

LEXIS DEVELOPMENT: THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXTUAL CLUES

Dr. Awwad Osman Abdelaziz Ahmed

Assistant Professor of Linguistics, Department of Foreign Languages,
College of Arts, Taif University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Lexis development has become an important part of second language acquisition. Students need to be taught vocabulary in context so that they can retain the words and use them frequently.

The present study is carefully designed to gain insight into the effects of context on lexis learning. It reflects that illustrations of words in various sentences are more helpful to students than lexical explanations. Therefore, the researcher suggests that the best way of teaching new words is to put them into a variety of defining contexts. In this way, students can master various syntactic and semantic uses of words in authentic English sentences. Some important strategies and techniques that can help facilitate the acquisition and development of English lexis are investigated.

Keywords: Lexis, contextual clues, second language acquisition, defining context

1. Introduction

1.0 Background

One of the greatest problems confronting advanced foreign students when reading material written in English is a heavy load of difficult words and expressions that do not retain even after they have read them and checked their meanings in dictionaries many times. It seems that although their vocabulary developed quickly in the early stages of their study of English, now it has come to a standstill. Little wonder that instead of enjoying reading they often find it a meaningless and boring activity.

Some students read without any specific method for remembering new words. They do not pay particular attention to difficult words and structures, but skip over expressions they cannot understand or are afraid to grapple with. Once they have finished a book, they do not go through it again to figure out the meanings of the words that they did not know. As a result

they are dissatisfied with the meager understanding that they have gained from their reading.

To tackle these problems, the researcher would describe some procedures that might be helpful for learning lexis in different contexts. Vocabulary knowledge is an important element in second language (L2) acquisition. By learning new words, students can increase their listening, speaking, reading and writing vocabularies and can improve comprehension and production in L2. A student can increase vocabulary meanings in different contexts.

1.1 Hypotheses

This study addresses the following hypotheses

1-Contexts have a significant effect on gaining knowledge of word meaning.

2-Students frequently look up a word in a dictionary whenever they come across a new one.

3-If unknown words appear in less informative or misleading large contexts, it may take learners much longer to gain knowledge of meaning.

1.2 Definition of Terms

1-Learning context: refers to the "learning environment and includes the teachers, the peers, the classroom climate or ethos, the family support, the social, cultural tradition of learning, the curriculum, and the availability of input and output opportunities" (Gu 2003:2).

2-Language context: refers to the textual or discoursal place in which a particular word or structure can be found.

2. Literature Review

Mastery of vocabulary is an essential component of second language acquisition. Effective L2 vocabulary acquisition is particularly important for foreign language learners who frequently acquire improvised lexicons despite years of formal study (Hunt, Begar 2005: 1). Today's language teachers and researchers have realized the important role of vocabulary in different pedagogical tasks. There is no doubt that virtually all L2 learners and their teachers are well aware of the fact that learning a L2 involves the learning of large numbers of words (Avila, Sadoski 1996, Laufer, Hulstijn 2001), yet how to accomplish this task is often of considerable concern to them (Ott, Blake, Butler 1976: 37). How vocabulary is acquired and what the most efficient means are to promote effective acquisition are well established lines of enquiry in the field of second language acquisition (De La Fuente 2002: 82).

The acquisition of a new lexical item is a complex process. Ellis, Tanaka and Yamazadi (1994: 457) argue that vocabulary acquisition involves discovering the frequency with which the item is used in speech and writing, its situational and functional uses, its syntactic behaviour, its underlying form and the forms that can be derived from it, the network of associations between it and other items, its semantic features and of course, the various meanings associated with the item. Due to this complexity, research on L2 acquisition encompasses a number of different and diverse sub-areas, for example, how words are stored in the mental lexicon, automaticity of retrieved, the role of vocabulary in reading comprehension, the role of background knowledge, the implications of L2 vocabulary acquisition for L1 vocabulary and how words are learned in contexts.

However significant lexical knowledge and vocabulary acquisition may be, the techniques and strategies recommended in this field remain challenging (Newton 2001: 30, Mohseni-Far 2006: 149). Although researchers and language teachers are becoming more and more convinced that vocabulary knowledge constitutes an essential part of competence in an L2, so far no comprehensive theories have been proposed to explain foreign language growth in terms of lexical development in vocabulary acquisition. Consensus is still lacking over issues such as the conceptualization of the process by which vocabulary acquisition occurs, the importance of context for acquiring vocabulary, and the extent to which learners build up specific strategies for vocabulary learning during their language acquisition.

Lawson and Hogben (1996: 106) suggest that from a psychological as well as a linguistic point of view, underlying the first guideline would be the need for vocabulary to be learned in context. Activities and reading materials that present words in meaningful contexts may contribute to vocabulary gains and are valued highly by students (Zimmerman 1997: 136).

The study of lexis is the central business of lexicology. Richard (1982: 165) defines lexicology as

... the study of vocabulary items (lexemes) of a language, including their meanings and relations, and changes in their form and meaning through time.

From the above definition, the following are made clear:

1-Words are usually studied through their meanings and their relation to one another in a particular situation of usage.

