Learning English Vocabulary in the Chinese Context

Jun Lin, Aiguo Wang, Weiwei Du

Abstract—Vocabulary acquisition is of great importance in learning a foreign language. Since vocabulary knowledge reflects one’s language capability to a great extent, it has long been felt to be a crucial factor in language learning. However, vocabulary learning is also a major difficulty which impedes learners’ progress in language learning. This paper analyzes the impact of several factors on vocabulary learning efficiency, such as mother tongue context, and makes suggestions on vocabulary learning strategies to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners with regard to breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords — English vocabulary, Chinese context, Association strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

As early as the 1970s, research into vocabulary learning began to receive attention and gain development in the field of language teaching. British linguist David Wilkins (1972) stated, “while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.” From a sociolinguistics perspective, vocabulary is the most important ingredient in social intercourse system; from a psycholinguistics perspective, vocabulary is not only the driving force of speech output, but also the key to listening, writing, and reading.

In order to progress in learning the language, learners need to be able to understand what they are hearing and reading. That is, the input must be comprehensible in order for it to be useful and meaningful to the learner and help with acquisition (Krashen, 1982), but if learners do not understand a sizable portion of the vocabulary in the language that they are reading or hearing, the language is not comprehensible and therefore cannot be useful for acquisition. Therefore, it is recognized that the mastery of vocabulary is an essential component of EFL learning, and that vocabulary learning is a life-long cognitive process. As Zimmerman (1997) points out, vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to EFL learners. The prominent role of vocabulary knowledge in foreign language learning has been increasingly recognized (Rodriguez & Sadoski, 2000). Many argue that vocabulary is one of the most important, if not the most important component in learning a foreign language, and foreign language curricula must reflect this.

In the Chinese context, many college students admit that vocabulary is an important factor in learning the English language. Our investigation (see appendix I) indicates that most Chinese learners regard vocabulary as the number one obstacle in reading comprehension, followed by grammar and background knowledge; greatest barrier to listening comprehension, followed by speaking speed and accent; greatest impediment to oral and written expression, followed by organizing viewpoint and grammar.

By learning English vocabulary in the Chinese context, we mean the learning context or the environment in the Chinese learning institutions rather than the language context. According to Gu (2003), learning context refers to the learning environment. It is the socio-culturo-political environment where learning takes place. The learning context can include the teachers, peers, classroom climate or ethos, family support, social-cultural tradition of learning, curriculum, and the availability of input and output opportunities. Learning context is different from language context which refers to the textual or discoursal place in which a particular word or structure can be found. Learning contexts constrain the ways learners approach learning tasks. A learning strategy that is valued in one learning context may well be deemed inappropriate in another context.

This paper intends to explore vocabulary learning strategies employed by EFL learners in the Chinese context and their beliefs about vocabulary learning, which could help learners gain insights into effective learning of English vocabulary and consequently promote EFL learning.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING

English vocabulary learning (EVL) makes Chinese learners both fascinated and puzzled. Most Chinese students admit that EVL is hard work and time consuming. There are many reasons why Chinese learners feel enlarging their vocabulary is a slow process, and why their lexical utilization capability is not flexible. The contributing factors are both internal and external.

A. Internal Factors

a. Lack of motivation and hence interest

As in every other field of human learning, motivation and interest in EFL learning are the crucial forces which determine whether a learner embarks on a task at all, how
much energy he or she devotes to it, and how long he or she perseveres. Psycholinguists have discovered the reason why learners can effectively learn and understand certain knowledge. They unconsciously have a series of psychological processing steps. With a clear motive of learning a foreign language they display interest in the target language (TL), and concentrate self-efforts on understanding and learning knowledge. Their cerebra certainly do not begin to take notes like a CD writer just to start the recording, but repeatedly explain and digest knowledge unconsciously.

