

G.S. Akhmetova^{1*}, A.Ye. Bizhkenova¹, Karin Pittner²

¹*L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan;*

²*Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany*

*(Corresponding author's e.mail: gulnarakzkk@gmail.com)**

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4608-1996

Scopus ID: 57196374873

Scopus ID: 10139002700

Lexical semantic modeling as a means of effective vocabulary acquisition and expansion

English vocabulary is a challenging task for school students, so EFL teachers' main aims is to find effective ways for faster and better vocabulary acquisition. This study implements using lexical semantic models based on semantic fields as an alternative strategy of teaching foreign vocabulary for vocabulary mastery and expansion in a structured way. The present study aims to investigate the effect of lexical semantic modeling on students' foreign vocabulary acquisition and vocabulary expansion. The research design of this study is based on experimental teaching, modeling, observation, and post experimental testing. Thirty-three university students participated in this study. During the treatment students in experimental group learnt new words in paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationship by means semantic modeling, while students in the control group used the wordlists strategy. The research results has shown that learning words through lexical semantic modeling is more beneficial for EFL students comparing to wordlist strategy, as it facilitates better memorization and vocabulary retention, significantly enriches learners' vocabulary through synonyms and antonyms, improves understanding of word relationship and correct word usage and collocations in different contexts and enlarges learner's active vocabulary. The study results have shown that lexical semantic models has a positive effect on vocabulary acquisition and expansion when it is implemented together with lexical semantic exercises, and students practice new vocabulary using various types of lexical semantic exercises.

Keywords: lexical semantic field, modeling, experiment, vocabulary acquisition, vocabulary expansion, paradigmatic, syntagmatic, lexical skills, lexical competence.

Introduction

Methodology of teaching foreign languages has been paying great attention to the lexical component of the linguistic competence for the last decade, which is explained by the change of the attitude to the nature of language and the role of lexical units in it. Currently, linguists mainly focus on the semantic and pragmatic aspects in the study of lexical units, since they allow learners to most accurately represent the relationship of language elements and their functioning in various types of learners' speech activity. Today forming a foreign language communicative competence is viewed as the strategic goal of teaching foreign languages. In order to meet modern requirements set to school graduates they should be able to use the foreign language to effectively solve communicative problems in different fields of human activity. Thus, EFL lessons aim at forming students' linguistic competence which includes forming a lexical competence gained by effective vocabulary acquisition.

In Kazakhstan English is learnt as a third language (foreign language) and the mastery of the English vocabulary and gaining communicative skills are viewed as key skills which leads to more opportunities in the field of education, science, technology and tourism. Today, modern Kazakhstani secondary and high school educational system face a gap between the requirements for learning a foreign language and the methods used at schools. Acquiring foreign language vocabulary is one of the biggest challenges that EFL learners face at every lesson. Therefore, EFL teachers testing different approaches, techniques, methods and strategies in teaching vocabulary, to identify their effect on learners' word mastery and lexical skills. According to Stahl (2005) word proficiency is the most important prerequisite for speaking, but in reproductive types of speech activity, knowing only the meaning of a word is not enough; it is also important how words are connected and collocate with each other.

Currently many EFL teachers highlight the importance of solving the challenges in foreign language vocabulary mastery and developing lexical competence. To such challenges we relate correct word use, classifying lexical units based on the principle from simple to the most difficult for effective word mastery, developing students' passive vocabulary, enriching students vocabulary, teaching vocabulary mastery strategies for communicative use, elaborate and create a set of exercises aiming at foreign language mastery. In this regard, the effective presentation of lexical unit leads to effective acquisition, and enable to make the learning process engaging and motivating. The aim of this research is to identify the effect of using lexical semantic models on English vocabulary acquisition and learning outcomes, whether it helps students to expand their vocabulary. The relevance of the present study can be explained by the fact that identifying the impact of lexical-semantic models may aid in English vocabulary acquisition and vocabulary enlargement of the university students to meet the curriculum requirements and standards.

