

UNIVERZITA PARDUBICE  
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**INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES  
IN LEARNING ENGLISH VOCABULARY**

Diplomová práce

2002

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Thesis

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V Pardubicích dne 10. 2. 2002

Eva Hrabincová

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## **Abstract:**

This diploma paper is meant to provide a view into the sphere of learning vocabulary. In the following discussion the emphasis is placed on the importance of vocabulary learning which is regarded as the key component of the language development. One of the chief aims of the paper is to develop awareness of the processes involved in learning, specifically, to explore what strategies students employ while dealing with English words. The following chapters cover topics closely related to vocabulary learning such as factors influencing the process, the mental lexicon, learnability and so on. The learning styles and strategies are given great attention as they are the prime focus of the thesis. How can vocabulary be practised and developed in the most effective way? Why are appropriate vocabulary recording and dictionary use significant? These are some of the issues discussed here.

The practical section is based on the research the prior concern of which has been to investigate what strategies students use, how far they are aware of the existence of various techniques and whether they actually use any to learn new words and to retain them better. It is important that students be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. It is the learning strategy instruction that is based on the idea that students are more effective when they take control of their learning and thus become more independent.

## Souhrn:

Tato práce poskytuje náhled do oblasti slovní zásoby. V následující diskusi je důraz kladen na důležitost slovní zásoby jako klíčové části zdokonalování se v cizím jazyce. Jedním z hlavních cílů práce je rozšířit povědomí o procesech probíhajících při učení, práce se snaží prozkoumat strategie, které studenti využívají při učení anglických slovíček. Následující kapitoly se zabývají tématy jako například faktory ovlivňující učení, schopnost naučit se nová slovíčka apod. Hlavním cílem práce je přiblížit styly a strategie žáků, otázka procvičování a rozšiřování slovní zásoby, význam vedení vlastního slovníčku. To jsou jen některé otázky, kterým je zde věnována pozornost.

Praktická část je založená na výzkumu, jehož hlavním cílem bylo zjistit, jak se studenti slovíčka učí, jak přistupují k problematice slovní zásoby, do jaké míry si uvědomují existenci různých technik a strategií, zda-li jich ve skutečnosti využívají k zapamatování a udržení nových slov. Různí žáci potřebují různé metody učení. Při osvojování cizího jazyka je třeba žáky vést k tomu, aby byli připraveni převzít větší odpovědnost za své učení a to pomocí využívání vlastních učebních strategií založených na individuálním učebním a poznávacím stylu, a tím se stát méně závislími na učiteli.

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# THEORETICAL PART

## Introduction

*“This brings me to the subject of vocabulary learning, which to me always seems the key to any language. I am quite happy to pronounce badly and make grammatical mistakes but there is no escape from learning words.”*  
(Hedge 1997:111)

*“In learning a second language, the student almost inevitably thinks about what he is doing and reflects on the nature of the process.”*  
(Lewis in Wenden, Rubin 1987:103)

Whether we are speaking or writing, we convey our messages in words. Words are the medium through which we express our thoughts, feelings, ideas, questions, remarks etc. A large and varied vocabulary allows us to express our ideas precisely and concisely by choosing the exact word; use the appropriate tone by choosing the most suitable words to reflect the degree of formality; communicate with confidence and ease by feeling comfortable with the situation because we know we have suitable words at our disposal.

*“The more words I have the more precisely I can express the exact meaning I want to.”* (Scrivener 1994:73)

No matter how well the student of a language learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of the language are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings communication cannot happen in any meaningful way. Students usually want to increase their store of vocabulary as they regard it as a yardstick of their language improvement. As Jordan (2000) points out: *“Vocabulary knowledge is the single most important area of second language competence.”* (p.149)

Despite the traditional neglect of the sphere of vocabulary,...“throughout this book we claim that vocabulary has been neglected by linguists, applied linguists and language teachers..“ (McCarthy:1990). Recent years have seen a greater awareness of this issue and many questions have been asked some of which are outlined below.

- π What are the factors affecting learning vocabulary?
- π Do all students learn in the same way?
- π What strategies do learners use to acquire new words and to retain them?
- π Why are some words easier to learn than others?

These are only some of the questions to be dealt with in the following chapters. The purpose of the thesis is first to look at some theoretical background of vocabulary acquisition and learning, specifically, the factors influencing learning vocabulary, the mental lexicon, effective strategies for developing one's word store and other issues. Secondly, the paper tries to reflect on how this is being applied in actual learning situation as the second part is practical and attempts to find out what the process of learning new words is like. As part of expanding students' skills and strategies, developing reference skills and encouraging the use of vocabulary records in particular are being stressed.

The research part is going to make use of a questionnaire, observation, interview and action research. The numbers and figures of the obtained data will be explained and further conclusions drawn.

The questionnaire will be given to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students who are between sixteen and nineteen years of age and all of them have studied English for at least five years. I am going to concentrate primarily on the ways students learn new vocabulary. The main focus will be on any techniques the students use as well as their opinion on and a general feeling about language learning.

## CHAPTER 1

### 1. THE POWER OF WORDS

“To the Anglo-Saxons a vocabulary was a ‘wordboard’, to be owned and treasured; to the Chinese, a sea of words to be fished.” (Morgan 1986:4)

When we stop to think how words are used in our everyday life, we realize that unlike grammar we use words with real awareness as we have to name a thing correctly, choose the right word in order not to hurt other people and so on. Put in another way, we are constantly conscious of power of words. Obviously, to

communicate effectively both in writing and speaking we need a large and varied vocabulary so that we can select the most appropriate words for our purpose and audience. In other words, in order to communicate successfully we have to rely entirely on the words we use to express the message correctly, clearly and appropriately. In order to put the message across successfully we need to have a choice of words if we are to be ready for different occasions.

