

BILINGUAL APPROACH: THE ROLE OF FLASHCARDS IN TEACHING VOCABULARY TO YOUNG LEARNERS

Erniwati¹, Sudarkam R. Mertosono², Muhammad Arid³, Afrillia Anggreni⁴

^{1,2,3,4}, Tadulako University Palu, Indonesia
erniwatizhang@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses teaching approach and media in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. It brings to lights vocabulary teaching, bilingual approach and using flashcards in the teaching of vocabulary to young learners. As teaching vocabulary can take place from very early stage to a high level of learning, its introduction needs to be managed in such a way using an appropriate approach along with utilizing particular media, such as flashcards, that the learners can enjoy the teaching process. This is based on the consideration that not all teaching media fit in the context of vocabulary teaching through bilingual approach. For this reason, it is important that teachers of English whose concern is how young learners learn vocabulary adopt appropriate teaching media on their behalf. Once the learners feel secured and comfortable with the media used, it is guaranteed that they can learn as many words as possible and, thus, the desired outcome of the learning can be projected to occur. This article emphasizes the issue of bringing together bilingual approach and flashcards together in the teaching of vocabulary to young learners.

Keywords: *Vocabulary, Bilingual Approach, Flashcards*

INTRODUCTION

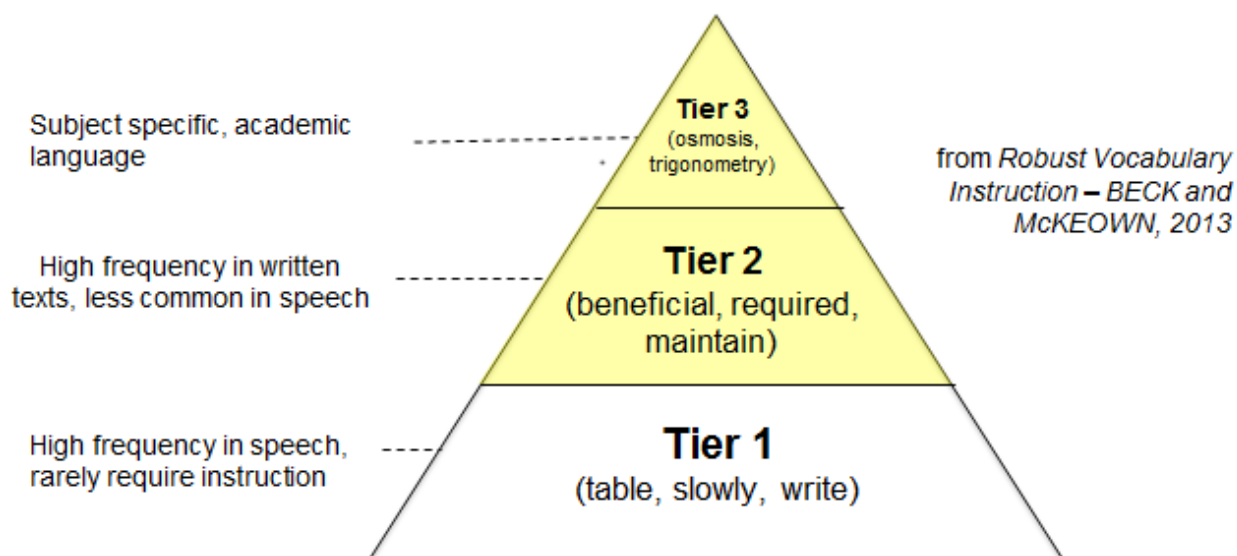
As people being asked about vocabulary, they may have the same idea; it is something related to the words that a particular language has. Barcroft, Sunderman and Schmitt (2011:571) define vocabulary as “all the words in a language.” However, such definition of vocabulary is not as simple as that. “It is much more than just single words. It includes lexical chunks, phrases of two or more words” (Lessard-Clouston, 2013:1). Therefore, vocabulary can be defined as a set of words either single words, phrases or chunks with specific meanings of a language.

Vocabulary is knowledge of words involving three significant aspects; the aspects of form, meaning and use. According to Katamba (2005), the *word form* refers to physical form representing a word in speech (pronunciation) or writing (spelling). Yet, the word form embodies not only spoken and written form but also any parts that make up the word such as prefix, root and suffix (Nation,

2001). He further explains that the *word meaning* is concept - the associations that come to mind when people think about a specific word or expression. In addition, the *word use* is the way a word, phrase or concept is used in a language (Word Usage, 2020).

Vocabulary is key to language teaching and learning. Erniwati, Mertosono and Aryani (2020:13) claim, "Vocabulary plays a very important role in all language activities." In the process of learning English, EFL students may be aware of the importance of vocabulary. They notice that their opportunity to understand or being understood depends on the number of vocabulary they have. Even, Schmitt (2010:4) notes, "Learners carry around dictionaries and not grammar books." In other words, vocabulary is crucial; it is the main tool for language learners to use the language effectively. Therefore, having a rich collection of vocabulary always becomes the first priority in second or foreign language teaching.