2-They are also studied through their form through time.

The study of how meaning is encoded is the main business of semantics and its concern is with meaning of words as lexical items. Meaning, according to Widdowson (1990: 18) is

...not only concern with words, but it figures at levels of language below the word and above it. A language

contains within itself the dynamic potential for change. Its signs are arbitrary, and can therefore provide for abstraction: they enable us to set up conceptual categories to define our own world. It is this, which enables human being to be productive (creative) rather than reactive; language does not just reflect or record reality, but creates it.

From what Widdowson has stated above the following could be pinpointed:

1-The meaning of a lexical item is affected by such factors which can be general or specific.

2-Meaning is (sometimes) inborn and it is intrinsic to the nature of a language.

3-The meaning could be lexical, structural and contextual. So, meaning changes according to the situation and the subject in question.

4-Through meaning a word could be defined, learners could be creative rather than just reacting.

5-The lexical items of a language are abstracted to be ready to express any idea or concept. This abstraction helps language users to be creative rather than recording an already existing reality of concepts.

6-The fact that the lexical items of a language are abstract, on the other hand, complicates meaning. In other words, the meaning of a word would not be fixed; the word gets its meaning according to the context in which it occurs.

Yule (1996: 114) says in that respect of meaning

When linguists investigate the meaning of words in a language, they are normally interested in characterizing the conceptual meaning and less concerned with the associative or stylistic meaning of words. Conceptual meaning covers those basic, essential components of meaning which are conveyed by the literal use of words, some of the basic components of a word like needle in English might indicate thin, sharp, steel instrument. These components would be part of the conceptual meaning of needle. However, you may have associations or connections attached to a word like needle, which lead you to think of painful whenever you encounter the word. This association is not treated as part of the conceptual meaning of needle. Poets and advertisers are, of course, very interested in using terms such a way that their associative meanings are evoked, and some linguists do investigate this aspect of language use.

According to what Yule has mentioned above, it is clear that lexical items have two kinds of meaning:

1-Conceptual meaning: the basic meaning of a lexical item; its denotative meaning.

2-Associative meaning: the meaning that a lexical item has according to the situation of use. This kind of meaning is used to provoke the interest of the reader or the listener. The main concern of linguists is the conceptual meaning while the associative meaning gains little attention, but investigated by linguists as well. The use comes first and the meaning is distilled out of it.

Widdowson (1990: 100) advocates and shares the same idea of Ullman and says:

Every linguistic expressions contains the potential for a multiplicity of meanings and which one is realized on a particular occasion is determined by non-linguistic factors of context. The word's meanings change continually to suit the circumstances in which they are used.

It is obvious that from the above quotation, a word has multitudes of meanings, only the use could decide which one of them is meant. The context decides a particular or whichever meaning could be linguistic or non-linguistic.

From modern linguists, as far as meaning is concerned, there are two types of words: opaque and transparent. Opaque words are difficult to understand, while transparent ones maintain different meanings and are relatively easier than the opaque.

Vallins (1976: 6) gives a full account of the lexical categories of the English language. He reports

...the most important lexical categories are noun, verb, adjective, adverb and adposition which subsumes prepositions and postpositions.

Nouns can be classified in a number of ways. There is a great variety of nouns that refer uniquely to particular entities or individuals and are called proper nouns. Nouns which do not refer to unique individuals or entities are called common nouns which can be divided into mass nouns and count nouns. Verbs are either transitive or intransitive.. Adjectives express the properties of entities. They tell us about the characteristics of these entities. Adverbs have various types among them adverbs of manner and time. Adverbs are sometimes used as nouns. They function as nouns rather than adverbs.

In brief, the main categories of English lexemes are nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, besides the minor categories, which comprise the

determiners, demonstratives and conjunctions. Learners need to understand these if they are to deal with lexis of a language.

Knowledge of lexical roots (etymological information and morphological origins) can assist in vocabulary development in that it helps learners predict or guess what a word means, elucidate why a word is spelt the way it is, and remember the word by knowing how its current meaning develops from its morphological roots. Learners should learn to identify morphemes, which recur in a number of words that can help them to identify at least part of the meaning, thus assisting them in guessing from context the meaning of apparently new items (Rivers 1981: 456). Contextual information and word morphology (e.g. word roots, affixes, and inflectional suffixes) are two major sources that readers use to interpret novel words (Mori 2003: 404).

Although most words can be decomposed into root words, prefixes, and suffixes, the degree to which these components specify the meaning of the whole varies widely. Shu et al. (1995: 80) introduce two major categories of words. First, the meaning of some words can easily be determined on the basis of the constituent morphemes or 'word parts' with little or no help from context (morphologically transparent words). Second, extreme words for which the components contribute almost nothing to the meaning (morphologically opaque words). In general, most words fall in between; although their meanings cannot be derived solely on the basis of word parts, their meanings are likely to be clear when they appear in even moderately helpful contexts.