R. Nordquist [1; 15] defines a semantic field is as a set of words (or lexemes) which are related in meaning. Semantic field is also known as a word field, lexical field, field of meaning, and semantic system. I. Indriarti [2] states that the semantic mapping strategy is used for representing word concepts graphically. This strategy enables the students to create a map of word which consists of a diagram displaying a single word or phrase, placed in the center as topic and other associated words are added in the form of branches. It promotes students deeper understanding of conceptual knowledge by displaying words into categories to show how they are related to each other. E.V. Varlamova et al. [3; 183] also conducted a similar research to identify the effect of lexical semantic fields in teaching foreign vocabulary among university students concludes that a semantic field performs a great number of semantic ties and abounds less in the number of their members systemized groups — lexical semantic groups.

M. Saeidi & S. Atmani [4; 52] have examined the effect of semantic mapping on learning vocabulary as a pre-reading activity. The experimental group received semantic mapping in the pre-reading stage, but the control group did not receive this treatment. The results of the study indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group in vocabulary learning.

Experimental

The present research employs methods of experimental teaching, modeling, observation, post experimental testing and qualitative and quantitative analysis of data. In this study we have used "true" experimental design, namely the pre-test–post-test control and experimental group design. Before starting treatment and an experimental and control groups individually completed pretest. The purpose of the pretest was to determine students' prior lexical knowledge, if they can recognize and understand the meaning of the given words. The words were chosen from ESL textbook and curriculum to assure they had not already been taught particular words. The pretest was administered one week before the experimental study started. The present study uses modeling as research methods in applied linguistics. Mostly the term "model" is defined as a type, sample (language pattern) of any text units (words, sentences); symbols, schemas for describing language objects (the schema of the component model in the syntax) (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. The structure of lexical semantic model based on semantic field

The present study was conducted among the 1st year students enrolled at the Pedagogical Institute at Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau State University. 33 students studying English as a Major participated in this study. They were pre-intermediate level Kazakh learners of English. Their proficiency level was determined by a placement test implemented at the beginning of the semester and they were placed into one group which is defined as a homogeneous group in this study. The lessons were conducted according to the educational program and language skills and competencies reflected in the curriculum designed for specialty “Foreign language: two foreign languages (English and German)”. The data of the study were collected by their EFL teacher as their pre-test and post-test results. Sixty-six test results were used as the instrument of the study to obtain real language from the participants. Vocabulary was presented in the models, so it was straightforward for student to use it as an aid (Fig. 2).