As Quirk points out, "*Language is the key to interpersonal relations and the driving force in them.*" (1990:143). Consequently, it is necessary to know the range of words for different situations in order to pick the most appropriate ones since, and it is typical for English, there are a great many subtle differences in meanings of words. According to Quirk, many of our interpersonal difficulties are language based. (p.143).

The size of our vocabulary is not fixed. It can be extended. Our word store will continue to grow throughout our life if we encourage it to do so. Some of the ways are by using a dictionary, referring to a thesaurus, extensive reading, listening, practising.

Three types of vocabulary areas are distinguished according to our social interaction with other people: the 'core' vocabulary, the 'private' vocabulary and the 'specialized' vocabulary. This issue is not going to be dwelt upon more as it is not the objective now.

## **2. STATUS OF VOCABULARY IN A LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

In the past vocabulary used to be emphasized too much in language classrooms. Some people had believed it was the only key to language learning. Learners often thought that all they needed was a large number of words. They presumed they could master the language by learning a vast number of words along with the meanings in their own language. This belief proved to be wrong since apart from knowing many words and their meanings, one must also know how the words function in sentences. That is one reason for the emphasis upon grammar in teacher-preparation programmes as well as in the classroom in the past few decades.

A great deal has been said about new discoveries in English grammar. At the same time, much less has been pronounced about ways to help students deal with new words. What is certain according to various studies is that students who do not learn

grammar along with vocabulary will not be able to use the language for communication.

As Allen (1983:2) points out,

“...some specialists in methodology seemed to believe that the meaning of words could not be adequately taught, so it was better not to try to teach them....It is not simply a matter of learning that a certain word in one language means the same as a word in another language. Much more needs to be learned, and there were those who felt the complexities were too great to be dealt with in class.”

The status of vocabulary within the curriculum has varied considerably over the years. It suffered significant neglect during the 1950's and 1960's. When audio-lingualism had a dominant influence on methodology, made some of a comeback during the 1970's under the influence of communicative language teaching. For much of this century, the principal focus of language teaching has been on the grammar. While grammar-translation approaches to the teaching of language provided a balance of grammar and vocabulary, audio-lingualists suggested that the emphasis should be strongly on the acquisition of the basic grammatical patterns of the language. The status of vocabulary has been enhanced as a result of the development of communicative approaches to language teaching, and methods such as the Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). Proponents of these methods point out that in the early stages of learning and using a second language one is better served by vocabulary than grammar.

At present there is more concern with learning vocabulary. Scholars are taking more interest in the study of word meanings. There has been a number of research studies dealt with problems related to words. The results are that lexical problems frequently interfere with communication as it is the right words which are necessary for successful communication. Undoubtedly, teachers are aware of the value of learning vocabulary.

Allen (1983:5) gives a list of the most frequent questions raised by teachers:

- Which English words do students need most to learn?
- How can we make those words seem important to them?
- Why are some words easier than others to learn?
- Which aids to vocabulary learning are available?
- How can we encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning?

My objective is to try to find answers to these questions in the chapters that follow.

### 3. FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNING VOCABULARY

“...from the psychological point of view foreign language acquisition is in comparison with other subjects – increasingly complicated process, largely dependent on the learner’s individuality.“ (Hendrich 1988:62)

Learning vocabulary is a complex process which depends on a number of factors. They are briefly outlined below:

1. *Individual differences* including age; aptitude and intelligence; motivation; anxiety; attitude; personality;...and many others
2. *Individual learning styles and strategies*
3. *Materials used in the classroom*
4. *Teacher’s approach and methods*
5. *Classroom atmosphere:* a) relations among students and students and their teacher  
b) time and place conditions
6. *Level of communicative competence*

Learners bring their own personalities, individual characteristics, perceptions of themselves and many other attributes to the learning process. This results in different learning styles and consequently diverse ways of learning, comprehending and knowing as we shall discuss later. The pages that follow will not consider all of these attributes but will discuss the importance of learner’s motivation, attitude and anxiety.

#### 3.1 Motivation

“But practice without zeal – with equal comfort and success and failure – does not make perfect...“ (Thorndike in Educational Psychology, 1993)

That affective factors such as motivation, attitude and anxiety are critical factors to effective learning is universally agreed on. There is a high correlation between motivation and achievement. This aspect, however, is very difficult to define and measure. What exactly is a *motive*?

“*Motives are inner psychological drives that impel people to action.*“ (Nunan 1996:209)

In Hendrich’s words, “every motivated behaviour ensues from the inner motivational dispositions – needs and incentives activating these needs. Incentive is an impulse that changes a need into a motive of an action.“ (1988:52) In a school

environment such an incentive may be, for instance, a praise, reprimand, a good grade etc. Hendrich also maintains that “motivation is one of the most efficient forms of psychological regulations. It is a driving force, an agent of learning.” (1988:52)

The fact that motivation is a crucial component in learning seems very obvious. Yet it was not always so. It was not until early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that E.L.Thorndike experimentally pronounced in his famous law of effect the link between learning and motivation. Learning, as Thorndike stated, “is strengthened when it is followed by a satisfying state of affairs – satisfying, of course, to the learner.” (Sprinthall:519) Motivation has since become a firmly established term in psychology and education. Teachers have long recognized motivational or non-intellectual factors to be crucial in determining the achievement of their students. There is much evidence that motivation has got a powerful influence on the positive attitude towards learning. Psychologists tend to stress the fact that motivation never acts apart from learning and perception. “Not only does motivation affect learning, but learning also affects motivation.” (Sprinthall 1990:521)

Below a few interesting theoretical aspects of this topic will be discussed. They are as follows:

1. The importance of motivation compared to language aptitude for success in language learning.
2. What are the characteristics associated with a motivated learner?
3. *Integrative* versus *instrumental* motivation. Which of the two might be stronger motive?
4. *Intrinsic* versus *extrinsic* motivation.