The traditional viewpoint among Chinese learners regarding vocabulary learning is that it is only a process of reciting a word list by heart. Their learning efficiency is very low because they just mechanically memorize the pronunciation and Chinese rendering (not the English meaning) of words. Lack of motivation among some EFL learners in China may eventually lead to the loss of interest. This is especially true with English as a compulsory course. This makes it difficult for them to progress further, as some English professional education researchers indicate that 70% of English learning efficiency comes from learning interest (Xiang, 2007; Zhou, 2003). Psycholinguists’ studies show that, if a person who wants to learn a foreign language holds detestable or negative attitude, it is impossible to learn it well. This coincides with our classroom survey, in which 73 % of lower scoring students say they have no interest in learning English. Therefore, learners should employ an appropriate strategy to arouse their interest.

b. Improper Learning Strategies
Most English language learners in China admit that “a lack of vocabulary knowledge is the largest obstacle” (Huckin and Bloch, 1993) in English learning. Their one-sided pursuit of vocabulary quantity has resulted in neglect of deeper meditation on vocabulary. Some nod their heads over new words again and again until they think the words are in their minds. But they have not done enough to firmly link the word’s form with its meaning. They even do not know there are vocabulary learning techniques which can help them memorize new words effectively.

The most typical problem that EFL learners in the Chinese context face is that, for most of them, they have been trapped in a dilemma that they know in their minds that vocabulary is the cornerstone of English success, but they are vexed when trying to memorize new words. Their vocabulary learning strategy seems to be monotonous and mechanical.

Careful observation of some EFL learners in the Chinese context indicates that their most commonly employed vocabulary learning practices include: rehearsal, rote memorization, consulting dictionaries, repeated copying or reading. These are fully proved in various experiments carried out by different linguists in China. Gao (2006) observed the subtlety of EVL among various groups of students: science students were liable to remember the exact Chinese equivalent of an English word, they seemed to be less tolerant to the fuzzy meaning of a specific word, they were superior to students of art in guessing word meanings, planning word studies and classifying English words. Students of art, on the other hand, were inclined to associate word meanings with other words, they were more active in using the word and cooperating with others in word study. Gao also found that girl students were more skillful and strategic than boy students in EVL learning.

In fact, vocabulary learning strategy is greatly concerned with quantity and quality of vocabulary knowledge. If the learning strategy takes the independent variable, then the vocabulary knowledge may take the dependent variable. It would be helpful for learners to adopt necessary tactics to obtain, reorganize, store up and utilize their established knowledge. We believe that strategy is an unavoidable ingredient in language learning and application.

Learners who have developed appropriate learning strategies have greater self-confidence and interest and learn more effectively (Oxford, 1990). Therefore, the knowledge of learning strategies is important, for it will facilitate language learning considerably.

B. External Factors
a. Forgetfulness

Memory is defined as “recording, interpretation, storing and recall of information” (Bussmann, 2000). It is believed to be essential in vocabulary learning. If the learner cannot memorize a word, it is impossible to recognize it and understand its meaning when the learner meets it the next time.

However, it is a normal phenomenon that words are easily forgotten. Moreover, various other aspects of lexical knowledge are more prone to be forgotten than pronunciation and grammar. Schmitt (2002) believes that words are incoherent information units, not composed by a series of rules, therefore are quite easy to forget. Research (Hulstijn, 1992; Fosse, 1999) indicates that learners need multiple encounters with words to remember them. The most important point in learning vocabulary is the number of times the learner has to retrieve the word, a factor which can be achieved through classroom activities.

According to the cue-dependent theory of forgetting in psychology, the reason why a learner cannot bring some language information to mind is not that s/he has forgotten the information, but that he or she lacks the proper cues to retrieve the information. One scientific research suggests that words considered important, significant, and more closely associated with former information by cerebrum are easier to enter long-term memory (Pan, 2004).