So, it is important to raise such question as "how to build a robust vocabulary for students?" Before answering the question, it is better to figure out what vocabulary to teach. Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2013) divide vocabulary into three different tiers – *Tier 1*, *Tier 2*, and *Tier 3*. Each tier has its own characteristics. Khan (2020) points out that tiered vocabulary is an organizational framework for categorizing words. The tiers are based on frequency, complexity, and meaning. *Tier 1* words are high frequency words used in every day conversation. Because they are basic everyday words, students learn the words through oral communication in classroom. On the contrary, *Tier 2* words refer to academic words; they are not commonly used in conversation. Often, the *Tier 2* words have multiple meanings. They frequently appear in reading passages of content areas; therefore, the more students learn the words, the better their reading comprehension can be. In addition, *Tier 3* words are categorized as low frequency words that belong to specific domain such as *photosynthesis* in science. The *Tier 3* words are closely related to specific content area; thus, they are best learned within the context of subject matter.



process of using L1 as a tool in the acquisition of L2 is called *Bilingual Approach*. Thus, *Bilingual Approach* is an approach in which learners make use of their L1 to acquire L2.

The Process of bilingual acquisition can be categorized into *compound bilingual*, *coordinate bilingual*, and *subordinate bilingual* (Wenrich, 1953). *Compound bilingual*, which is also known as “balanced bilingual” (Cohn and Ravindranath, 2014:137) occurs when two languages (L1 and L2) grow at the same time and are spoken by people in the same environment. A good example of this can be brought to light the case of English and French in the province of Quebec, Canada—they are spoken by the people there. Wenrich (1953) notes that in compound bilingual two sets of linguistic codes are stored in one meaning unit. In other words, they have one system in meaning that are used for both L1 and L2.

On the contrary, *coordinate bilingual* occurs when an individual acquires L1 and L2 in different period of time and context (e.g., home and school). Wenrich (1953) asserts that in coordinate bilinguals, each linguistic code is stored and organized separately in two meaning units and the bilinguals have two systems of meanings for words. There, one system of meaning is for words that the individuals know in the L1 and the other is for words they know in the L2. In other words, during the process of acquiring both languages a person operates two separate and distinct systems of lexicon. One system works when he is using the

L1 and the other will be activated when he is using L2. As a result, in order to improve L2 vocabulary an individual has to master L1. The EFL learners in Indonesia apparently experience this process for they acquire the Indonesian language (Bahasa), including their vernacular language, not at the same time and circumstances as they do with English.

In the case of *subordinate bilingual*, furthermore, an individual acquires two languages but one language is more dominant. Wenrich (1953) states that in a subordinate bilingual situation, an individual interprets and understands the linguistic codes of L2 through his L1. He seems to possess two linguistic codes but only one meaning unit is accessible through his L1. Boanerges (2018) uses a different term 'incipient bilingual' for subordinate bilingual. He states that an incipient bilingual is just able to use one of the two languages proficiently and this is usually the mother tongue, but with a partial understanding of the other language. Most young generation in Indonesia nowadays can consider to be *subordinate bilingual*. A study of Adelaar (2010:25) reported that, "In spite of their large speech communities, the vernacular languages are actually endangered in that some of their domains of usage are being taken over by Indonesian, and, to a lesser extent, in that they are not always passed on to the next generation." In other words, though these young generations grew up with two languages (vernacular languages and Indonesian or Bahasa), the Indonesian language dominates in practice.

In addition, Lambert (1974) categorizes bilingual as either *additive* or *subtractive* bilinguals. Bilinguals who can improve their L2 without losing their L1 proficiency are called *additive bilinguals*. On the contrary, those who are able to acquire or learn L2 successfully at the cost of losing their L1 can be called as *subtractive bilinguals*. Moradi (2014:109) argues, "*Additive bilingual* occurs when learning an L2 does not interfere with the L1 learning, both languages develop. While, *subtractive bilingual* occurs when learning an L2 interferes with the L1 learning and consequently the L1 is replaced by the L2." Thus, the EFL learners in Indonesia can be categorized as *additive bilinguals* as they learn English without losing their L1.

Bilingual Approach brings positive impacts on language learning. Through the use of students' L1, meaning is conveyed efficiently while teachers can ensure

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that the concepts being discussed have already been grasped by the students (Donnchaidh, 2021). A study of Sipra on the role of bilingualism in EFL classes (2013) revealed that students' L1 guides them during the initial stage of their learning experience. Bilingualism allows the target language to be taught effectively and efficiently. Put simply, using L1 (e.g. the Indonesian language) in EFL classroom will not impede students learning, rather it helps them improve their L2 (English language) competences.