### **3.1.1 The importance of motivation**

As has been said above, motivation is very strongly related to achievement in language learning. A question for which there is not yet conclusive evidence is whether motivation is more, or less, important than natural aptitude for learning, though there are many claims towards the opinion that motivation is ultimately more important. What is conclusive for us as teachers is that we are responsible for creating conditions which encourage learners’ motivation and thus learning. There are several important points for the teachers which may help enhance motivation. It could be done by

choosing interesting topics for discussion, by clearly explaining all activities so that learners may find them easy to understand. Moreover, it is a teacher's role to be able to convince the learner about the usefulness and attractiveness of the topic and the importance of learning new words. Last but not least, for motivation it is crucial to have good and quality materials available – learners need a good textbook to follow in order to have a feeling of concept and guidance.

Various research studies show that students' motivation for learning and studying the language emerged as a primary influence. According to Chamot et al, "ineffective students generally displayed low motivation to learn the language. Effective students tended to be highly motivated." (1999:140)

### **3.1.2 Different kinds of motivation**

A distinction has been made between *integrative* and *instrumental* motivation. The former refers to the identification with and integration into the target language culture. The latter entails the wish to learn the language because of its value as an instrument for doing something successfully, such as for study purposes, pursuing one's career, as an intellectual challenge, or simply as a part of the school programme and like. Experts say integratively motivated learners do better than the instrumentally motivated ones.

Another distinction is that between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation. *Intrinsic* means learning for its own sake. *Extrinsic* is connected with external incentives, such as the wish to please either a teacher or parent, to pass an examination, to receive a good grade etc. It has been found out that intrinsic motivation has a bigger impact on successful learning, as it has its roots in the learner's awareness of learning to be worthwhile and useful. Both of them play a big part in the classroom motivation. Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation are concepts dealt with by many psychologists. Jerome Bruner, the great cognitive psychologist, is convinced that "learning will be far more long-lasting when it is sustained by intrinsic motivation than when it is driven by the more transitory push of external reinforces." (Sprinthall 1990:523) Bruner admits, however, that extrinsic motivation may be necessary for initiating certain actions or for getting learning process started. (p. 523)



“But once on its way, the sometimes fragile process of learning is better nourished and sustained by intrinsic motives.” (p. 524)

According to Gardner in Nunan’s *Self-directed Teacher* (1996):

“...motivation refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language....motivation to learn a second language is seen as referring to the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity.” (p.290)

### 3.1.3 Characteristics of motivated learners

What does the term ‘*motivated*’ learner entail? It is the one who is willing and eager to invest effort in learning activities and to make progress. As has already been said, learner motivation makes learning and teaching significantly easier and more pleasant and as a result more productive.

There is a number of personality traits of such learners according to Penny Ur as she states and explains in her book *A Course in Language Teaching*.. Some of them are:

1. *Positive task orientation*. The learner is willing to tackle various tasks and has confidence in his or her success.
2. *Ego-involvement*. Success is important for maintaining positive self-image.
3. *Need for achievement*. A need to be good at something, to overcome obstacles.
4. *High aspirations*. Such learners are ambitious, want to gain top grades.
5. *Good orientation*. Awareness of the goals and usefulness of learning.
6. *Perseverance*. Such learner consistently invests a big amount of effort in learning, and is not discouraged by setbacks or lack of improvement.
7. *Tolerance of ambiguity*. The learner is not disturbed or frustrated by confusion or a lack of understanding.

One way of enhancing motivation in the classroom is by involving learners in the decision-making process about what to learn and not ignoring their needs and interests and thereby encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning.

### 3.2 Anxiety

Anxiety is another aspect of affective factors having an impact on language learning. It is believed that anxiety is detrimental to effective learning and that it is teacher's task to reduce anxiety in the learner especially by building self-confidence through positive experiences, positive feedback and by giving reassurance of making progress in the language. Numerous investigations have been carried out in this field and it was found that there are two types of anxiety 'facilitating', which is associated with good performance, and 'debilitating' anxiety which impedes good performance.

Nunan in his book *Self-directed Teacher* cites Allwright and Bailey who suggest why language learners should incline to be suffering from anxiety.

“Learners report that one of their major worries is that when forced to use the language they are learning they constantly feel that they are representing themselves badly, showing only some of their personality, only some of their real intelligence.” (Nunan 1996:220)

### 3.3 Attitude

As well as motivation, the attitude of learners toward the target language greatly effects the learning process. Attitude is closely related to motivation and an opinion prevails that learners' motivation can be largely influenced by their attitude toward the target language, culture and learning environment. It was discovered that not only the positive attitude toward the foreign language and its culture is important, but also the context and the environment where the teaching and learning takes place is crucial.

It is the right time to mention the notion of the *affective filter* which can be interpreted as the way in which affective factors such as attitude, anxiety, competitiveness, and other emotional aspects can help or, on the other hand, hinder learning. According to Krashen, “A learner who has generally negative attitudes toward learning English will have a high affective filter.” (Hedge 2000:21)

Nunan stresses, “the importance of developing appropriate goals and objectives and conveying these to the students in ways that are meaningful to them.” (1996:219) This according to the author is a significant aspect together with observing other strategies in order not to let the classroom climate and atmosphere deteriorate.

To sum up, motivation, anxiety and attitude are crucial to effective language learning. The important thing for a teacher to be aware of is the possible influences which the students have to face and therefore it is to a great extent up to the teacher to decide which factors are within his/her power to change and which are beyond control.

#### **4. WHAT DOES KNOWING A NEW WORD MEAN?**

It is not enough just to know the meaning of a word, which is obviously the first and foremost thing we look for. We also need to know what words it usually goes with, in other words how the word collocates; whether it has any particular grammatical or other characteristics and how the word is pronounced in a recognizable way; in writing how it is spelled correctly. Furthermore, to know a word, it means the ability to recall it at will; be aware of its connotations and associations. All of this information is to be found and consulted in a good dictionary, which is dealt with later in the paper.

