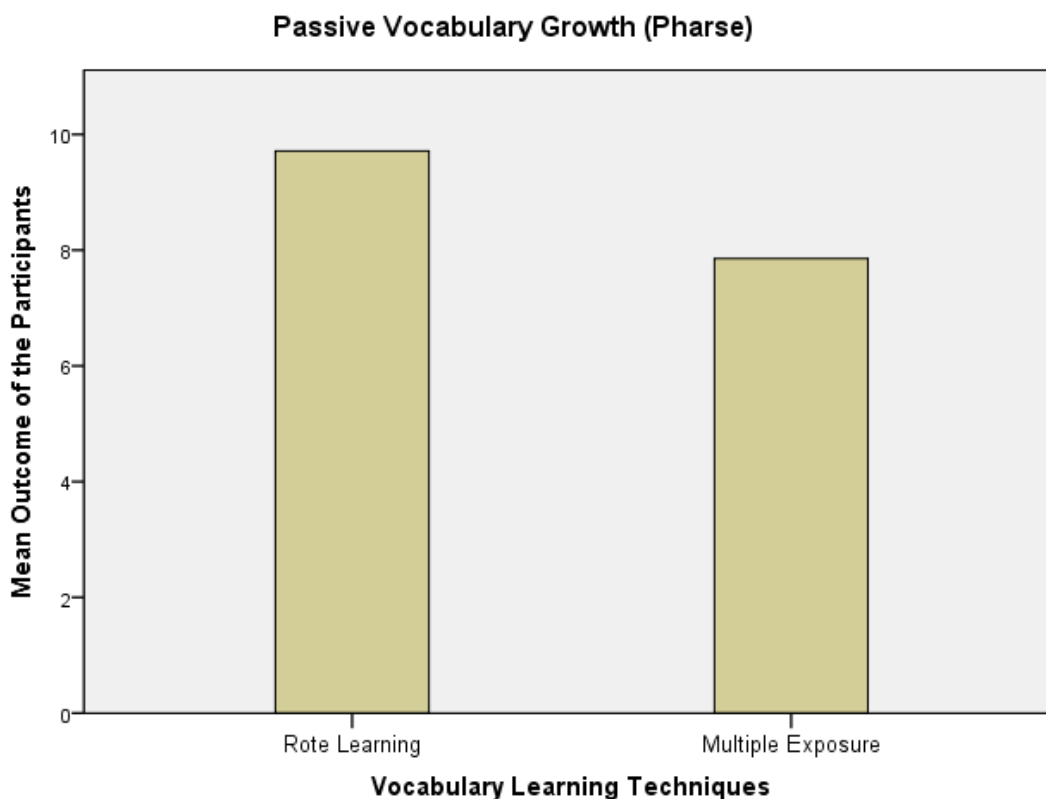
Figure 1: Mean differences in Passive Vocabulary Growth -Phrases

4.2. Discussions

Khoshsima and Raeissi (2016) proved the significant superiority of rote on multiple exposures in the case of single word learning for the purpose of passive knowledge for Iranian EFL learners in their study. More or less the same result is found in this study which deals with the case of phrase learning for the purpose of passive knowledge. However, this does not mean that being phrase or single word has no effect on the function of these two techniques of vocabulary learning. The mean differences in the research of Khoshsima and Raeissi (2016) which dealt with learning single words through the same techniques, was 2.230, while for the current study which about phrase learning it is as low as 1.857. This difference in mean results of the two studies reveals that multiple exposures technique is more effective in learning phrases compared with single words learning; although this difference may not be large enough.

In other words, contextualization may not play a fundamental role in growing passive vocabulary knowledge; however, its positive effect is not ignorable. It seems that when two or three words come together as a phrase, they would naturally create an internal contextualization; each word helps remembrance of the rest, and serves as a clue for retention the meaning of the whole phrase.

5. Conclusion

Rote learning proved to be more effective than multiple exposures for the purpose of learning passive vocabulary knowledge in case of phrase learning. This is similar to what it was found in the case of learning single word with the same technique in other studies. However, it was also revealed that the effectiveness of multiple exposures increases where the vocabulary items are phrases rather than single words. This in fact indicates the importance of internal contextualization.

The main implication of this study is that rote learning still has its advantage in some specific cases of vocabulary learning, despite several criticisms. Therefore, it is not wise to discard this traditional method of classroom learning activities thoroughly.

For the future studies, it is recommended that the two different techniques of this study should be evaluated in cases of learning vocabulary for active knowledge rather than passive one.

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