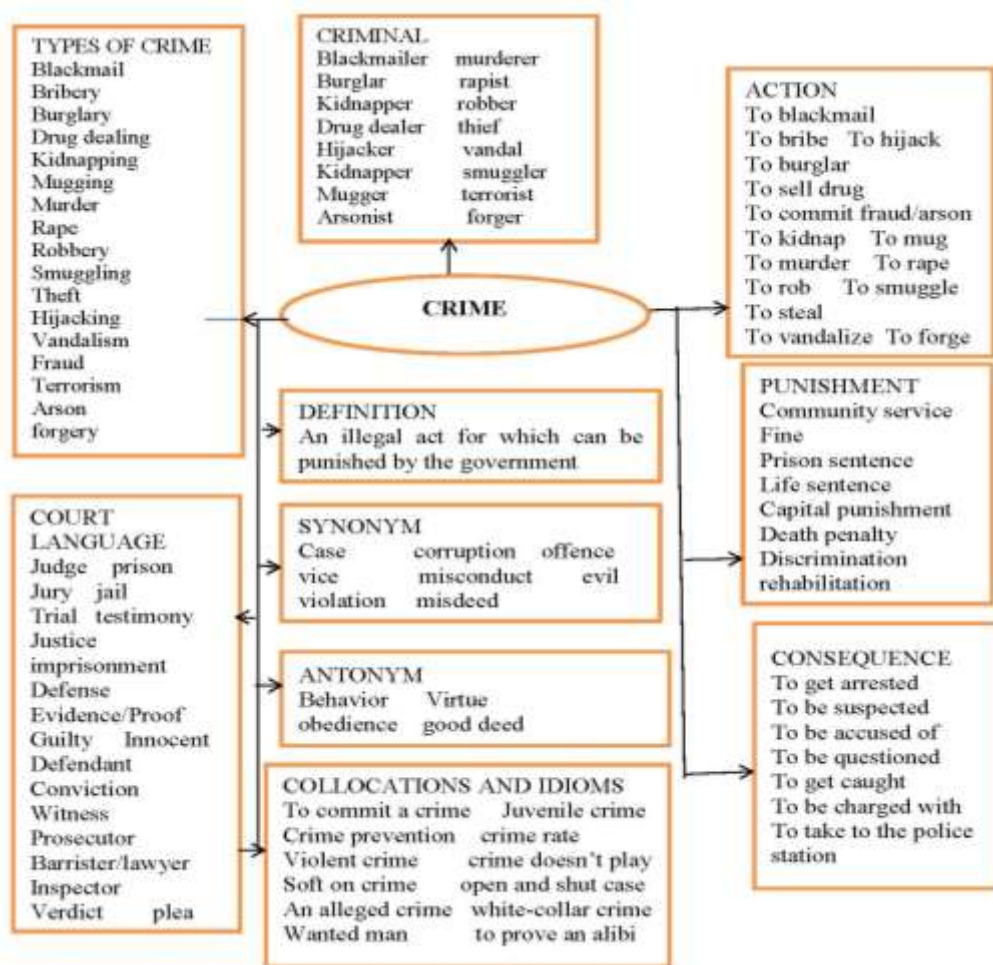


Figure 2. Lexico-semantic module on the topic “Crime and punishment” (compiled by the author)

Results and Discussions

Before the experiment started all thirty-three participants volunteered to participate in this research and gave their consent. The post-test was paper-based and assessed learning of the same words each group was exposed to in the study. Also the results of the summative assessment of the unit were analyzed to explore the effect of lexical semantic models on general vocabulary acquisition and learning outcomes. After the experiment the post-tests were administrated to explore if any significant changes occurred in learning vocabulary between the two groups.

The study used a two-group pre-test, post-test design, and summative assessment test results. The experimental teaching was conducted to test and identify the effect of implementing lexical semantic models based on semantic fields in the English language vocabulary acquisition. During one term which included 16 English language classes, experimental teaching using lexical semantic models was conducted in the experimental group and control group was educated traditionally using wordlist in presenting and practicing foreign vocabulary. When using this strategy a teacher directly demonstrates the target words to the students, then ask them to read and memorize the vocabulary items. This strategy is beneficial for the students to remember new words but in a short time, but fails to master the target vocabulary better.

Teaching materials and content in both groups were created and implemented strictly according to the State Educational Curriculum and supplementary material for extensive reading “Beyond this place” by A.J. Cronin. A rigorous analysis of the study texts has been done to select vocabulary and semantic fields for lexical semantic models which could also include books for extensive reading and sources which were used as supplementary materials. These fields were semantically analyzed and were presented to the learners in schemes and models in the experimental group. Students in the experimental group studied new foreign vocabulary through lexical semantic models and practices the usage of new vocabulary using lexical semantic exercises, whereas a control group used wordlist strategy. The participants of the control group were not provided with lexical semantic models and did not learn the words in clusters, but learnt words through translations into L1.

Vocabulary learning in a control group.

Teaching vocabulary in a control group had five stages and new vocabulary was presented to the learners in the following way:

Stage 1. Presenting a list of lexical units on the board.

Stage 2. Providing with the definition and translation into L1.

Stage 3. Work with the text. Students read the text, underline new words and study the meaning of the word in the context.

Stage 4. Students translate the text using new words.

Stage 5. Lexical exercises for practicing new vocabulary.