Above all, knowing a word means an ability to summon up the word when it is required. In other words, a learner must feel he/she does not have to do much mental searching. Now we are getting toward the phenomenon '*passive*' or '*receptive*' versus '*active*' or '*productive*' knowledge. *Receptive* knowledge of words means identifying words and understanding them whereas *productive* includes the vocabulary that we are able to use in our speech and writing. The terms passive and active vocabulary are often used. In general, the passive vocabulary is larger. Even in our own native language, we recognize and understand many more words than we say or use in writing. In the course of time, some words we have been able to comprehend and recognize become part of our active (productive) vocabulary. Various studies have shown that learners gain receptive control of new words before active control.

“Probably the commonest fault among students is failure to realize that learning is essentially an active process. Too many students sit for hours passively reading and re-reading notes and textbooks, without ever attempting actively to recall what they have read. The fallacy of this method has been amply shown by experiments...for effective memory, some form of active expression is essential...”  
(Knight in *English Vocabulary in Use* by McCarthy 1994:12)

## **Making the new words active**

One step from having words in our passive vocabulary to having them in our active vocabulary is constant revising. It should be encouraged by:

- learning new words not in isolation but in phrases
- writing the words and expressions one wants to learn in a sentence relating to one's life or interests
- writing down verbs with the structure, e.g. *to express an opinion*
- writing down words with their prepositions, e.g. *thanks to your help*
- writing down adjectives together with nouns, e.g. *a serious problem*
- noting any grammatical characteristics of the words (irregularity, uncountability,..)
- making a note of any special pronunciation difficulties

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **1. THE MENTAL LEXICON**

#### **1.1 Input**

“Whoever, wherever, you are, you are using – to read these words – the most beautiful, intricate, complex, mysterious and powerful object in the known universe: your brain.“

(Buzan 2000: 28)

A question is often being asked: What type of input is best?

The input can be in the form of word-lists with various kinds of definition and explanation, or words and their translations, or the input surrounded by context. All three methods work in some way, but none completely without its problems.

As McCarthy (1990) in his book *Vocabulary and Language Teaching* seems to suggest, “People can memorize quite long lists of words, but it is questionable whether these are retrieved over long periods and to what extent they assist quick recall.“ (p.36)

The author goes on saying that “...research is frustratingly inconclusive as to whether presenting and learning words in context is superior to learning words by pairs of translation equivalents.“ (p.36)

It is strongly believed, however, that contextualized input is vital from the earliest stage. It has been suggested by cognitive psychologists that learners are more likely to remember words if they have worked on their meanings actively.

“Learners do not get any real grasp of a word anyway until they have performed some sort of mental contextualization upon it.” (McCarthy 1990:36) Similarly, Hedges says, “...input becomes intake if there is a depth of processing.” (2000:101)

Learning words in context as one of the strategies will be focused on in chapter four.

## **1.2 Storage**

Not only for the purpose of vocabulary learning but any aspect of language, it is useful to remember that there are short-term and long-term memories. They are different from each other mainly in that the latter one is a capacity for recall of information minutes, weeks and years after the input. The psychologists maintain that in order to hold information over brief periods demands constant repetition. It is not only a question of duration because unlike short-term memory which is limited in capacity, long-term memory is inexhaustable. Research in memory suggests that “More meaningful tasks require learners to analyse and process language more deeply, which helps them to commit information to long-term memory.” (Gairns and Redman in Jordan, p.161) From this the implication for teaching is that it is especially problem-solving activities that help students to remember.

It is still unclear how words are stored and organized in the mental lexicon and what kind of relationships are built among words. There is evidence, however, that we organize words by meaning and that they gradually become part of a semantic cluster of lexical set: for example, ‘mother’, ‘father’, ‘son’, and ‘daughter’ as members of a nuclear family. Categorizing words systematically leads to building networks of meaning having various kinds of relationship.

Research studies have shown that learning strategies used appropriately help students to learn and remember information for a long period of time by “building bridges“ in the learner’s mind. Chamot et al (1999) explains, “Information is retained and connected in the brain through mental links or pathways that are mapped onto an individual’s existing schemata.” (p.29) The author maintains that if the links are

numerous and personally meaningful, the information is easier to memorize and recall later. (p.29)

Although semantic links play an important role in remembering and recalling words, later studies have shown that

“..in light of research motivated by inference theory and, more recently, the distinctiveness hypothesis, the possibility arises that the practice of presenting L2 students with their new vocabulary grouped together in sets of syntactically and semantically similar new words might actually impede rather than facilitate the learning..“

(Tinkham in Hedge 2000:122)

### **1.3 The Psychology of Learning – Remembering**

Why is it that a learner will immediately remember one word without too much effort, while another encountered will be refused a place in one’s mind? There are various reasons why we remember some words better than others. Our perception of words is affected by:

- the nature of words themselves (the sound and spelling of the word)
- under what circumstances they are learnt
- the associations the word has for the learner
- the kind of input and the method of teaching
- a category where the word seems to belong such as collocations, syntactic and semantic categories etc.

Particular words people tend to remember are those having personal or emotive significance (‘mum’, ‘dad’, ‘home’,...). People commonly attempt to link items together in sense units, or find some reason to associate them. Students need to be encouraged to find what ‘works’ for them and to approach a task in an appropriate way. Most currently used coursebooks follow the need to provide the learner with the basic core of the language (the most common grammatical and lexical words).

Barry Buzan, a world authority on the brain, memory and creativity presents various results from numerous studies, one of them concerned with remembering. Here is the outcome presented in his *The Mind Map Book*: Research has shown that, during the learning process, the human brain primarily remembers the following:

- Items from the beginning of the learning process (‘the primacy effect’)
- Items from the end of the learning process (‘the recency effect’)

- Any item associated with things or patterns already stored, or linked to other aspects of what is being learned
- Any items which are emphasized as being in some way outstanding or unique
- Any items which appeal particularly strongly to any of the five senses
- Those items which are of particular interest to the person

*“Words are hard to learn unless you want them, in a strong way, from inside yourself. Where you are when you meet them, and how you feel at the time, and what happens next are all somehow bound up with ‘the word’. The word you want, the word you get, from whom, the way you turn it over in your head or write it down.”*

*(Woodward 1991:104)*

Memory is obviously very important in learning vocabulary. Research suggests that one of the best ways of remembering words is via association. A learner meets a word he/she wants to remember and associates it with something else, probably in one’s own language. What the association is does not matter at all.