Therefore, language information should be retained in memory, being related to some other information in memory instead of being isolated. One method is to relate vocabulary knowledge in long-term memory to newly learned knowledge and to establish new associations. Thus the new knowledge and original knowledge may integrate into a whole, which is not easily forgotten. Association is a key method for the brain to process the information to be stored and retrieved.

b. Influence of Mother Tongue Context

Vocabulary learning involves such a cognition system that processes perceiving, memorizing, problem solving and information processing. Viewed from the cognitive perspective, first language (L1) and second language (L2) learning differ much, which is the cause of learning difficulties and errors. Since second language learners (SLLs) have already developed rich conceptual and semantic systems which are already linked to their mother tongue (MT), the process of Chinese and English vocabulary learning practices are totally different.
L2 vocabulary learning is different from that of the MT. The former involves two kinds of lexical systems and conceptual systems. Despite that the two languages have many words approximately correspond in meaning; there is seldom a word-for-word relationship between L1 and L2 words.

Example1. Some young people don’t have politeness*. Some young people don’t have good manners.

Example2. The teacher gathered* our term papers and corrected* them.

The teacher collected our term papers and graded them.

The examples show that many of the meanings of a word do not correspond to the meanings of its so-called equivalent in another language. Some words in the L2 may not even have MT counterparts.

Within the behaviorist framework, L2 learning consists above all of overcoming the differences between the first and second language systems. When learning a L2, a series of habitual behaviors that the L1 established can disturb the building up of L2 habitual behaviors. In structuralism, linguists hold that L2 acquisition is a process of overcoming behaviors formed in L1 context, and replaces them with those of L2.

Although MT influence is powerful and complicated, it is comparatively one-sided to think that the MT solely plays an interferential role in learning L2 vocabulary. According to Zhang (2006), taking advantage of mother tongue’s positive transfer can help to improve the English language learning. For example both the Chinese and English languages treasure money and time. Chinese people huò qián (spend money) and huǒ shìjiěn (spend time) to do something, so do people in the English culture. In word formation, the two languages are in similar too, for example, as an image language, the Chinese characters like 江 (river), 河 (stream), 湖 (lake), 海 (sea), 洋 (ocean) all contain a composing part of “氵” (water). This is similar to a prefix in English word-formation to some extent, take aqua- for example, aquacade, aquaculture, aquanaut, etc. A learner’s L1 is one of the most important elements in learning L2 vocabulary. The L1 will determine whether a majority of L2 words are easy or difficult, and whether the whole new knowledge systems have to be mastered.

If the L1 and L2 are similar, there’s a much higher likelihood that the initial mapping of the new L2 word will simply be the re-labeling of a L1 word, rather than the addition of a totally new conceptual unit. Of course, this re-labeling will eventually have to be adjusted towards the exact properties of the L2 word, but it does have the advantage of being initially easy. As a result, it is economical and productive for SLLs to transfer their previous knowledge of learning to the new task. It means that they do not have to discover everything from scratch. As Corder (1967) expresses it, the L1 provides a “rather rich and specific set of hypotheses” which learners can use. The transfer of rules from L1 may be one of the learners’ active strategies for making sense of the L2 data.

Clearly, the more aware learners are of the similarities and differences between their MT and the TL, the easier they will find it to adopt effective learning strategies. So learners should raise the consciousness of cross-linguistic influence and become aware of the differences and similarities between the MT and the TL. We can compare the learners’ L1 with the L2 and actively construct rules from the data they encounter and gradually adapt these rules in the direction of the TL system. Our MT is an invisible learning foundation of a new language, and it is also a kind of potential resources of the learner’s learning.

Based on the above hypothesis, we propose a set of association strategies (ASs) that are targeted at learners in the Chinese context. Before the introduction of the strategies, first let us look at two dimensions of vocabulary knowledge.

. Two Dimensions of Vocabulary Learning

![Two Dimensions of Vocabulary Learning](image)

A. Width of English Vocabulary (Horizontal Theory)

Horizontal theory (Figure 1-X axis) refers to the relationship among words themselves, such as synonymy and antonymy. It is the foundation of vocabulary learning. We take one word as center and cover all its synonyms, antonyms and derivatives. This method is conducive for learners to construct a mental lexicon. This method can help learners not only to speed up the internalization of new words, but also to enhance the degree of assimilation.