A learner needs three skills in order to make use of affixation: breaking a new word into parts so that the affixes and roots are revealed; knowing the meaning of the parts; and being able to connect the meaning of the parts with the meaning of the word. The learner needs to know the most useful word parts of English (20 or so high-frequency prefixes and suffixes are enough initially), needs to be able to recognize them in their various forms when they occur in words and needs to be able to relate the meanings of the parts to the meaning or definition (Nation, Meara 2002: 46).

The linguistic context of a lexical item can often distinguish between the different meanings of that lexical item. Richards and et al. (1986: 61) explains context as follows:

...that which occurs before and/ or after a word, a phrase or even a longer utterance or a text. The context often helps in understanding the particular meaning of the word, phrase etc. For example, the word loud in loud music is usually understood as meaning noisy whereas in a tie with a loud pattern it is understood as unpleasantly colourful. The context may also be the broader social

situation in which a linguistic item is used. For example, in ordinary usage, spinster refers to an old unmarried woman but in legal context, it refers to any unmarried woman.

It is important to make sure that students can use the words they learn in acceptable contexts because words come to life only when they are used in the situations representing the cultural ethos of the language under use.

Illustrations of words in various sentences are more helpful to students than lexical explanations. Therefore, the best way of teaching new words is to put them into a variety of defining contexts. In this way, students can master various syntactic and semantic uses of words in authentic, correct English sentences. It is useless to drill students on mere lists of words and uncontextualized exercises if the main objective is to lead them gradually to mastery of vocabulary and correct usage. Some textbooks contain exercises such as giving synonyms, antonyms, definitions of words, or translating words into a given language or changing the meaning of a word by adding a prefix or a suffix. These are of very little help, as they tend to be simply mechanical. On the other hand, exercises such as 'Choose the correct expression among given ones to fit into given sentences, illustrating its various meanings and grammatical functions', 'Use given words and expressions' and so on, are very helpful, as they are generally done in contexts. Moreover, such exercises have many other advantages: they sharpen students' minds and make them aware of their own errors in the use of words; they help learners to discriminate between different meanings; and they facilitate the retention of expressions. They also help the teacher not only to test students' real comprehension of vocabulary but also to correct grammatical usage of new words and phrases.

It is evident that many words can be learned from the contexts in which they are used. This is especially true for native speakers who, in addition to being in permanent contact with their language and its culture, have generally developed many reading skills in the language. But for foreigners, it is not all that easy to infer meaning from contexts. They may be ignorant of the cultural, geographical, historical, social, and technical contexts that help the reader deduce the meanings of difficult words. They may be unacquainted with the (foreign) logical sequencing of ideas and with the structures that link sentences, so that they cannot concentrate at the same time on the meanings of difficult words and the sequence of ideas.

Research on dictionary use shows that most learners do not make use of the most of this information, and that they have not usually studied the introduction to the dictionary which explains how to make the best use of such information (Bejoint, 1981). In order to do something about this, some publishers of dictionaries for second language learners have published

accompanied booklets to guide learners. (Underhill, 1980). The best dictionaries for productive purposes are monolingual-that is, the meaning and extra information is given in the same language as the word. There is a need for productive bilingual dictionaries (Tomaszczyk, 1981) where learners can look up a word by beginning with a word in their mother tongue and then find an English word with information about its grammar, collocation, etc., to guide its use.

Once learners know around two or three thousand words, they can use the reading skills they have developed to infer the meanings of unknown words that they meet (Nation: 180). Some readers can do this without any particular training, but those who cannot do it can easily be taught a strategy, which will quickly enable them to guess most of unknown words they meet.

Clark's and Nation's (1980) strategy begins by getting the learner to look closely at the unknown word, next to look at its immediate context, and then to take a much broader view of how the clause containing the word relates to other clauses, sentences, or paragraphs. After guessing, there is a simple system of checks to make sure that the guess is the best possible. Once learners have mastered the steps of the strategy and have practiced guessing words by systematically going through the steps, it is no longer necessary to apply all the steps. That is, the strategy is just a means of acquiring the unconscious skill that an efficient reader has. This strategy works as follows:

1-Look at the unknown word and decide its part of speech. Is it a noun, a verb, an adjective, or an adverb?

2-Look at the clause or sentence containing the unknown word. If the unknown word is a verb, what nouns does it go with?

Is it modified by an adverb?

If it is an adjective, what noun does it go with?

If it is an adverb, what verb is it modifying?

3-Look at the relationship between the clause or sentence containing the unknown word and other sentences or paragraphs. Sometimes this relationship will be signaled by a conjunction like but, because, if, when, or by an adverb like however, as a result. Punctuation may also serve as a clue. Semi-colons often signal a list of inclusion relationships, dashes may signal a list of inclusion relationships; dashes may signal restatement. Reference words like this, that, and such also provide useful information.

