Thai Teachers’ Reflections On Vocabulary Pedagogy In Thai EFL Class

Chongrak Liangpanit
Department of English
Khon Kaen University, Thailand

ABSTRACT
This paper reports on the extents to which Thai secondary teachers’ reflection of vocabulary teaching and their implementation its vocabulary pedagogy which includes in their EFL classroom. Within a qualitative study, data were collected by way of in-depth interview with 10 teachers in different high school teachers both experienced and non-experienced teachers. 100 questionnaires were interpreted by using quantitative data. The results revealed that teachers show some different reflections which in turned effected the way they implemented the vocabulary pedagogy in classrooms. Recommendations are also given to apply for teaching vocabulary in Thai EFL classroom.

Keyword: vocabulary activity, pedagogy

1. Introduction

Rationale
Vocabulary is regarded as an essential element for all communication and is encountered by language students on a daily basis. Success in communication depends on how well students acquire and retain vocabulary. As claimed by Nation (2001), knowing vocabulary is considered useful for language students. Meara (1996) stated that students with more knowledge of vocabulary are more proficient in language study than those with less knowledge. In Thailand, where English is a foreign language in the curriculum, Wangkangwan (2007) discovered that the cause of Thai students’ difficulty in learning the English language was their insufficient knowledge of vocabulary (Liangpanit 2002; Nomsiri 2005; Duadsuntia 2008; Mongkol 2008). Obviously, vocabulary is one of the major problems in teaching and learning a language. Its importance calls for a focus on the teaching of

Generally, vocabulary is widely taught in all English compulsory subjects,

it is challenging to explore how teachers reflect in their vocabulary teaching in EFL classroom in order to know the in dept-information in improving students’ vocabulary knowledge.

2. Research objectives:

To investigate the teachers’ reflections on vocabulary teaching in terms of vocabulary activity, vocabulary testing in Thai EFL classroom. To explore how Thai teachers teach vocabulary in EFL class.

3. Research questions

Which vocabulary activity do Thai teachers prefer to use in class for Thai secondary students?
How do Thai teachers use vocabulary activity for teaching secondary students in Thai EFL classroom?

4. Research Methodology

It is divided into four main parts: the participants, the research instruments, the data collection, and the data analysis.

The Participants
100 secondary schools teachers were selected by the random sampling method to serve as the sample group.
5. Research instruments

The research instruments used in the present study were the questionnaire, and the semi-structured interviews.

6. Data Collection

The data collection was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2014.

7. Data Analysis

The obtained data were divided into qualitative and quantitative data.

8. Findings

Results of research question1: Which vocabulary activity do Thai teachers prefer to use in class for Thai secondary students?

100 Thai English teachers were asked to complete a 5-point rating scale questionnaire investigating their opinions on their vocabulary teaching activity used in class. The quantitative data collected were calculated for the arithmetic means. The results of the analysis are presented in Table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary activity</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listing from memory</td>
<td>Single items</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recall and show</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words without vowels</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search a page</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association dominoes</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection two</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True or false</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy cloze</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhymes and couplets</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrambled words</td>
<td>Vocabulary activity</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word from letter</td>
<td>for fun</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short words from a longer one</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beetle hangman</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words game</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the table shown above, it can be seen that teachers choose teaching single items by using Single words dictation activity the most, making up 4.7 mean score, followed by using Translation dictation with 4.50 mean scores. While teaching items in context, teachers preferred easy cloze to teach vocabulary for students the most, making up 4.6 means scores.

Vocabulary activity for fun, it is found that teachers preferred Beetle hangman the most, making up 4.8 highest mean scores, followed by scrambled words, making up 4.7 mean score very high level.

Results of research question 2: How do Thai teachers use vocabulary activity for teaching secondary students in Thai EFL classroom?

