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## **The Impact of Translation Method on Word Meaning and Fill-In-the-Blank Tests Procedures on Short-Term and Long-Term Retention of Vocabulary Items**

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# The Impact of Translation Method on Word Meaning and Fill-In-the-Blank Tests Procedures on Short-Term and Long-Term Retention of Vocabulary Items

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## Abstract

The purpose of research described in the present study to investigate the impact of translation method on word meaning and fill-in-the-blank tests, their correlation, and procedures on both short-term and long-term retention of vocabulary items. The current study explores the relations between the methods of language teaching (here, translation method) and type of tests (here, word meaning and Fill-in-the-blank tests). The paper presents a vocabulary knowledge scale and scores the learners' learnt vocabularies as achievement test. The population for subject recruitment was all under graduate students at the second semester in a large university in Iran (both male and female) who study English as a compulsory paper. In Iran, English is taught as a foreign language.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary acquisition, translation method, retention

## 1. Introduction

The crucial role lexis plays in second language learning and teaching has been repeatedly acknowledged in theoretical and empirical second language acquisition vocabulary research. Joe (1994) emphasized the importance of vocabulary learning by mentioning "one cannot communicate or apply grammatical and phonological rules without having first developed a core vocabulary." Similarly, it is stated that "lexical knowledge is known to be an absolutely crucial factor across the whole spectrum of L2 activities" (Singleton, 1999). This same idea is also found in Henriksen, Albrechtsen and Hasstrup (2004), Kelly (1991), Linnarud (1986) and meara (1996) who points out the lexical competence is "at the core of communicative competence."

Although there seems to be a growing acceptance among SLA researchers that vocabulary is a crucial component of overall communicative competence (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997), it is an area that is often neglected both in and outside the classroom and there is still remains an enormous amount of research to be done in the area, as it is still far from clear how learners acquire (Paribakhht & Weche, 1997). In fact, the acquisition of new lexical item is a complex process (Eliss, Tanaka and Yamazaki, 1994).

Nowadays, it is widely accepted that vocabulary teaching should be part of the syllabus and taught on a well-planned and regular basis (Lewis, 1993, 1996), but the controversial problem arises as to the type of test of knowledge of vocabulary which is proposed to be done in order to evaluate and score the vocabulary learning of learners.

The two of dimensional views of vocabulary learning are:

1. Vocabulary size (breadth of one's word knowledge or quantity of words),
2. Vocabulary depth (richness or quality about particular words or phrases).

The focus on each of these views will define the preparation of teacher training programs, Curriculum development, material preparation and syllabus design.

The present work focuses on the relationship between vocabulary size and application of Fill-in-the-blank test to estimate the correlation between them in order to apply such a test. Through the present study, investigators aim to show the impact of translation method on word meaning and Fill-in-the-blank tests and their correlation on short-term and long-term retention *in the condition that learners were not allowed to guess or randomly answer the questions.*

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Participants**

The population for subject recruitment was all undergraduate students from second semester at a large University in Iran in academic year 2008-2009, who volunteered to participate in this study. The participants were 53 (29 male and 24 female). They were told that this study would not affect the final results of their course.

### **2.2 Instrumentation**

The following instruments were used in the current study:

- a) Questionnaire elicited information regarding demographic profile of the respondents (e.g. age, sex etc.).
- b) Materials which are prepared for the treatment phase.
- c) Materials which are developed as pre-test and post-test that related to materials of treatment and to test learners' performance on vocabulary retention.
- d) Proficiency test in order to homogenize recruitment of the population of learners regarding to their English knowledge.

### **2.3 Procedure**

#### **2.3.1 Questionnaire**

The questionnaires were distributed two weeks before the treatment in order to elicit information regarding the demographic profile of the respondents. The students completed answering the questionnaires in the class and returned the forms to the lecturer. The needed details of the questionnaire were explained by the lecturer.

### **2.3.2 Proficiency Test**

The Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency was used to determine the level of the students' English proficiency one week before the test designed for this paper. It was estimated as 6.

### **2.3.3 Pre-testing**

Sixty printed words on single paper were given to 90 students and the students were asked to write the meaning of any word in Persian as L1 (as mother tongue), if they know. 15 out of 60 words that were completely unknown to the students were chosen. These fifteen words include nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs and they again reprint on other particular paper.