B. Depth of English Vocabulary (Longitudinal Theory)

Longitudinal theory (Figure 1-Y axis) refers to the relationship among vocabulary, sentence, paragraph, article and cultural background, which has manifested the nimble utilization of vocabulary. It helps learners grasp the deeper meaning of vocabulary and profoundly understand the connotation or the sentimental color of the word expressed, and it simultaneously helps learners actually experience the contextual function of a specific word.

C. Suggested Strategies

* Possible Chinese English
The longitudinal theory is the goal of vocabulary learning. But only if horizontal theory is profoundly understood and solidly grasped can longitudinal theory be well prepared to carry out. The longitudinal theory can change horizontal knowledge to inherent knowledge, so these two dimensions ought to be integrated into one by association strategies.

IV. Association Strategies

Vocabulary learning is a lifelong cognition process. No single individual can grasp the whole English vocabulary. However, learning sufficient vocabulary is the core of language learning. German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus’s (1964) experiment indicates that remembering 80 irrelevant words will cost 10 times as much time as remembering 80 poems. As words are stored and remembered in a network of associations, the association strategy will surely make an effective method in L2 learning. These associations can be of many types and be linked in a number of ways. Words in our mental lexicon, for example, are tied to each other not only by meaning, form and sound, but also by sight. Learners link similar shapes in their mind’s eye, and by other parts of the contexts in which they have learned or experienced. To know the meaning of a word becomes the task of knowing its associations with other words. Therefore, to learn it most effectively, the learners should present it in the network of associations.

Just as language is alive, so is vocabulary. It is active and in constant change. Vocabulary learning is a process of association and connection concerned with the processing and organization of different information. Therefore association method is also an effective way to know and to store up words in one’s memory. In the process of vocabulary learning, learners will make links or connections between stimuli and responses either consciously or subconsciously, for example, the English words and their Chinese equivalents, the English words and their synonyms and antonyms, and the English words and their referential concepts in reality.

Thus we can employ such kinds of strategies to facilitate understanding and memorizing language materials by linking the new language information with that already existed in memory, or forming some kind of association between received information. These are the so called Association Strategies (ASs).

Example: we can memorize the names of the American Great Lakes, Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior by associating them to HOMES.

Associations can be approached step by step, first from word association, semantic association, subsequently to structure association, conceptual association and finally to cultural association. (Figure 2)

A. Word Association

Oxford (1990:87) stated that associating new language information with familiar concepts already in memory is effective for learning a foreign language. Naturally these associations are likely to strengthen comprehension, and make the material easier to memorize.

Association strategies are divided into five categories (Pei, 2002):

a. Euphony association strategy involves finding a Chinese word with the similar pronunciation with the English word, linking the meanings of the two words together, and thus establishing a definite association between the form and the meaning of the English word.

For example, “abandon” means “give somebody/something up” in English and we can find a Chinese equivalent “lěng bōng dēng” (a cold bench) with the similar pronunciation. The association is that in a football match when a player sits on a cold bench, he is abandoned.

b. Form-meaning association strategy involves analyzing the form of the target word and establishing association between its form and meaning.

For example, the word “amaze” means “surprise or astonish”. In this word, two “a”s are like two big eyes and “z” is like an open mouth. The association is that when a person is amazed by something, he will widen his eyes and open his mouth.

c. Old-word association strategy involves analyzing the English spelling, finding one or more old English words included in this new word, linking the meanings of the new and the old words, and then establishing some association between the form and the meaning.

For example, the word “arrest” includes the word “rest” that students have learned. So the association is formed between the meanings of the two words. If a thief is arrested and put into prison, he has to stop stealing and have a rest in his job.

d. Word-pair association strategy proposes that when an English word has a similar spelling or pronunciation with another English word, links can be formed between the meanings of these two words and association between the form and the meaning can be established.