Experience has shown that using affixes and roots alone as a means of guessing meanings is not very reliable. Also, once a word has been analyzed according to its parts, this guess at its meaning is more likely to result in twisting the interpretation of the context than allowing interpretation of the context to modify the guess of the meaning (Nation: 163). So, by leaving the use of affixes and root until the last step in the strategy, the

learner is more likely to approach interpretation of the context with an open mind. This is an application to the strategy to guess the meanings of two infrequent words. The following paragraph is taken from Mackin and Carver (1968: 45-50)

{Chinese spectacles} were regarded as objects of reverence because the rims of tortoise-shell came from a sacred and symbolic animal, and the lenses were made from sacred stones. People wore them at first not so much to aid eyeside, or for curing eye-ailments, as for good luck, or the dignity which they bestowed on the wearer. Sometimes even empty frames worn as a mark of distinction.

reverence

Step (1) *reverence* is a noun

Step (2) spectacles are objects of reverence. If, because of the –ence suffix, we guess that *revere* might be a verb, we could say

People revere spectacles.

Step (3) because indicates a cause-effect relationship. The causes are the rims of tortoise-shell that came from a sacred and a symbolic animal and the lenses were made from sacred stones. The effects that are Chinese spectacles were regarded as objects of reverence.

Step (4) *reverence* seems related to sacred and symbolic so, it probably means something like religion or holiness.

Step (5)

- a. Like reverence, religion and holiness are nouns.
- b. Spectacles were regarded as objects of holiness. Spectacles were regarded as objects of religion. The first substitution seems the best.
- c. re-ver- -ence indicates that the word is a noun. The prefix and root do not help at all (Nation: 163).

The dictionary says that reverence means feelings of deep respect. Holiness is close enough to this: ninety-five percent is correct.

bestowed

Step (1) bestowed is a verb.

Step (2) Spectacles bestow dignity on the wearer.

Step (3) or indicates that there are alternatives. The other alternatives are good luck, and curing eye-ailments which are desirable things, so we can conclude that bestowing dignity is also a desirable thing.

Step (4) bestowed probably means gave or put.

Step (5)

- a. gave and put are verbs.
- b. Spectacles put dignity on the wearer. Spectacles gave dignity on the wearer. Except for the awkwardness of on, both words seem suitable.

c. be- -stow- -ed. No help here.

The dictionary gives put, place: hundred percent is correct.

The errors that learners make when guessing words from context give interesting insights into their grasp of the strategy and also into difficulties they encounter while reading. One of the commonest errors in using the strategy was to guess a meaning that was a different part of speech from the word in the passage. Failure to understand the context produced some errors.

Bright and McGregor (1970: 31) say

...perhaps the most important thing of all is to remember that the ability to infer in this way is a skill that can only be acquired by practice. Every time we tell a pupil what a word means we are robbing him of a chance to practice this skill.

The various steps needed in the strategy-namely part of speech, immediate context, wider context, word parts-can be practiced separately before being combined into a strategy (Long & Nation, 1980). So the learners can practice recognizing the part of speech of various words in context. They can do the does what? exercises with various nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs in a text. In this exercise the teacher gives the learners a word and the line number of what word in the text. The learners must ask themselves questions like "What does what?", "Who does what?" if the word is a noun or verb, or "What is what?" if it is an adjective or "What does what how?" if it is an adverb. They answer these questions by reference to the text. The learners can also practice using the wider context as a separate exercise by analyzing sentences to find the conjunction relationships.

The guessing strategy can be used in cooperative class exercises or for individual work such as homework (Nation: 165). When the strategy is being introduced, the teacher can demonstrate the steps to the learners using a word from the passage. The steps are put up on the board. Then one word is chosen from the passage for the whole class to guess. The teacher then calls on different learners to do each step. So, one learner has the task of saying what part of speech the word is, and then another looks at the immediate grammar of the word, and so on. After doing few words like this the learners can work in pairs and then on their own.

When the learners work in pairs, they work on the steps together and then describe the steps to the rest of the class. The teacher gives them a percentage grade for correctness.

Guessing words in context leads on to dictionary work. Unless the learners already have a reasonable idea of what a word means, they will be unable to choose the most suitable meaning from those given in the dictionary.

Since teachers and researchers have come to understand the role of the lexicon in language learning and communication, the increased attention to lexis development has become more important. However significant lexical knowledge and vocabulary development may be, the techniques and strategies, recommended in this field, remain challenging.

The researcher has reviewed literature that is related to these procedures in terms of how words are learned in context from books and references together with various internet websites.

3. Methodology

This part describes the methodology that is used to measure the performance of students of foreign languages department in understanding the meaning of lexical items from contexts, without consulting a dictionary. The methodology of this study comprises the subjects, the instrument, the statistical analysis of the data.

The population is selected from Taif University, college of Arts, Department of Foreign Languages. The academic system, which is adopted by this university, is a term system. Each term usually lasts sixteen to seventeen weeks. The instrument, which is employed for the purpose of this study, lasted for four weeks.

The selection of the sample is chosen from the total group of students who represent the community of foreign languages department. The selected students are in the second level, both male and females. They have only studied English for two terms in the Department of Foreign Languages (FLD).

The number of the students who have taken the test from the two campuses: Hawia and Faisalia are (101) boys and (108) girls. So, the total number of the students is (209) .

An achievement lexis test is designed for the purpose of study. (The Appendix 1) of this research includes the test items. This test is administered to the sample of students of foreign languages department to know to what extent students are capable of understanding lexis meaning from short and quite large contexts.