Ways of lengthening the memory span have been considered. Hunter (1954) discussed several mnemonic and memory systems based on the principles of association and imagination. The best known are rote learning (learning by heart) and visual imagery. The latter involves the key word technique which “consists of associating the target word with a word which is pronounced or spelt similarly in the mother tongue, but is not necessarily related in terms of meaning.” (Gairns, Redman 1986 in Jordan, p.161) Barry Buzan is also one of the best-known exponents of mnemonic systems which make use of key words.

Rote learning is a memorization technique which has a long history in language learning. It involves repetition of target words either silently or aloud. These items commonly appear in lists, typical examples being words and their translation equivalents or their definitions, paired items or irregular verbs. It is a common practice among learners. Especially for universal paradigms such as days of the week, irregular verbs etc., mechanical learning is quite useful. This type may, however, delay the process of constructing new semantic networks since, as it has been indicated earlier, it is “a far deeper level of processing which is required to commit items to long term memory.” (Gairns and Redman,1991, p.93)

A question remains whether learners need to be encouraged to actively build their own associations and thereby to enlarge the networks of the mental lexicon, or whether vocabulary activities are to decide what associations learners are supposed to make.

## 2. LEARNABILITY

### 2.1 Factors influencing learnability

π There are many factors affecting vocabulary acquisition. For instance the **means of presentation** of words, which can be introduced by a teacher or through reading, listening etc. in numerous ways, influences the so called *learnability*. In other words, how we succeed in learning new vocabulary, how we are able to remember and recall new words largely depends on the kind of input.

π Ease or difficulty in the learnability of vocabulary is typically connected with the **notion of frequency** because it is the most frequent words that are likely to be absorbed and learnt more easily as a result of occurring regularly. The studies have found out that most learners know the words that appeared more times, and they had difficulty remembering words that appeared only once or twice.

π Another aspect playing a significant role in learnability is the area of **pronunciation** and **spelling** since many words may present phonological difficulties. Pronunciation may remain a long-term problem. For example, it is easy to understand why many students confuse the meaning, spelling and pronunciation of these words: *through, though, thought, tough, thorough*. As regards spelling, even native speakers of English have difficulty remembering whether single or double consonants appear in certain words (e.g. *successful, occurrence, beginning...*)

π A point worth mentioning is that learners may find it hard to relate the meaning of a word to their **world experience** or to their **culture**. Just as the vocabulary of a language changes from age to age so the vocabulary of different languages are distinct in their uses and references. There may be some close translation equivalents among several languages, but some items in one language may have no precise parallel in another language, because the culture in which the vocabulary has evolved is based on unique needs, interests, and experiences. These words may remain vague in the learners' minds. How the words are learnt also depends on what needs learners have.



π Some words may be perceived as very close in meaning both in the target and their own language, but in fact they are not. Such words are called **'false friends'**:

'Aktuální' in Czech and 'actual' in English do not mean the same. Similarly, 'trafika' and 'traffic'; 'kontrolovat' and 'control'; 'schéma' and 'scheme'; 'sympatický' and 'sympathetic', 'fabrika' and 'fabric', 'blanket' and 'blanket', 'gymnasium' and 'gymnasium', 'geniální' and 'genial', 'suplovat' and 'supply', 'etiketa' and 'etiquette', 'ambulance' and 'ambulance', 'klozet' and 'closet' etc.

## 2.2 Prototypes

Lexical fields of learner's mind do not contain words of equal status. Some words will spring more easily to mind as they are the foremost examples of a particular conceptual category. This phenomenon is referred to as *prototype* and "seems to reflect the fact that some concepts are more salient or more central than others within the semantic field." (McCarthy 1990:45)

To illustrate, let us take the word 'flower'. If 'a rose' is the kind of flower first thought of, then it is a prototype and other flowers are non-prototypes. In other words, central entities are seen as more central representatives of their class than others. It seems that people of the same culture tend to have the same prototypes. Whether this phenomenon has any significance for teaching and learning English has not yet been answered. Further research studies are needed.

## CHAPTER 3

### 1. LEARNING STYLES AND STRATEGIES

#### 1.1 Learning style

"If a teacher is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind." (Kahlil Gibran in Hedge 2000:75)

"It is a mistake to assume that learners come into the language classroom with a natural ability to make choices about what and how to learn." (Nunan 1997:4)

Williams and Burden in *Psychology for Language Teachers* stress the importance of efficacious learning, "effective learning is goal-oriented, draws upon prior

knowledge, requires knowledge organization, involves the use of strategies, occurs in recursive phases and follows a developmental pattern.“ (1997:159)

To begin with, the main terms will be introduced and explained below:

*LEARNING STYLE* – is an individual predisposition to learn in a particular way. The term is used to describe broad, general characteristics of approach to learning. It is to an extent observable.

“Learning styles are cognitive and physiological behaviours that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment.“ (Richards 1994:59)

### **1.1.1 Different styles**

*“In one sense, all students are different; in another sense, all students are the same.“*

*(Wallace 1991:20)*

Constant research on learning styles makes it clear that each and every student learns differently, in other words, learners have different approaches to learning. The extensive research in this field has thrown light on the various ways in which students approach the learning process. Numerous studies have revealed that we are a population of incredibly diverse learners with unique styles of our own. Sadker in *Teachers, Schools, and Society* describes three areas that contribute to each student’s individual learning style. It must be emphasized, though, that there are many more factors in play.