In a control group students also practiced new vocabulary using the following lexical exercises:

1. Define the odd word in the list.
2. Complete the gaps with the suitable words.
3. Correct the mistakes in these definitions.
4. Read the following text and choose the correct alternative in each pair.
5. Match the words and definitions.
6. Choose the words relating to the topic.
7. Complete the sentence using the given words.
8. Underline the odd word and explain your choice.
9. Look at the picture and describe it using active vocabulary of the lesson.
10. Make up a dialog using the thematic vocabulary of the lesson.
11. Make up a story using new vocabulary and retell it to your partner.
12. Read the story and role-play with your partner.

Vocabulary learning in the experimental group.

The experimental group was presented with 10 words every session. While being presented new lexical semantic models students were asked to remember synonyms, antonyms or collocations related to a new word to activate their prior knowledge. In the first session the teacher drawing a model showed the learners how the words relate, and later in subsequent sessions students could draw the models themselves and cluster related words.

New vocabulary based on lexical semantic modeling was implemented in the following way:

- Stage 1. Presenting the core lexical unit (core lexical unit or concept) in the centre of the board.
- Stage 2. Brainstorming. Asking students to think about keywords and ideas which are interrelated to the concept. Brainstorming enables the students to use their background or prior knowledge and experiences relying on schema theory, which is necessary for connecting known and unknown concepts and lexical units.
- Stage 3. Grouping or clustering. Collaboratively with students teacher groups new vocabulary giving headings and labeling them;
- Stage 4. Providing with the definition of the main keyword in English, and students may offer their own explanations and definitions.
- Stage 5. Based on the study text or dictionary the lexical semantic model is completed with several topic-related synonyms and antonyms;
- Stage 6. Presenting and grouping nouns, adjectives, verbs and other parts of speech accordingly related to the core lexical unit. A teacher may expand this chart into several subtopics according to the context;
- Stage 7. Presenting phrases, idioms and collocations related to the main keyword.
- Stage 8. Work with the text. Finding and discussing how words, word combinations, idioms and collocations are used in the sentences and text.
- Stage 9. Drill exercises for new vocabulary acquisition, and better comprehending semantic relationship and the usage of antonyms, synonyms and collocations.
- Stage 10. Speech exercises. Composing sentences, monologs, dialogs, essays using topic-related vocabulary.

While introducing topic-related vocabulary through lexical semantic models EFL teacher used drill and speech exercises. Using drill and speech exercises we aimed to master the vocabulary proficiency of the students and teach them to recognize the form and meaning of words.

Drill exercises:

1. Define the odd word in the list.
2. Group the words according to the topic/semantic fields.
3. Find the synonyms and (or) antonyms to the underlined words in the text
4. Read the text and find the synonyms and antonyms to the given words
5. Complete semantic chain of the given word.
6. Replace the following words with synonyms and antonyms
7. Complete the gaps with the suitable words.
8. Correct the mistakes in these definitions.
9. Read the following text and choose the correct alternative in each pair.
10. Match the words and definitions.
11. Choose the words relating to the topic.
12. Collocate the following words
13. Complete the sentence using the given words.
14. Match the antonyms of the given words.
15. Find new vocabulary in the crossword.
16. Underline the odd word and explain your choice.
17. Find the equivalents of the phraseological units in the Kazakh language.
18. Make up as many words as possible using the given word.
19. Make up possible idioms using the given word.
20. Make up correct word combinations using the given word.
21. Complete the text with suitable words and collocations.
22. Group the words according to the part of speech principle.
23. Find antonyms, synonyms to the given words.

Speech exercises:

1. Look at the picture and describe it using active vocabulary of the lesson.
2. Make up a dialog using the thematic vocabulary of the lesson.
3. Make up a story using new vocabulary and retell it to your partner.
4. Read the story and role-play with your partner.