This test contains three parts as follows:

Part (I)

In this part, the students are required to fill each blank with one word only from a set of words.

Part (II)

In each of the contexts, the students read the context carefully, then they guess which of the four choices defines the deleted word correctly. They circle the letter of the correct answer.

Part (III)

In the paragraphs provided, the students try to guess the meaning of the underlined word. They use all the clues that the context provides. They also circle the letter of the best definition.

In all three parts of the test, nouns, verbs and adjectives were selected as target words because they are the most common parts of speech found in natural text. Factors which were considered, when establishing the number of target words were subject fatigue and the time needed to complete the three parts of the test. The experiment is conducted within one 60-minute class period.

The contexts were rated according to the following scale (adapted from Webb, 2007).

1-Extremely unlikely that the target word can be guessed correctly. The text contains no contextual clues and may be misleading.

2-It is unlikely that the exact meaning of the target word can be guessed correctly. However, information in the context may lead to partial knowledge of the target word's meaning.

3-Information in the context may make it possible to infer the meaning of the target word. However, there are a number of choices. Participants may gain partial knowledge.

4-participants have a good chance of inferring the meaning correctly. There are few meanings that are logical apart from the correct meaning. Participants should gain at least partial knowledge.

The comparison of the results obtained from the students in the three parts helps to find out the significance difference. This indicates the effectiveness of the test in meeting the focus of the study, i.e. the importance of contextual clues in understanding lexis meanings.

The statistical method needed for test analysis will be done through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) programme. The researcher used T-Test and ANOVA to test the hypotheses of this study.

4. Data Analysis

In dealing with students' grades, frequency distributions tables are used to present data economically. Other forms of presenting data are graphic display such as histogram frequencies.

The researcher has used indicators of central tendency: the mean, the median, and the mode. In addition to the indicators of variability, in particular, the standard deviation.

Stating the hypotheses :

Null Hypotheses (H_0) : $m_1 = m_2$

Alternative hypotheses (H_a): $m_1 \neq m_2$

Significant level = 0.05

Frequencies

Statistics
Table (4.1)

		part1	part2	part3
N	Valid	210	209	206
	Missing	0	1	4
Mean		1.1857	4.6651	4.2330
Std. Error of Mean		.09520	.18849	.18342
Median		.8836	4.6889	4.1524
Mode		.00	4.00	4.00
Std. Deviation		1.37954	2.72502	2.63264
Variance		1.903	7.426	6.931
Skewness		1.605	-.083	.224
Std. Error of Skewness		.168	.168	.169
Kurtosis		3.007	-1.070	-.567
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.334	.335	.337
Range		7.00	10.00	10.00
Minimum		.00	.00	.00
Maximum		7.00	10.00	10.00
Percentiles	.05	.	.	.
	.95	.	.	.

Table (4.2)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	81	38.6	38.6
	1.00	65	31.0	69.5
	2.00	34	16.2	85.7
	3.00	17	8.1	93.8
	4.00	6	2.9	96.7
	5.00	2	1.0	97.6
	6.00	4	1.9	99.5
	7.00	1	.5	100.0
Total		210	100.0	100.0

Figure (4.1)

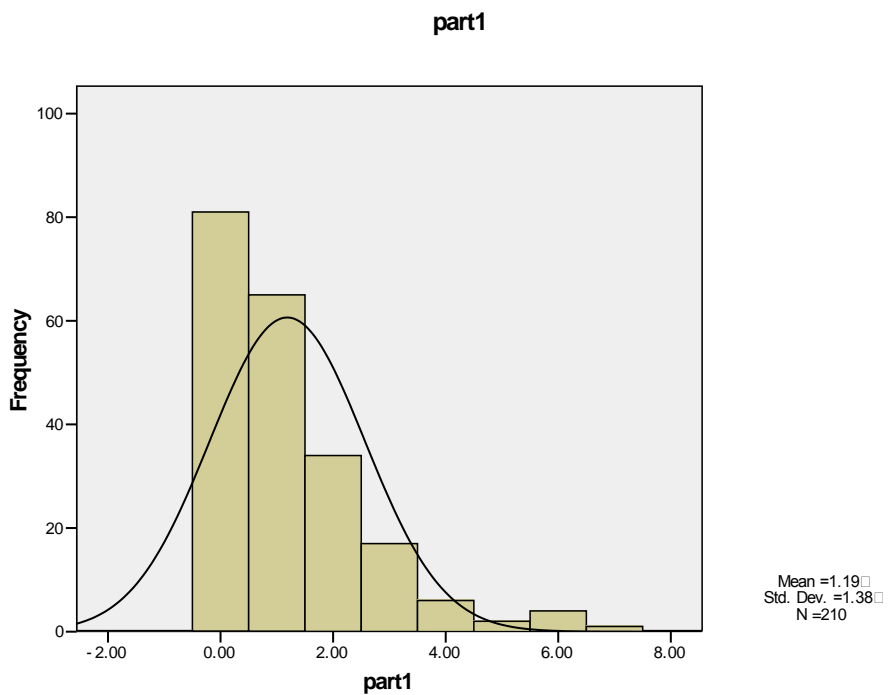


Table (4.3)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	21	10.0	10.0	10.0
	1.00	1	.5	.5	10.5
	2.00	41	19.5	19.6	30.1
	4.00	52	24.8	24.9	55.0
	6.00	38	18.1	18.2	73.2
	8.00	52	24.8	24.9	98.1
	10.00	4	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	209	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.5		
Total		210	100.0		