Regarding the fifteen chosen words, fifteen unseen sentences were developed for each of them. One lexical item was left out, which should be completed with one of the words. This in fact was the Fill-in-the-blank test. These fifteen sentences were printed on a single paper that included meaning of all English words in L1 in the bottom of the page (except 15 unknown words). The structure of all fifteen sentences was easy to understand by the students.

The students, who were asked to participate in the pilot study in order to choose 15 out of 60 words, to estimate reliability of word meaning and Fill-in-the-blank tests, were from the same academic year, university and grouping majors as the experimental group. The order administration of pre-test was firstly the word-meaning test and then Fill-in-the-blank test.

Before the students received any instruction, the word meaning test and Fill-in-the-blank test in the aforementioned order were taken by the students. In the word meaning test, the students were asked to write the meaning of English words in L1. After collecting the test papers of this test, the Fill-in-the-blank test papers were distributed. In this test, students were asked to complete any one of the fifteen sentences with one of fifteen given words. They were also asked to write the meaning of the sentence in L1 after completion to show that they do not use guess technique and randomly answer the questions.

### **2.3.4 Treatment**

In the current study, immediately after pre-test, the printed text on a single paper that included those fifteen unknown words was given to the students. The students were taught the text through Translation Method. The focus was on those fifteen words. Enough time was given to practice text and if the students have any question to ask.

### 2.3.5 Post-testing (immediate and delayed tests)

In post-testing, the same tests in pre-testing in the same order were administered, but such administration occurred in two steps. The first step was immediately after finishing the main test, and the second step was administered two weeks later (as a delayed post test). The students were not aware about pre-testing and post-testing.

### 2.3.6 Scoring procedure

In the word-meaning test, each of correct answer is scored as one point and in Fill-in-the-blank test, each correct answer that has the meaning of the sentence in L1, is scored as one point. Otherwise even the guess or random correct answers were not accepted, as was told to the student before the beginning the test.

### 2.3.7 Data Analysis

In this study, analysis of obtained data was performed using the SPSS software version 16, T-test was used to test the research through the vocabulary gain score of the sample.

## 3. Results

Table 1 displays mean, standard deviation and standard error mean for pre-testing of both word meaning test and Fill-in-the-blank test. The result 'zero' for both tests in such table shows us that the students do not know the meaning of the words and in Fill-in-the-blank test, although they were told the meaning of all words of all fifteen sentences (except 15 unknown words), they cannot answer the test.

**Table 1**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 pretest vocabulary meaning	.0000 <sup>a</sup>	53	.00000	.00000
pretest fill in the blank	.0000 <sup>a</sup>	53	.00000	.00000

a. The correlation and t cannot be computed because the standard error of the difference is 0.

Tables 2, 3 and 4 display mean, standard deviation, standard error mean, the correlation and the significant difference between pre-test word meaning test and immediate post-test word meaning test. Such tables show the meaningful of teaching.

**Table 2**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 pretest vocabulary meaning	.0000	53	.00000	.00000
Imm. posttest vocabulary meaning	6.1698	53	3.05549	.41970

**Table 3**

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 pretest vocabulary meaning & Imm. posttest vocabulary meaning	53		

**Table 4**

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 pretest vocabulary meaning – Imm. posttest vocabulary meaning	-6.16981	3.05549	.41970	-7.01201	-5.32762	-14.700	52	.000

Table 5, 6 and 7 display mean, standard deviation, standard error mean, the correlation and the significant difference between Fill-in-the-blank test in both pre-test and immediate post-test to show the effect of teaching on such tests.

**Table 5**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 pretest fill in the blank	.0000	53	.00000	.00000
Imm. posttest fill in the blank	1.3208	53	2.19942	.30211

**Table 6**

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 pretest fill in the blank & Imm. posttest fill in the blank	53		

**Table 7**

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 pretest fill in the blank – Imm. posttest fill in the blank	-1.32075	2.19942	.30211	-1.92699	-.71452	-4.372	52	.000

**Table 8**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair Imm. posttest vocabulary meaning	6.1698	53	3.05549	.41970
Imm. posttest fill in the blank	1.3208	53	2.19942	.30211

Table 8, 9 and 10 display mean, standard deviation, standard error mean, the correlation and the significant difference between word meaning test and Fill-in-the-blank test at immediate post test step.