Teaching vocabulary to young learners through *Bilingual Approach* is considered effective as the students at this age are in a phase called “the concrete operational stage of cognitive development” (Piaget, 1954). Students in this stage are learning through their experience using objects around them. The hallmark of the Concrete Operational Period is the development of mental operations – mental actions which can be applied to transform an object (that is, a thought) in some way. Thus, making use of various techniques or strategies such as *games, picture clues, sight-words, context clues, structural analysis and dictionary use* (Prayogo, 1997) is preferable. In other words, young learners aged 6-11 years old will effectively learn and absorb information presented visually. Accordingly, teaching vocabulary with pictures is favored by EFL teachers.

A flashcard is a perfect example of the picture clues strategy. Baleghizadeh and Ashoori (2011:4) state, “Flashcards is a piece of cardboard consisting of a simple picture, word, or a sentence on it. Flashcards usually have 8x12 cm or it can be adapted by big or small class.” Morocho and Zhagüi (2011) further define a flashcard as a little piece of paper with two sides; one side contains target language while the other side contains the source language. In addition, Suyanto (2014: 109) notes, “Usually the teacher holds and moves some flashcards in a pile of flashcards to front side. The movement of the cards is very quick, which may be the reason for why it is called by flashcard.” Thus, flashcard is a piece of card with picture(s) and word(s) on both sides and is used to help the learners visualize and build vocabulary words. It comes in various sizes and purposes.

Favell Lee Mortimer, an English evangelical author, is the first person to use flashcards in teaching. She created this visual aid to help children read and grasp some specific things in bible. Back at the time, color of the flashcards were white and made from index cards either by large or small in size. Two works that

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Mortimer designed using a set of phonic flashcards were “*Peep of Day*” and “*Reading without Tears*”. Later, the two works are considered as the first flashcards ever created.

There are two types of flashcards - picture flashcards and word flashcards. Students use the picture flashcards to demonstrate and practice vocabulary words. They can help the students identify verb on action, as well as to improvise in a dialogue. Picture flashcards should be interesting, and large enough for the whole class to see what is on the flashcard. In contrast, the word flashcard is a card where a word is printed on it. This flashcard is useful for practicing word order in a sentence. The cards can be placed randomly on the class board. Seemingly, EFL teachers in Indonesia prefer to using picture flashcards than word flashcard in teaching vocabulary to young learners. Elisa and Tuti (2020) reported that teachers considered flashcards important for teaching English vocabulary to young learners. Though flashcards come in many different shapes and forms, colorful ones are more suggested. The following figures show some of the examples of bilingual flashcards that the teachers use for teaching English vocabulary in Indonesia.



(Inside Story, 2020)



(Horaz, 2017)

Moreover, as a visual aid flashcards provide some benefits and drawbacks. Azabdaftari and Mozaheb (2012) point out that using flashcards in teaching

vocabulary makes the lesson easy and fun. Yet, abstract words are not easy to be learned when using flashcards. Morocho and Zhagüi (2011) add that flashcards are portable; they are easy to carry. They can help students with short attention span as flashcards aid the students visual memory. With flashcards teachers can easily organize the lesson in creative way while the students can get the meaning of the words without consulting their dictionary. Thus, the work of teachers in teaching the word meaning can be minimized. They can also be used to develop writing skills. In short, flashcards provide a great tool for teaching either vocabulary, writing or reading, memorization and repetition. Yet, the flashcards can be very expensive. Sometimes teachers have to print them out and it costs a lot.

In addition, teaching vocabulary using flashcards can be varied. They can be applied for teaching an individual or a group of students. For this reason, teacher, first, needs to prepare the flashcards by topic. For example, if the topic is about nouns, the teacher may provide flashcards that are related to animals, fruits and occupation. Next, the teacher shows the flashcards to the students. In order to help the students, improve their pronunciation, the teacher should pronounce the words while the students repeat after him. The teacher may assign students to write a sentence using the word they see in the flashcard. This activity aims to help students practice both grammar and writing skills. Thereby, not only are the students provided with access to practice the language skills but also to improve their vocabulary mastery.

CONCLUSION

Teaching English vocabulary to young learners is necessary in support of their EFL learning; yet, the methods applied should consider the characteristics and memory span of the young learners. These young learners, who are in the *concrete operational stage of cognitive development*, can effectively acquire L2 vocabulary words when their L1 is involved in the process. The system conforms with the principles of *Bilingual Approach* in which learners are allowed to use their L1 to make meanings out of the L2 words. With *Bilingual Approach* teachers may apply varied teaching aids, but using *picture clues* including *flashcards* are

more favored. Using *flashcards* help the young learners remember the words easily inasmuch as they can visualize the picture. When things or objects presented can be captured by senses, they will encourage the learners to think in a concrete way, enabling them to easily remember and recall the words they have learnt. Thus, teaching vocabulary through Bilingual Approach with flashcards as the teaching media is highly recommended for young learners.

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