part3

Table (4.4)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	24	11.4	11.7
	2.00	46	21.9	34.0
	4.00	58	27.6	62.1
	6.00	47	22.4	85.0
	8.00	22	10.5	95.6
	10.00	9	4.3	100.0
	Total	206	98.1	100.0
Missi ng	System	4	1.9	
Total		210	100.0	

Descriptives

Table (4.5)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Mini mum	Maxi mum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
1.00	210	1.1857	1.37954	.09520	.9980	1.3734	.00	7.00
2.00	209	4.6651	2.72502	.18849	4.2935	5.0367	.00	10.00
3.00	206	4.2330	2.63264	.18342	3.8714	4.5947	.00	10.00
Tota l	625	3.3536	2.79332	.11173	3.1342	3.5730	.00	10.00

Table (4.6)

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 part1 & part2	209	.230	.001
Pair 2 part1 & part3	206	.231	.001
Pair 3 part2 & part3	205	.294	.000

Table (4.7)

		Paired Differences					t	d f	Sig . (2-tail ed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Pair 1	part1 - part2	-3.47847	2.75799	.19077	-3.85457	-3.10237	-18.233	208	.000
Pair 2	part1 - part3	-3.06311	2.67616	.18646	-3.43073	-2.69549	-16.428	205	.000
Pair 3	part2 - part3	.44390	3.17821	.22198	.00624	.88156	2.000	204	.047

Table (4.8)

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total	male	100	8.5000	4.80004	.48000
	female	105	11.6286	4.47054	.43628

4.2 The Analysis of the Students' Grades

Table (4.2) shows the students' grades on part (I). They are scored out of ten points. It is noticed that (96.8%) of the students failed to answer this part correctly, whereas a great number of the students got good marks on the second part as explained in table (4.3). In the third part of the test as shown in table (4.4), the students got reasonable grades compared to the second part.

Table (4.1) also illustrates how the indicators of the central tendency spread students' grades out on the second part of the test. The mean (4.66), median (4.68) and the mode (4.00) correspond closely to each other. This indicates that the majority of the students have gotten high grades. Furthermore, table (4.5) supports this fact based on the mean of the second part (4.67) which is higher than the mean of the first (1.19) and the third (4.23) parts.

Table (4.6) draws a comparison between the students' grades on the three parts. This comparison states that student's grades on the second part are more homogenous than their grades on the first and second parts. Figure (4.1) reflects the highlighted normal curve, which indicates that the students got quite good grades.

To conclude, table (4.8) shows that females scored better grades than males according to the two means: (females = 11.6 and males = 8.5).

4.3 Testing the Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study are tested by using the paired-sample (t) (test) and ANOVA methods. The level of significance is at (0.05). If the significance value is less than (0.05), there is a significant difference, and if the significance value is greater than (0.05), there is no significant difference. This procedure is to reject or accept the hypotheses.

4.3.1 Hypothesis (1)

"Contexts have a significant effect on gaining knowledge of word meaning".

Tables (4.3), and (4.5) show that the highest mean is of part (2) which is (4.66). The significant level is (0.00). It is noticed that there is non significant difference. These results indicate the acceptance of this hypothesis.

4.3.2 Hypothesis (2)

"Students frequently look up a word in a dictionary whenever they come across a new one."

As classroom survey, based on the researcher own experience in teaching reading and vocabulary courses, students frequently look up words whenever they encounter such new ones. Even when proctoring this test, a number of students asked if they could use their dictionaries. Table (4.1) and Figure (4.1) may support this hypothesis that if they had been allowed to use their dictionary, they might get the meanings of the required words. Based on this data, this hypothesis proves true.

4.3.3 Hypothesis (3)

"If unknown words appear in less informative or misleading large contexts, it may take learners much longer to gain knowledge of meaning."

Reviewing table (4.7), it is clear that the significant (2-tailed) = (0.47) which is greater than (0.05). According to this result, this hypothesis is accepted.

5.0 Conclusions And Recommendations

The present study is carefully designed to gain insight into the effects of context on learning vocabulary meaning.

5.1 Conclusions

Differences between the types of contexts used in this research may often account for conflicting results. These reveal the following:

1-This study examined the effects of context-more and less informative-on knowledge of form and meaning. The results found context to have a significant effect on gaining knowledge of meaning.

2-The results contrast findings indicating that learners may ignore unknown words in uninformative contexts.

3-There is a significant difference on test grades according to the sex of the learners.

4- A word has multitudes of meanings; only the use could decide which one of them is meant. Thus, the students failed to answer some of the questions correctly.