Let me start by a *cognitive area*. The author also refers to it as *information processing* and explains that individuals have different modes of perception, organization, and retention of information. To exemplify it, some students learn by reading material, some prefer listening to information spoken aloud, while others learn best by whole body movement etc. Other factors are called *affective* or *attitudes*, which entails individuals bringing different levels of motivation and drive to the learning process. As the author points out, “the intensity (or lack of intensity) of this motivation is a critical determiner of learning style“. (Sadker 1991:100). Other aspects of the affective factors include curiosity, the ability to fight frustration, and the willingness to take risks. The third main factor is *physiology* or *biology* some of which characteristics are obvious. If a student is hungry or tired, he/she will not learn as effectively as a

student who is well-nourished with being rested. Other aspects are less evident, such as different body rhythms, light, temperature and others to which students respond differently. For example, individuals' peak learning times differ, some are disturbed by bright light, while others not, some learn best when hearing a background noise etc.

There is a clear link between learning styles and personality characteristics. Different people approach a learning task differently. A number of learning styles have been identified, one of them as suggested by Knowles (1982) in *Reflective Teaching in the Language Classroom* by Richards (1994:60):

- *Concrete learning style*
- *Analytical learning style*
- *Communicative learning style*
- *Authority learning style*

The following are some of the terms which are used to characterize the individual approach to learning:

Hudson (1968) and Parlett (1970), for example, divide students into *syllabus-bound* and *syllabus-free*. The former ones need exams in order to study, do not read much outside the set work, but attend classes regularly, are conscientious students; the syllabus-free students, on the other hand, "operate better when they can pursue their own lines of work, and often feel restricted by course requirements."(Wallace 1991:20)

Another distinction is made by Pask and Scott (Wallace 1991:21), who divide students into *serialists* and *holists*. Serialists like to proceed step by step, doing one thing at a time whereas holists like to make global hypotheses. Both strategies can lead to deep understanding if handled appropriately. Extensive research in this field has identified a wide range of styles, such as:

*The cue-seekers; the cue-conscious; the cue-deaf.* (Wallace 1991:20)

*Tolerant of ambiguity – Intolerant of ambiguity; Visual – Aural – Kinaesthetic; Field-dependent – Field-independent; Introvert – Extrovert* (Parrot 1993:41)

Though the issue of learning styles has raised a tremendous amount of interest among academics, the intention here is not to go into depth as far as the explanation and description of the particular styles are concerned since it is not the prime concern of this study. To conclude, it is worth noting that although learning styles are undoubtedly important, there are other aspects of a whole range of individual

differences in students. Entwistle (in Wallace 1991:23) lists the following 'student characteristics':

- √ previous knowledge
- √ intellectual skills
- √ level of anxiety
- √ preferred learning style
- √ interests
- √ types and levels of motivation
- √ expectations about what is to be learned

## 1.2 Learning strategy

*"A learning strategy is like a tactic used by a player. It is a series of skills with a particular learning purpose in mind...strategies are purposeful and goal-oriented."*

(Williams 1997:145)

*LEARNING STRATEGIES* are specific procedures learners use with individual learning tasks. They are defined by Oxford in Richards as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more transferable to new situations." (1994:63)

"Learning strategies are an integral part of language programs, providing students with the tools for a lifetime of learning." (Chamot et al 1999:5)

There is a bewildering array of descriptions of strategies in the research literature. The popular distinction differentiates between *communication strategies* and *learning strategies*. Broadly speaking, *communication strategies* are a set of "coping" tactics for keeping communication channel open when the learners' linguistic repertoire is not quite wide enough to understand what has just been said or to express what they want to say next. These strategies include circumlocution, making up words, asking for help, stalling strategies that we use to give ourselves time to think.

Learning strategies, on the other hand, are more to do with how we go about our learning. Some of them are used consciously, some unconsciously and therefore they are very difficult to observe making the research into this area so problematic. Some of these strategies are cognitive, while others are more social in nature.

### 1.2.1 Cognitive and metacognitive strategies

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) draw a distinction between *metacognitive* and *cognitive* strategies. The first group relates to the more global strategies involved in

planning, monitoring and then evaluating learning. Chamot gives a definition: “the metacognitive strategy is intended to enhance comprehension, acquisition, or retention.” (p.229) More information is given below on this page.

The second group refers to the strategies used for specific language tasks involving direct manipulation of the language, whether it is basic study skills like memorization strategies, or more complex ones like applying grammar rules and so on. The term cognitive means that they involve processing language in our minds. Rubin in Hedge (2000) defines learner strategies as including:

*“any set of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information,...that is, what learners do to learn and do to regulate their learning“.* (p.77)

Rubin, like many authors, distinguishes between what learners do to learn (using strategies that deal directly with the second language – *cognitive strategies*) and what learners do to regulate their learning (involving strategies that manage learning – *metacognitive strategies*).

Literature distinguishes *cognitive* and *metacognitive* strategies as belonging to the group ‘learning strategies’. Whereas cognitive strategies are mental processes directly concerned with processing information in order to learn, which include *obtaining, storing, retrieval and use of information, making associations* etc., then there is a set of strategies functioning at a different level. These include an awareness of one’s own mental processes, an ability to reflect on and regulate one’s learning.

This different level is called *metacognition*. Learners employ metacognitive strategies when they decide to use a dictionary, when they choose to pay attention to contextual clues, when collecting words from authentic texts, categorizing words into lists, making word cards and many others. These strategies are the most sophisticated in that they involve a knowledge of language learning behaviour and the other options available. It may be concluded that metacognitive processes include *planning, monitoring, problem-solving* and *evaluating*.

As Hedge put it: “They are indirect strategies which facilitate learning by actively involving the learner in conscious efforts to remember new words.” (2000:118)

A third group they identified were *social* and *affective* strategies through which the learner may seek help from others or control emotional responses, such as level of anxiety.

### 1.2.2 Categorization of strategies

As has been stated above, there is a range of classification of strategies in various psychological and methodical sources. Here is one suggested by Joan Rubin, who did much of the work in this field. He distinguishes three major types of strategies in *Psychology for Language Teachers* by Williams and Burden.