For example, when a learner meets the new word “haste”, he will find it similar to “taste”, and he can think if the dinner is ready, he will make haste to taste the delicious food.

e. Affix association strategy is related to analyzing prefixes, suffixes of words and inferring the meaning of the target word.
For example, the word “ashamed” has the root word “shame”, and we can infer from the affixes “a-“ and “-ed” that “ashamed” is an adjective with the meaning of feeling shame.

The analysis of the word structure would ease the task of memorizing new words by associating them with familiar concepts already in memory.

B. Semantic Association

In Schmitt’s taxonomy (1997), using related words that involve some type of sense relationship, such as co-hyponymy, synonymy and antonymy is also a strategy derived from word association.

In semantic relations, it is the relation between words that is important. The goal of semantic field analysis is to arrive at meanings shared by a group of words. That is, all the words within the field relate to each other, yet differ in details. Semantic relations can be divided into four types: hyponymy, meronymy, synonymy and antonymy.

a. Hyponymy: In the utterance “apple is a kind of fruit”, apple is a hyponym of fruit. The hyponym relation is important in writing semantic descriptions, as well as in terms of memory for words.

b. Meronymy: The relationship between arm and body is a part-whole relation, which is termed meronym. Chapter is a meronym of book.

c. Synonymy is a semantic relation with which most learners will be familiar. For instance: In English there are 37 synonyms of the word “thief” (Zhou & Yu, 1994). However, it is difficult to find lexemes in a language which can be considered as completely identical in meaning.

d. Antonymy shares features with the exception of one where the feature is negative rather than positive in value, such as hot and cold. There’s a saying in English: “Everything is known and better understood by its contrary.” It can also be applied to language learning.

For example, “refractory” is very uncommon. But it is much easier to grasp by memorizing its antonym “docile” or “tame”, which eases the task by associating “refractory” with its contrary.

Swinney (1979) has shown that multiple senses of the same word are activated automatically, instantaneously and subconsciously during the first 200 milliseconds of word reading. A perceived word form does not activate only its own specific meaning, but also potentially many related meanings. In other words, by activating a node in the lexical semantic network, one also activates, automatically and subconsciously, all the other connected nodes. Whether learners access the meaning by inference from context, by asking someone, or by looking the word up in a dictionary, they must consolidate the memory of this label-meaning pair. The analysis of meaning can increase the associations that learners make with a word. Semantic association, or more specifically, hyponymy, meronymy, synonymy and antonymy can not only help to set up an associative network, but also facilitate long-term memory.

C. Structural Association

This is an effective way of memorizing words by putting them into word collocations. When words have inner-relations, they enter your long-term memory, simultaneously let your cerebrum “carry conveniently”, and adjust to use them appropriately. If an individual word is only a raw material, the matched collocations are already half-finished product that is beneficial for memory and application. it is clear that the collocations are just as important to learners as the lexicalized compounds. These collocations are part of the “large store of fixed or semi-fixed prefabricated items” which, according to Lewis (1997) are essential for the acquisition of language.

While semantic ASs aim to have more accurate comprehension of lexical meanings and a better choice of words in expressions, another part of the production strategy, i.e., structure association strategy tends to produce language in appropriate structures. This part mainly refers to the strategies of putting words and morphemes into larger units like multi-word items as collocations, phrases, idioms and prefabs in which a single-word item is usually the component of a new meaning that the single-word item alone does not exhibit.

Single-word items are far from enough if we want to produce idiomatic expressions in English because words are much more alive in connection with other words and tend to cluster together.

Look at the following example first, which is put forward by Jim Scrivener (2002) in his discussion of vocabulary items.

Example: “dark horse”. We are quite familiar with the one-word vocabulary items like book, box, computer and etc, but do you know what “dark horse” means? Does it mean “a black horse” or “a horse in the darkness”? Of course neither. Usually these two words are found together to mean “a little-known, unexpectedly successful entrant, as in a horserace” and we can find it as a single entry in dictionaries. But, by learning “dark” and “horse” respectively and putting their meanings together, can we make this new meaning clear easily, especially to novice English learners? You bet! So, in English acquisition, it’s wiser to take these two words as a holistic unit.