Apart from the available quantitative evidence, there were also qualitative data obtained from the interview. In order to obtain more in-depth data for the answer of Research Question 2, the semi-structured interview was conducted. Ten experienced English teachers in secondary schools have been chosen for this study to express their reflection of vocabulary in real class. Each participant spent approximately 15 minutes participating in the interview session. Some examples of participants’ reports on their opinions are presented below.

**Teaching methods**

Most of the participants mentioned that they used both the grammar translation and communicative approach in teaching vocabulary because it is the best way to open the opportunity for students to recognize words understand the meaning and use the words effectively. Teachers divide language teaching into six different components: speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. The students are given twenty words per week. Fifteen minutes each week are spent on word-building. They work with them in various ways, for example by putting them into sentences or by trying to understand them in context. The texts come from textbooks, course book, newspapers, TV-shows or movies. Teachers believe that context clue is important as it helps students get a better understanding of words. Their books give valuable support to his vocabulary teaching. Teachers gave students important words from a general word list, not connected with a text. They also give students exercises where they fill in missing words and match words with definitions.

Furthermore, they also think that dictionary is one of the most valuable sources for learning vocabulary. Students can learn words by their self study from dictionary. They mentioned that dictionary is useful for Thai students in improving four skills.

Teachers believed that vocabulary is important sub skill in improving students’ English four skills of communication in speaking, listening, reading and writing.

**Vocabulary activity**

Most of the teachers mentioned that they use game in teaching vocabulary for fun to be integrated into class. They also think that using vocabulary games is one of the activities which require students to energetically communicate with their classmates, using their own language in a communicative way. Therefore, games are useful and effective tools that should be applied in vocabulary classes. The use of vocabulary games is a way to make the lessons more interesting, enjoyable and successful.

**Discussions**

According to the above findings, the following recommendations in teaching vocabulary are discussed:

Previous Thai research studies (Intaraprasert, 2004; Charnsin, 2007; Siriwan, 2007; Sarnthong, 2010) found that students employed the discovery strategy of using English-Thai dictionaries and Thai-English
dictionaries as well as guessing the meaning from contextual clues. Therefore, dictionary use should be promoted to students as an effective strategy for learning vocabulary.

The main focus in teaching vocabulary is to consider the vocabulary learning goals by focusing on determining the word form, word meaning and word use which was mentioned by Nation (2001) as the most effective kind of vocabulary learning. How do Thai teachers use vocabulary activity for teaching secondary students in Thai EFL classroom?

Stahl (2005) mentioned “simple repetition or drill of the word”, emphasizing that vocabulary instruction should provide students with opportunities to encounter words repeatedly and in a variety of contexts. As indicated by Liangpanit’s (2010) research and Maneeganont’s (2012) findings, seven to 10 repetitions of words helped students to remember the target words better. These findings are similar to Nation (1982); Wallace (1984); and Tinkham (1993) who suggested six or seven repetitions of the same word.

In teaching vocabulary, the direct and indirect vocabulary learning should be integrated in class. Keyword method and the use of vocabulary cards should be promoted to use in EFL class. Rodrique and Sadowki (2000) showed that the keyword method produced superior recall achieving retention of vocabulary in EFL classrooms. It is also primarily a way of making a strong link between the form of an unknown word and its meaning. The keyword method has positive effects on both immediate retention and long-term retention (Nation, 2001).

Using vocabulary games is one of the activities which require students to energetically communicate with their classmates, using their own language in a communicative way. Some experts have also worked out the characteristics of games that make vocabulary learning more effective (Ersoz, 2000). Therefore, games are useful and effective tools that should be applied in vocabulary classes. The use of vocabulary games is a way to make the lessons more interesting, enjoyable and successful.

Fifty percent of the teachers mention that it is important to learn words in context, and that studying words in texts is one way to help students understand that the same word they can mean different things in different contexts and sentences. This is in line with the lexicographical research described by Zimmerman (1997:16-17) which has shown that it is important for learners to notice and be able to use patterns in the language, rather than learn rules.

References


Meara (1996)

Mongkol 2008).