Pre-Test Findings. At the beginning of the study the pre-test was held in both groups. It had a purpose to identify the early condition of the students' vocabulary acquisition before starting an experiment. Vocabulary knowledge was used as the pre-test. This test consisted of 50 vocabulary items. Each item included one English word which was selected from the learners' course book. The participants were asked to write the

Kazakh equivalent of the words. The average time to take this test was about 20 minutes. The result of pre-test in experimental and control group could be seen in the following diagram (Fig. 3).

The analysis of the pre-test taken before experimental teaching has started demonstrates that both groups: experimental and control group has approximately the same percentage of correct answers (control group gained 18% of correct answers, whereas experimental group gained 16 % of correct answers). So, we concluded that two groups had equal level vocabulary mastery before starting the experiment. This results indicate that majority of students are not familiar with the words presented in the vocabulary knowledge test which served as a pre-test in our research (Fig. 3).

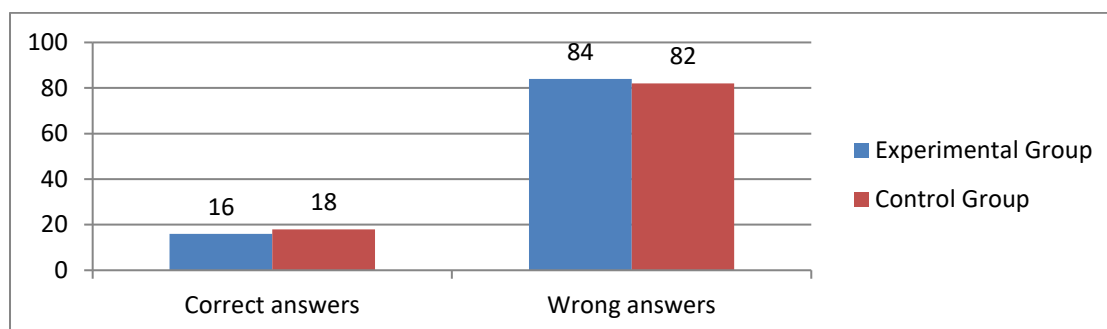


Figure 3. Analysis of pre-test (Vocabulary knowledge of both groups)

According to the results and learning outcomes in the post-test presented in Figure 4 lexical semantic models had a positive effect on vocabulary mastery and aided to develop lexical skills and vocabulary expansion of students in the experimental group significantly. In order to evaluate the effect of experiment based on using lexical semantic models in the post-test we included multiple choice questions aiming to identify a number of various lexical skills.

Overall, post-test (Fig. 4) results showed that experimental group acquired new foreign vocabulary more systematically and effectively compared with the control group which gained lower percentage of vocabulary acquisition and expansion. In post-test, after the treatment students of both groups demonstrated the following results:

- knowledge and usage of appropriate topic-related vocabulary in the context (experimental group 86%, control group 55%);
- vocabulary knowledge (experimental group 91%, control group 62%).