5- Students often look up a word in a dictionary whenever they come across a new one.

5.2 Recommendations

In the light of the results obtained from the data analysis and the discussion of the hypotheses, the researcher recommends the following:

1-New vocabulary can be acquired when learners negotiate the meaning of unknown lexis during in-class discussion; a communicative act involves a temporary focus on lexis.

2-As learners adopt techniques such as using vocabulary cards, they can become more autonomous and can actively take charge of enlarging their vocabulary.

3-Ultimately, it is the learners who are responsible for implementing techniques presented by teachers, regularly reviewing target lexis, and monitoring their own learning.

4-The student should look for words that could help him understand the meaning. He should not stop at the new word but should go around it to find help that leads him to the required meaning. The student must be trained in the skill of finding clues in the context that will enable him to understand without having to look up the unknown word in a dictionary. He must develop his skill for understanding the unknown from the known words.

5-An understanding of the significance of suffixes denoting various parts of speech is important in knowing the meaning of such a word.

6-Equally important is word order, i.e. the position of the word or words in the sentence to show with what other word or words its sense is to be connected.

7-Vocabulary instruction must ensure not only that readers know what the word means, but also that they have had sufficient practice to make its meaning quickly and easily accessible during reading.

8- Once students have finished a book, they should go through it again to figure out the meanings of the words that they did not know.

9-Using a wider range of strategies consistently contribute to the increase in English vocabulary knowledge in learning English as a second language context.

10- A vocabulary item, in order to decide its meaning should not be used in isolation; a context is significant to decide the required meaning of a word from among its many meanings.

References:

Avila, E. & Sadoski, M. (1996). Exploring new applications of keyword method to acquire English vocabulary. Language Learning 46, 397-395.

Bejoint, Henri (1980). The foreign student's use of monolingual English dictionaries: A study of language needs and reference skills. Applied Linguistics 2, 3: 207-222.

Bright, J. & McGregor, G. (1970). Teaching English as a Second Language. Longman, London.

Carter, R. (1987). Is there a core vocabulary? : Some implications for language teaching. Applied Linguistics, 8(20).

- Clarke, D. & Nation, I. (1980). Guessing the meanings of words from context: Strategy and techniques. System 8, 3: 211-220.
- Chin, C. (1999). The effects of three learning strategies on EFL vocabulary acquisition. The Korea TESOL Journal (2).
- Crow, J., & Quigley, J. (1985). A Semantic field approach to passive vocabulary acquisition for reading comprehension. TESOL Quarterly, 19 (3).
- De la Fuente, M. (2002). Negotiation and oral acquisition of L2 vocabulary. Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 24, 81-112.
- Ellis, R., Y. Tanaka & Yamazaki (1994). Classroom interaction, comprehension, and the acquisition of L2 word meanings. Language Learning, 44, 449-491.
- Folse, K. (2008). Six vocabulary activities for the English language classroom. English Teaching Forum. Volume 4/ Issue No. (2).
- Gairns, R. & Redman, S. (1986). Working with Words: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Vocabulary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gu, (2002) developing EFL reading vocabulary. Retrieved October, 2007 from <http://nflre.hawaii.edu/rfl/april2005/hunt/hunt.html>
- Haggard, M. (1986). The vocabulary self-collection strategy: Using student interest and world knowledge to enhance vocabulary growth. Journal of Reading, 635-639.
- Hunt, A. (2008). A Framework for developing EFL reading vocabulary. Retrieved December, 2008 from <http://www.nflre.edu/rfl/hunt/hunt.html>.
- Hunt, A. & Beglar (2005). A framework for developing EFL reading vocabulary. Reading in a Foreign Language, 17, 1-31.
- Laufer & Batia (1989). Why are some words more difficult than others?-Some intralexical factors that affect the learning of words. IRAL 27, 3.
- Laufer & Hulstijn (2001). Incidental vocabulary acquisition in a second language: the construct of task-induced involvement. Applied Linguistics, 22, 1-26.
- Lawson, M. J. & D. Hogben (1996). The vocabulary learning strategies of foreign language students. Language Learning, 46. 101-135.
- Long, M. & Nation, I. (1980). Read Thru. Longman: Singapore.
- Mackin, Ronald & Carver (1968). A Higher Course of English Study. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mori, Y. (2003). The roles of context and word morphology in learning new Kanji words. The Modern Language Journal, 87, 404-420.
- Meara, P. (1987). Vocabulary in a second language, Vol. 2. Specialist Bibliography 4.
- Moheseni-Far, M. (2006). Techniques utilized for vocabulary acquisition. Language Forum (32).