**Table 9**

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair Imm. posttest vocabulary meaning & Imm. posttest fill in the blank	53	.392	.004

**Table 10**

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair Imm. posttest vocabulary meaning – Imm. posttest fill in the blank	4.84906	2.98326	.40978	4.02677	5.67135	11.833	52	.000

Table 11, 12 and 13 display mean, standard deviation , standard error mean, the correlation and the significant difference between word mean test and fill-in-the-blank test at delayed past test step.

**Table 11**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Del posttest vocabulary meaning	2.2453	53	2.49542	.34
Del posttest fill in the blank	.6038	53	1.06228	.14

**Table 12**

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Del posttest vocabulary meaning & Del posttest fill in the blank	53	.001	.9



**Table 13**

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair Del posttest vocabulary meaning - Del posttest fill in the blank	1.64151	2.71105	.37239	.89425	2.38877	4.408	52	.000

#### 4. Discussion

Firstly, it should be mentioned that the students were taught to practice their lessons productively and were asked not to answer the question without a relevant semantic reason. In fact, such strategy was applied for them to avoid guess and answer the questions randomly. Secondly, in word meaning, Fill-in-the-blank tests, and the text, the core meaning sense of words were suggested to be the correct answer (Carter, 1998).

The analysis of the data indicates the following results:

- a. In meaningful learning to answer Fill-in-the-blank test, it is necessary to learn the essential meaning of words and guess cannot be the meaningful technique to answer; in other words, students should avoid guessing the real meaning. In testing, such factor should be applied to evaluate and score the answers of the learners.
- b. Word meaning knowledge only cannot help the students to answer the Fill-in-the-blank test and some other knowledge and skills are essential to arrive at the answer in the Fill-in-the-blank test. Therefore, it is impossible to have correct evaluation of students' performance. So the syllabus design should reflect this need.
- c. The L1 translation in language teaching cannot help the students to be successful in Fill-in-the-blank test of vocabulary for both short and long retention. Translation method is not so much helpful when the test would be in Fill-in-the-blank; in other words, Fill-in-the-blank test may not be used if the syllabus design employs the translation method.
- d. The L1 translation method in language teaching can be a successful method when the type of test would be word meaning knowledge and in fact the results of such method correlate to the memorization of words.
- e. The L1 translation cannot affect the learning for long term retention.
- f. Memorization of meaning of words could not increase the results when the base is meaningful learning.
- g. The L1 translation method in language teaching is not successful in meaningful learning.

#### 5. Conclusion and areas for further research

The current study suggests that the type of pedagogical approach of the L2 vocabulary learning may have an impact on retention of new L2 words. The findings clearly demonstrate some results that can be applied in the preparation of teacher training programs, curriculum Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

development, material preparation, syllabus design. and for the preparation of tests given to the learners in order to score their knowledge of vocabulary as achievement test. It will also help make suitable comparison between the aspects of vocabulary size, depth of processing and degree of organization with their pre- and post levels.

Further research is needed to better determine the strength of the association among other strategies regarding such study. A future agenda for vocabulary learning researchers should specifically and thoroughly address questions relating to the methods and techniques to be applied to teach and assess the vocabulary knowledge better and help the learners' that help better retention.

## **6. Pedagogical implication and recommendations**

Implications for vocabulary learning from this study include the following:

- a. The type of methods of teaching of materials such as vocabularies should be correlated with the type of test.
- b. The knowledge of the meaning of words should not be the goal of teaching words and these should be interconnected with other aspects of vocabulary learning.
- c. The L1 translation method cannot be helpful in meaningful learning.

Along with recycling and review techniques to improve recognition and prediction skills, reassessing of learning must be done regularly with frequent individual feedback to maximize acquisition. Better analysis and activation are required to improve learners' understanding of words.

## **7. Limitations**

Although this study clearly contributes to our understanding of impact of L1 translation method on word meaning and Fill-in-the-blank tests and their correlation regarding vocabulary learning, there are limitations to consider. Firstly, the focus of the study was on testing for statistical significance. Future research should consider mixed design or studies that examine qualitative aspects of the topic. Secondly, the frequency of the vocabulary is another area.

Several of the limitations of this study are common to other studies in the field: the need for a large n-size; need to conduct similar experiments with different populations and proficiency levels and so on.

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