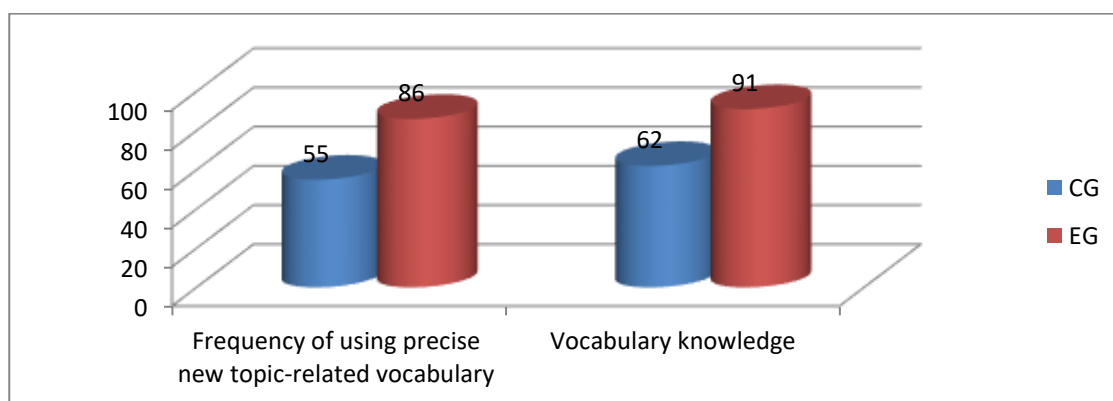


Figure 4. The analysis of the post-test result

After gaining post-test result we collected summative assessment test results which included on not only vocabulary tasks, but also four assignments for testing perceptive and productive skills such as listening, reading, writing and speaking. The summative test included 24 questions overall, 6 questions testing each skill. All tasks included the target vocabulary which has been learnt throughout 10 sessions.

Table

Results of summative assessment for the unit of both groups.

| Scores | Control group | Experimental group |
|----------|---------------|--------------------|
| 20-24 | 3 | 7 |
| 15-19 | 9 | 8 |
| Below 15 | 5 | 1 |

The results of the summative assessment for the unit demonstrated in Table 1 verified the hypothesis that teaching foreign vocabulary based on lexical semantic models facilitate students vocabulary acquisition and vocabulary enlargement, develops lexical skills, enhances significantly vocabulary mastery and has a positive effect on students learning outcomes in all perceptive and productive skills and motivates them to enlarge their vocabulary. Table 1 demonstrates overall scores of both groups and shows that more students in experimental groups managed to receive maximum score between 20-24 is (7 out of 16), whereas only 3 learners scored maximum score in a control group. About the same number of students scored between 15-19 in both groups. However, only one student from experimental group scored below 15 points, while 4 learners from a control group received a score below 15. This analysis verifies the hypothesis that learning vocabulary through lexical semantic models and fields enhances overall students' learning outcomes (Table 1).

The results of the study indicated in the table and diagram above demonstrate the students' improvement of experimental group was higher than control group. Post-test result shows that students in the experimental group after getting treatment by using lexical semantic models showed better results in vocabulary acquisition and improving lexical skills. Based on these results it can be concluded that lexical semantic models were more effective to improve students' vocabulary mastery than wordlists strategy.

Similar research has been done by T. Tinkham [5; 138] who explored which method of grouping words semantically or thematically is more effective for vocabulary acquisition. Tinkham explains that when words are grouped semantically, they are called as "semantic clusters or sets" in which words share certain semantic and synthetic similarities, e.g., eye, nose, mouth, chin, face. On the contrary, when words are grouped thematically, they are termed "thematic clusters" in which words are grouped together on the basis of their psychological associations and shared thematic concepts, e.g., frog, green, hop, pond, slippery [5; 138]. He put forward a hypothesis that grouping word thematically in which words are grouped on the basis of their psychological associations and shared thematic concepts should facilitate learning and word mastery of students. T. Tinkham conducted his study on 48 university students acquired new vocabulary more easily through thematically related sets than semantically grouped words and English words comprising unassociated sets.

Similarly, T. Hippner-page explored the effect of semantic and thematic word clustering on vocabulary acquisition. However, the findings of his study demonstrated that both kinds of word groupings are effective and beneficial for learners [6]. Teachers can introduce semantic maps or models in circles, squares, or ovals with connected lines. To this end, the teacher can write the main idea on the board and ask students to brainstorm about the reading topic; the students can then put the words in circles which connect to the main idea. A. Kaveh & E. Rassaei [7; 151] concluded that semantic maps significantly enhance learners' L2 vocabulary learning.

According to S.A. Stahl [8] in reproductive types of speech activity, knowing only the meaning of a word is not enough; it is also important how words are connected and collocate with each other. Zarei, A.A. & Adami, S. admit that presenting new vocabulary in clusters or sets is effective, but excessive semantic and syntactic similarities inhibit learning since they cause interference with each other and with previous words in mind.

P. Saengpakdeejit [9] explains that as students use the English language inside and outside classrooms, they still have problems in mastering vocabularies while acquiring them. According to Thuy (2013), the guided semantic mapping also provides a situation for learners to organize words systematically and created a semantic link between the words by the topics or by the ideas in the context. Semantic fields can also be regarded as semantically simple dictionaries.