So, Scrivener (2002) draws a conclusion that native speakers do not construct expressions like the above examples word by word, but rather, extract ready-made structure or language chunks from some internal store and then put them together with other language items in order to express. In this case, we should know that it is better for us not only to deal with single-word lexical items, but also with longer, multi-word items. By doing so, we may avoid isolationism and be more ready to put words to use.

Rosamund (2002) classified multi-word items into five categories, namely compounds, phrasal verbs, idioms, fixed phrases and prefabs. Let’s look at them respectively.

a. Compounds

A compound is a combination of two or more words which functions as a single word. For example: self-made, flower-shop. Compounds are written either as a single word like headache, as hyphenated words like self-government or as two words like police station. Compounding is a productive process in word-formation.

b. Phrasal Verbs

A phrasal verb is a verbal construction consisting of a verb plus adverb or preposition (a verb may be followed by its object if it is transitive). The meaning of some of these verbal constructions can be guessed from the meanings of their parts
Prefabs refer to prefabricated language, also termed as conventionalized language or routine. Generally, it is a segment of language made up of several morphemes or words which are learned together and used as if they were a single item. For example: How are you? With best wishes! You must be kidding and etc. By putting words into multi-word items, we may not only have a further understanding of the meaning of a word in a new linguistic setting, but also get ready-made linguistic structures and language chunks, which can be compared to some half-finished products in the process of language production, and aided by grammatical rules. Chinese learners may find it more convenient and effective to use in their speech or writing.

The institutionalization of multi-word items will help produce English in a more idiomatic way so that what learners may find it more convenient and effective to use in their speech or writing.

D. Conceptual Association

This is one kind of high-grade association, transiting from word association to conceptual association. Take one concept as center, consider other concepts it is connected with and collect them to compose an associative field. Then inspect and analyze which words and expressions are used together surrounded the central concept.

Take “开会” (kaì huì) this central concept as an example. Its associative concept includes: 散会 (sàn huì), 休会 (xiū huì), 闭会 (bì huì), 复会 (fù huì), etc. The corresponding English should be call a meeting, break up a meeting, adjourn a meeting, close a meeting, and resume a meeting.

Moreover, if we extend “开会” (kaì huì), we can associate it with propose (ti yì), move (dòng yì), vote (biào jue), veto (fǒu jue) and etc. In order to be advantageous for memory, the above words may be listed into a table like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Call a meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Break up / adjourn / close / resume a meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propose / move / vote / veto.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, conceptual association should be based on correct use of expressions; otherwise it will just be piles of words, unfavorable to the grasp of language. Thus, learners should memorize these associative words by putting them into put…to the vote, take a vote on…, move for…and the like.

E. Cultural Association

The difference between Chinese and English vocabulary does not only lie in language form, but also exists in a logical difference of thought, that is culture. Vocabulary connotation refers to the connecting meaning or the attached meaning that words associate within the English-speaking country’s historical background, cultural tradition, manners, customs, production methods and etc. The same word would reflect different intentions and associations for persons with different cultural backgrounds.

Example: Pie in Chinese is translated into “馅饼” (xiàn bǐng), which reminds people of traditional Chinese meat pie. While in English speaking countries, it reminds people of apple pie or something like that kind of food.

Mr. Hu Wenzhong, a cross-culture scholar, once stated: “Learning a foreign language while neglecting its cultural background means repeating the words of others like a parrot, one can hardly touch the quintessence of that language” (Hu, 1989). Traditional vocabulary learning method has put great emphasis on individual pronunciation and meaning. Unsuccessful English learners lay stress on superficial meanings and ignore cultural connotations.

In fact, the origin and usage of English vocabulary is variable. Some of it originates from Greek mythology; some from stories in the Bible; some from Shakespeare’s drama and so on. There is even some from French and Spanish. These words are put into use and their meanings are either expanded or reduced or shifted in long-term use. Simultaneously those words gradually accumulated the associative meaning as a result of specific usages under certain circumstances. That is, cultural connotation.