π **Learning strategies** which include both *cognitive* and *metacognitive strategies*.

There are six main cognitive strategies identified:

1. Clarification / verification
2. Guessing / inductive inferencing
3. Deductive reasoning
4. Practice – storage and retrieval of language
5. Memorization
6. Monitoring

π **Communicative strategies** are used for promoting communication with others especially when the speakers face a difficulty in their communication because of a lack of the knowledge of the language. An example would be describing an unknown word by a different word, appealing the partner for help to finish the conversation and so on.

π **Social strategies** are activities that learners use in order to increase their exposure to the language. Like communication strategies, they contribute indirectly to learning. They include initiating conversations, watching language programmes, films, reading books etc.

Both communicative and social strategies contribute indirectly to learning. A point worth emphasizing is that the use of learning strategies have been found to be influenced by such features as attitude, motivation, age, personality, gender, general learning style, proficiency in the language etc., and that it is the motivation which “appears to correlate best with strategy use.” (Williams 1997:154)

Oxford in Richards’ *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classroom* (1994:63) suggests that language learning strategies have the following features:

- π contribute to the main goal, communicative competence
- π allow learners to become more self-directed; expand the role of teachers
- π involve many aspects of the learner, not just cognitive
- π support learning both directly and indirectly
- π they are not always observable; they are often conscious; they can be taught
- π they are influenced by a variety of factors
- π they are problem-oriented

On the basis of various foreign language studies, it became increasingly apparent that specific language tasks elicit particular types of strategies. It has been also found out that strategies that are used for different language tasks appear to be of primary importance. The attempt here is not to dwell upon the enormous range of strategies in general, though it would certainly be worth giving attention to. My concern is to look closely on strategies applied in learning vocabulary.

## **2. THE CURRENT SITUATION**

Pupils very often lack a clear grasp of how to go about their learning and so enter a vicious circle whereby they feel that it is not even worth trying and therefore make even less progress. They need to become more effective learners and to take more responsibility for their own progress.

Rees and Graham (1995:12) suggest that if pupils are helped to perceive a link between the strategies employed and the resulting outcomes, however, their sense of control over their own learning could be heightened and a powerful source of motivation harnessed.

Until recently the notion of learning strategies has been neglected. Research into language learning strategies began in the 1960s. Early researchers acknowledged that observation of learners brought insufficient information and consequently many other techniques, especially interviewing ones, started to be used to elicit the descriptions of language learning experiences. In the course of time it has revealed a wealth of information on the types of strategies students use to learn. Over one hundred strategies have been identified by different language strategies researchers. For instance: Rubin, 1981; Stern, 1975; Wenden, 1987; O'Malley&Chamot, 1990 and a number of others.

Much of the work has been influenced by developments in cognitive psychology. In recent years there has been a growing interest in the cognitive strategies people use to make sense of the tasks or problems with which they are faced in order to learn.

There has been a number of labels for strategies, such as 'language processing strategies', 'tactics', 'plans', 'techniques', with no easy equivalences among them. As has been said in the previous chapter, different studies have identified different ways of categorizing strategies. (Ellis:1985; Oxford:1990; O'Malley, Chamot:1995)

The reason why scientists are concerned with learning strategies so much is the question what makes learners successful at learning something. The answer is according to Williams (1997:146):

"Effective learning is not merely a matter of an individual having a high IQ. What appears to be more important is the learner's ability to respond to the particular situation and to manage their learning in an appropriate way. Studies of successful and unsuccessful learners show that people who succeed in learning have developed a range of strategies from which they are able to select those that are most appropriate for a particular problem, to adapt them flexibly for the needs of the specific situation, and to monitor their level of success."

Research into learner strategies has above all made an important contribution to the field of ELT by making it clear that it is possible for learners to become more self-reliant, self-directed in their learning and by generating ways of how learners can be trained to take control over their learning and how the whole process can be facilitated.

"Learning strategies in action are complex behaviours that rarely occur as single instances." (Chamot 1990:31) Normally they are used in combinations to complete a task. If they are used properly, then, they can be more powerful.

Chamot in the book *The Learning Strategies Handbook* presents a list of individual strategies according to each of the four processes (planning, monitoring, problem-solving and evaluating). Appendix n.1 provides a summary of twenty-seven learning strategies that language learners have found useful in a wide range of tasks, not only in the vocabulary area. They include strategies according to each of the four metacognitive processes. The figure presents the definition of the strategy, an example and explanation of how and when to use it. The author stresses that although the



strategies are grouped according to the process in which they most often occur, it may be used in more than one process depending on the task.

Chamot gives great importance to assessing strategies as belonging to evaluation strategies because “reflecting on how a strategy has worked can help students evaluate the usefulness of the strategy.” (1999:33)

Students then can extend the usefulness of the strategy by applying it to new situations. Learning strategies are supposed to be exceedingly helpful since they are processes effective learners use to work through any challenging task and should also help transfer strategy use to other subject areas, as well as to real-life situations. For learning to be effective, attention must be paid to the students’ own process of learning. Consequently, direct instruction in learning strategies is being applied in various foreign language programmes as it is identified as a means to help students become better learners and to help them develop control over and responsibility for their own learning. How it has been applied in my classroom environment is shown in the practical section.

### **3. SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL LEARNERS**

The literature concerned with learning strategies in second language acquisition started to emerge because of a need to identify the characteristics of effective learners. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) state that:

“Research efforts (Naiman et al.1978; Rubin 1975) concentrating on the ‘good language learner’ had identified strategies reported by students or observed in language learning situations that appear to contribute to learning...and that these strategies can be described and classified.” (p.3)

Rubin suggested that a model of *the good language learner*’ could be identified by looking at the special strategies used by students who were successful in their second language learning. (Chamot 1999:164)

It was Rubin (1981) who proposed a classification scheme for learning strategies under two primary groupings and a number of subgroups. As it is based on more general categorization and very similar data have already been addressed in one of the previous chapters above, the researcher’s results are not going to be presented now.