Lexical semantic exercises were applied as the most effective method to preventing lexical errors in oral and written speech. Lexical semantic exercises are defined as exercises aimed at comprehending lexicological concepts and forming lexical skills. These exercises can be classified in the following way:

- 1) find the studied language phenomenon among words (in a phrase, sentence, text) based on a sampling and without it;
- 2) select the examples illustrating studied phenomenon;
- 3) find errors in the use of lexical unit (in the context or in the text under the picture);
- 4) group particular lexical units according to themes, semantic fields;
- 5) determine the role of the word and analyze the lexical unit;

To achieve better results in mastering vocabulary skills it is recommended to use lexical semantic exercises in combination.

The main advantage of using lexical semantic models is explained by the fact that they can be used at any stage of the lesson. This means lexical semantic models can be used at the beginning of the lesson while creating a foreign language speaking atmosphere, doing phonetic drills, speech exercises when introducing memorizing new lexical units when teaching vocabulary based on a specific grammar material, or while assessing and evaluating students' skills on word knowledge. Another advantage of the lexical semantic model is that it can be adapted to any topic, age, and level of a student. Lexical semantic models enable students to be fully engaged in the learning process. It is recommended to use open questions that require participation, and tasks that require full answers. It was noticed that lexical semantic models encourage students to improvise and be creative, transform words, and make up their own sentences, texts, monologues, short stories. Since the models clearly and visually demonstrate the use of words this can stimulate students to do the right word choice, use it accurately in their speech, overcome language barriers, and master vocabulary skills. According to E. Rassaei concept mapping taught learners to concentrate on the central topic, and elaborate the central concept with the related concepts to form the semantic map. It is obvious that the lack of vocabulary knowledge demotivates students from learning a foreign language [10].

Conclusion

Lexical semantic models enable students to master larger amount of vocabulary, help to establish connections between learnt words and phrases and retain them in long-term memory. Creating lexical semantic models include several stages:

- Selecting a core concept and keyword for a particular topic;
- Grouping words in nests according to category in a semantic field;
- Grouping vocabulary around keywords by word class or colloquial usage.

The findings of the present study can have implications for teachers and learners. For better word mastery lexical semantic models should be presented with grammatical forms, in different contexts, and study materials. During the teaching learning process, the students became active and enthusiastic to use lexical semantic models in written and oral speech activities. The results of the tests in the experimental group which used lexical semantic models have shown better learning outcomes, vocabulary enlargement and word mastery. The results have verified that implementing visual and graphic lexical semantic models helped learners deeper understand how words relate each other and how to group them according to thematic, paradigmatic and syntagmatic properties. This type of learning vocabulary in a structured way helps students to enlarge their vocabulary and used words more precisely. Although using lexical semantic models was proven effective in improving the students' vocabulary acquisition, this strategy also has a drawback. The disadvantage of this strategy relies on the fact that it is more time-consuming compared to wordlist strategy, because teacher spends more time to explain the vocabulary by using lexical semantic models and draw lexical semantic models on the boards. However, this obstacle does not cause a serious problem, because teachers and students can solve it by using interactive IT technology, power point slides and gadgets. Teachers may also save their time by using lexical semantic models which were prepared at home in advance.

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Г.С. Ахметова, А.Е. Бижкенова, Karin Pittner

Лексикалық-семантикалық модельдеу сөздік қорын тиімді меңгеру және кеңейту құралы ретінде