In ancient Greek mythology, characters’ names are often widely used in literary work or in daily life. For example, Narcissus originally is a handsome man in Greek mythology. There are no mirrors in ancient times. So Narcissus is only able to stand in the water’s edge to appreciate his own appearance. He was so immersed in his beautiful appearance that he was not willing to leave, and finally plunged into the water, only to drown to death. God took pity on him, and thereupon turned him into a narcissus flower. Finally Narcissus became an adjective. Its lower case is “narcissistic” which means “自恋 (zì liàn)”.

Literature has a great impact on people’s lives. Quite a large batch of vocabularies and their related collocations belong to the category of literary reference, of which the “Holy Bible” bears the brunt.
Example 1: “A blue stocking” refers to a literary lady or a talented woman. It started in the 18th century in London, where groups of men and women met in the evenings to discuss books and culture. They decided to replace evenings of empty, meaningless talk with intelligent discussion. They dressed (including women in blue stockings) to show their dislike for that fancy evening clothes of the time. So in Chinese it means “女才子（nǚ cái zǐ）”.

Example 2: “to have January chicks”. It is difficult to understand if we neglect background knowledge. Here January is a center leading character in Chaucer’s “The Canterbury Tales”. He is the son of Lombard Baron (who is already 60 years old) and a young girl named May. So “to have January chicks” is what we called “老来得子（lǎo lái dé zi）”.

In order to overcome “cultural distance”, Swaffar (1992) suggests that learners first be exposed to FL texts of popular literature, such as “Holy Bible”, ancient Greek myth, Shakespeare’s drama. Learners can easily recognize the social stereotypes on which these texts are based. Thus, instead of fixed typologies of isolated cultural facts, learners learn to match checklists of cognitive typologies or universal networks of meaning with specific texts.

. Conclusion
Vocabulary takes a central role in learning a L2. Language learners are faced with the task of how to store and retrieve words and how to improve vocabulary learning efficiency and then language learning efficiency.

The clarification of the process of associating vocabulary learning from the perspectives of psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology shows that vocabulary learning in a L2 is a process of association and connection. In the course of learning new word information, memory plays an important role. The more word information is processed, the more associations and connections are made and the longer the new word will be stored in memory. The learner’s mother tongue, foreign language words they have mastered, encyclopedic and word knowledge all may be the stimulus in the storing and retrieval of new word information. This deep level of word information processing will build an associative network, which helps to consolidate the semantic networks of mental lexicon.

Some popular methods are often used for learning English such as opposite association, approachable association, causal association, classified association, and so on. For example, in the procession of memorizations to a group of semantically related words like program (noun), programmed (adjective and verb), programmer (noun), programming (verb and noun), and programmatic (adjective), etc., learner should associatively memorize the group of words by classifying these words in their mind from relevant categories (Li, 2008). The association method will motivate students’ learning interests and be convenient for them to memorize. Learners should be encouraged to make their own lexical associations when they are learning new vocabulary. In conclusion, the association strategy is perceived as an enjoyable way to learn vocabulary. Theoretically, the more those words are analyzed either phonologically, semantically or comprehensively, the more those words are enriched by associations rendered by learners, the longer they will stay in memory, and the higher the vocabulary learning efficiency will be. As Hulstijn (2001) has stated, to some extent it can transform the vocabulary learning task from uninspired drudgery into newfound delight.

References
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**Appendix I** Survey result (frustrations in acquiring language skills) %:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>items</th>
<th>vocabulary</th>
<th>Grammar/structure</th>
<th>Accent/speed</th>
<th>Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening %</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>30.</td>
<td>8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking %</td>
<td>44.</td>
<td>18.</td>
<td>18.</td>
<td>20.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading %</td>
<td>79.</td>
<td>8.</td>
<td>6.</td>
<td>7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>writing %</td>
<td>48.</td>
<td>32.</td>
<td>8.</td>
<td>12.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>