- Nagy, W., Anderson, R. & Herman, P. (1987). Learning word meanings from context during normal reading. American Educational Research Journal, 24, 237-270.
- Nation, P. (1990). Teaching & Learning Vocabulary. USA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Nation, P. & P. Meara (2002). Vocabulary in N. Schmitt (ed), An Introduction to Applied Linguistics, 35-54. London: Arnold.
- Newton, J. (2004). Options for vocabulary learning through communication tasks. ELT, 55, 30-37.
- Ott, C.E., R.S. Blake & D.C. Butler (1996). Implications of mental elaboration for the acquisition of foreign language vocabulary, IRAL, XIV, 37-48.
- Palmberg, R. (1990). Improving foreign language learners' vocabulary skills. RELC Journal, 21(1).
- Redman, S. (2003). English Vocabulary in Use. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, Meredith, M. (1982). Empiricism and learning to mean. In language Development, Stan A. Kuczaj II (ed.) Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ. 1: 365-396.
- Rivers, W. (1981). Teaching Foreign- Language Skills. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Schmitt, N. (2000). Vocabulary in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shu, H., Anderson, R. & Zhang, Z. (1995). Incidental learning of word meanings while reading: a Chinese and American cross-cultural study, Reading Research quarterly. 30, 76-95.
- Tomaszczy, J. (1981). Issues and developments in bilingual pedagogical lexicography. Applied Linguistics, 2, 3: 287-296.
- Ulman, S. (ibid). Language and Style. UK: University of Leeds
- Underhill, A. (1980). Use Your Dictionary. Oxford University Press.
- Vallins, G. (1976). The Best English. Chaucer Press: Britain
- Visser, A. (1990). Learning vocabulary through underlying meaning: An investigation of an interactive techniques. RELC Journal, 21 (1)
- Webb, S. (2007). The effects of synonymy on vocabulary learning. Reading in a Foreign language, 19, 120-136.
- Widdowson, H. (1990). Aspects of Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yoshi, M. & Flaitz, J. (2002). Second language incidental vocabulary retention: The effect of picture and annotation types. CALICO Journal, 20.1,33-58.
- Yule G. (1996). The Study of Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zimmerman, C. (1997). Do reading and interactive vocabulary instruction make a difference? An empirical study. TESOL Quarterly,31 (1), 121-140.

APPENDIX (1)

Part I

Fill each blank with ONE word only.

disorderly	quiver
authority	glee
anxious	assured
glanced	mistreated
admire	captives

- 1-David _____ at the answers on Mrs. Jone's desk.
- 2-Casandra _____ her best friend when she called her a name.
- 3-I _____ police officers because they risk their lives to protect us.
- 4-The _____ were set free when the war was over.
- 5-The principal has the _____ to expel students that misbehave.
- 6-I am so _____ about the test on Friday that I feel sick to my stomach.
- 7-The teacher _____ the class they would do well in her class if they did their work.
- 8-When Joseph got a spanking his lip began to _____ and tears gathered in his eyes.
- 9-Policemen often work with _____ people.
- 10-Joan shouted with _____ when she scored a 100.

Part II

In each of the following contexts, read the context carefully, then guess which of the four choices defines the deleted word correctly. Circle the letter of the correct answer.

- 1-The night was so _____ that not a sound could be heard.
A. quiet B. beautiful C. dark D. dangerous
- 2-Although Sara had expected her parents to be worried by her long, unexplained absence both her mother and father seemed quite _____

A. unavailable B. undecided C. unworried D.
unexpected

3-His _____handwriting resulted from haste and from the inability to form the letters correctly.

A. careful B. unreadable C. beautiful D. silent

4-When the letter from his wife arrived, he _____ the contents carefully. Because she hadn't answered his question, he was angry and tossed the letter into the fire.

A. wrote B. destroyed C. tore up D. read

5-After so many nights of _____, Mrs. Harris decided that she really must see a doctor. She could not continue to lie awake, night after night, worrying about her health.

A. parties B. frightening dreams C. sleeplessness D.
loneliness

Part III

In the following paragraphs, try to guess the meaning of the underlined word. Use all the clues that the context provides. Circle the letter of the best definition.

1-The ruler had been so cruel and dishonest that after the revolution she was banished. A few members of the Senate opposed this decision, but the majority voted that the ruler should leave the country forever.

A. killed by stoning
B. sent away, exiled
C. imprisoned, jailed
D. punished by whipping

2- The prisoner seemed to relax, but actually he was thinking about the possibility of escape. His eyes stared straight ahead, while his hand moved so slowly that the movement was imperceptible. It was only when the keys accidentally fell from the table that the guard suddenly realized that the prisoner's hand had almost reached them.

A. hardly noticeable
B. heavy-handed
C. not capable of fast or immediate action
D. a matter of habit

3-Mrs. Jackson's son was intelligent and charming, but his continual extravagance made her wonder if she could continue to support him. Each month she was going deeper into debt, attempting to pay for his expensive purchases.

- A. superior manner
- B. wastefulness or carelessness in spending money
- C. showing too great concern for current fashions
- D. insults to family or close friends

4-Everyone else was too afraid to move. John, however, the only intrepid one of the men, showed his bravery by quickly leaping forward to struggle barehanded with the beast.

- A. frightened
- B. masculine
- C. thoughtful
- D. fearless

5-Although the hazards of the trip were many-for example, the unbearable heat, the lack of water, the possibility of getting lost, the presence of wild animals and poisonous snakes-Collins nevertheless decided that she must go.

- A. pleasure
- B. conveniences
- C. dangers
- D. equipment