Аталмыш зерттеу лексикалық-семантикалық модельдеу студенттердің шетелдік сөздік қорын меңгеруіне және оның сөздік қорын кеңейтуге әсерін зерттеуге бағытталған. Ағылшын тілінің сөздігін меңгеру студенттер үшін өте маңызды, алайда күрделі міндеттердің бірі, сондықтан ағылшын тілінің оқытушыларының басты мақсаты — студенттердің сөздік қорын тез және сапалы меңгерудің тиімді жолдарын табу. Мақалада ағылшын тілінің сөздік қорын жүйелі меңгеру үшін шеттілдік лексиканы оқытудың балама стратегиясы ретінде лексикалық-семантикалық модельдерді қолдануды жүзеге асырудың жолдары қарастырылған. Авторлар эксперимент, модельдеу, бақылау және тестілеу әдістерін қолданған. Зерттеуге университеттің отыз үш студенті қатысты. Эксперимент барысында эксперименттік топтағы студенттер семантикалық модельдеу арқылы парадигматикалық және синтагматикалық қарым-қатынаста жаңа сөздерді меңгерген, ал бақылау тобындағы студенттер ана тіліне аудармасы бар сөздер тізімдері арқылы сөздерді үйрену стратегиясын пайдаланған. Зерттеу нәтижелері лексикалық-семантикалық модельдеу арқылы шет тіліндегі сөздерді үйрену ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде оқытын студенттер үшін тиімдірек екенін көрсетті, өйткені бұл әдіс сөздерді жақсы есте сақтауға ықпал етеді; яғни синонимдер мен антонимдер арқылы білім алушылардың сөздік қорын айтарлықтай байытады, сөздердің өзара байланысын түсінуді және әртүрлі контекстерде сөздер мен сөз тіркестерін дұрыс қолдануды жақсартады, студенттердің белсенді сөздік қорын және ой-өрісін кеңейтеді. Зерттеу нәтижесінде лексикалық-семантикалық модельдер лексикалық-семантикалық жаттығулармен бірге жүзеге асырылған кезде сөзді қорды игеруге және арттыруға оң әсер ететіндігі және студенттер лексикалық-семантикалық жаттығулардың әртүрлі түрлерін қолдана отырып, жаңа лексикамен айналысатындығы дәлелденген.

Кілт сөздер: лексика-семантикалық өріс, модельдеу, эксперимент, сөздік қорын меңгеру, сөздік қорын кеңейту, парадигматика, синтагматика, лексикалық дағдылар, лексикалық құзыреттілік.

Г.С. Ахметова, А.Е. Бижкенова, Karin Pittner

Лексико-семантическое моделирование как средство эффективного овладения и расширения словарного запаса

Овладение словарем английского языка является одной из важных и сложных задач для студентов, поэтому главная цель преподавателей английского языка — найти эффективные способы более быстрого и качественного усвоения вокабуляра. Настоящая статья исследует эффект использования лексико-семантических моделей в качестве альтернативной стратегии обучения иностранной лексике для структурированного овладения словарным запасом. Данное исследование направлено на изучение влияния лексико-семантического моделирования на расширение словарного запаса у студентов. Авторами использованы такие методы, как эксперимент, моделирование, наблюдение и тестирование. В исследовании приняли участие тридцать три студента университета. Во время эксперимента студенты экспериментальной группы изучали новые слова в парадигматических и синтагматических отношениях с помощью семантического моделирования, в то время как студенты контрольной группы использовали стратегию изучения слов с помощью списков слов с переводами на родной язык. Результаты

исследования показали, что изучение иноязычных слов с помощью лексико-семантического моделирования более эффективно для студентов, изучающих английский язык как иностранный язык, поскольку этот метод способствует лучшему запоминанию слов, значительно обогащает словарный запас учащихся за счет синонимов и антонимов, улучшает понимание взаимосвязи слов и правильного применения слов и словосочетаний в различных контекстах, расширяет активный словарный запас студентов и кругозор студентов. Результаты исследования показали, что лексико-семантические модели положительно влияют на усвоение и увеличение словарного запаса, когда они реализуются вместе с лексико-семантическими упражнениями, и студенты практикуют новую лексику, используя различные типы лексико-семантических упражнений.

Ключевые слова: лексико-семантическое поле, моделирование, эксперимент, усвоение словаря, расширение словарного запаса, парадигматика, синтагматика, лексические навыки, лексическая компетенция.