It has been said that learners adopt a number of strategies for coping with new vocabulary, but not all learners are equally good at using their strategic means. Studies of good and poor learners of English show considerable variation in what successful ones did and what under-achievers did. A wide range of strategies were taken into account, such as memorizing words, using dictionaries, asking teacher for information, asking questions for clarification, taking notes etc. It has been found that what distinguished unsuccessful learners from successful ones was not the lack of appropriate strategies that much but the inability to choose the right strategy for the task. The unsuccessful learners according to Richards (1994:65):

“...appear to be active strategy-users, but often failed to apply strategies appropriately at hand. Apparently, they lacked certain necessary higher-order processes, what are often called metacognitive strategies or self-regulatory skills, which would enable them to assess the task and bring to bear the necessary strategies for its completion.”

Rubin and Thompson (in Nunan 1995:171) published lists of strategies used by ‘good language learners’ and tried to put the theory into practice through learner training courses. They were, however, mostly a failure. After completing her learner training project at Columbia University, Wenden admitted that the learners “were so resistant to the training that after the first three weeks it was disconnected...(Wenden, 1990:164). Similarly, O’Malley (1987), who studied the effectiveness of strategy training in learning vocabulary, listening and speaking found that “groups that received special training in learning strategies performed in most areas more poorly than those in the central group which received no treatment.” (p.141)

It can be seen that learner training in strategy use was not very successful. What may have caused this nonsuccess?

O’Malley (1987:142) says the training was not successful because very little time was given to the learners to adopt new strategies. Abraham and Vann (1990:85) ascribe the failure to the fact that the learners were not able to apply the strategies effectively to the particular tasks. They (pp.87-88) also argued:

“No single learning strategy is sufficient to explain success in language learning task.”

To put in another way, there are, apart from learning strategies, many other factors that influence success in learning.

A Czech author Mareš tries to point out that, when training the learners, some researchers did not take into account individuals with their specific differences. He further (1998) says that all learners have their own individual learning styles, which are, in contrast to learning strategies, “relatively stable characteristics of learner behaviour in the learning situation.” (p.15–16)

A question is often being asked by teachers whether individuals can learn to become more successful at learning, and, if teachers can help people learn more effectively. The answer was given by Wenden and Rubin in *Psychology for Language Teachers*:

“..one of the leading educational goals of the research on learner strategies is an autonomous language learner, one who is equipped with the appropriate skills and strategies to learn a language in a self-directed way.” (1997:147):

Similarly, Knowles in the same book reminds us, “one of our main aims in education is helping individuals to develop the attitudes that learning is a lifelong process and to acquire the skills of self-directed learning.” (p. 147)

## CHAPTER 4

### 1. PROBLEM-SOLVING STRATEGIES

#### AIDS TO LEARNING AND REMEMBERING VOCABULARY

This chapter focuses on the strategies which can be employed while completing vocabulary tasks and coping with vocabulary in general. The strategies suggested here help students to learn and remember words and other information for a long period of time by building bridges in the learner’s mind. As has been said in chapter two, information is retained and connected in the brain through mental links. If the links are personally meaningful, the information is easier to memorize and recall later. It is making meaningful associations with new words that can make vocabulary acquisition more efficient.

## 1.1 Using context to get meaning – inference / inferring

*“The more active the learner needs to be, the more likely the word will be remembered.” (Hedge 2000:130)*

Inference strategy involves creating information and drawing conclusions for the unknown word based on world knowledge and experience. It is one of the best ways how to cope with new words by following rational steps. Such words are then better remembered because of the effort put into the process of constructing the meaning. Inferencing may well be practised by extensive reading. When we come across an unfamiliar word we may be able to determine the meaning by using the context in which it appears. In other words, we use the overall sense of the words and ideas that surround it. Then we may be able to figure out the meaning of a word we do not know.

There are a few strategies which might help:

- π looking for clues to the meaning of the unfamiliar word such as where the text is from, the title, headings...Then we use our own knowledge and experience to help to decide on the meaning
- π looking for synonyms of the unfamiliar word the text may give
- π noticing whether the unfamiliar word is compared or contrasted with a word that we know

There is evidence that retention depends in some way on the amount of mental and emotional energy used in processing a word. Research tends to suggest that if inferencing is easy because the text has many contextual clues, retention is less likely. It is worth noting that there are strategies which may actually hinder learning. One of them is looking up and trying to understand every word in a text which is inefficient waste of time. Students need to develop inference skills in language lessons. It could be started by working with a text; looking for morphological clues such as word-class; decide whether the item is subject, verb, etc. In other words, activities should concentrate on the use of context to work out the meaning. Similarly, listening tasks offer chances to develop these skills by using pictures and instructions to help students to predict what they will hear. What ought to be remembered, however, is that it is not always necessary to hear and understand every word. According to Hedge (2000:118):

“It has been suggested that inferring the meaning of a word from its context relates to the retention of that word, in particular, that if the meaning of a new word is inferred in conditions which require more careful analysis and decision making, retention will be better.”

Learning words in isolation has been widely criticised by Schouten-van-Parren (1989) in Hedge (2000:120) who presents an argument as follows:

- π “If the words are presented as isolated elements, there is no point of support, no ‘cognitive hold’ for them in the learners’ memory, so despite sometimes considerable learning effort, they are quickly forgotten again.”
- π “Isolated words do not present a linguistic reality, as the meaning of a word is in most cases partly defined by the context.”
- π “Isolated words or words in isolated sentences do not present a psychological reality, because they do not carry a message. For this reason they cannot evoke emotions or involvement in the learner, a factor which plays an often underestimated but yet important part in long-term acquisition.”

## 1.2 Getting meaning from word parts

A lot of information may be deduced from the syntactic structure (adjective placed before a noun,..), the word may be divided into its parts (realizing its suffixes, prefixes etc.) This knowledge of morphology is essential in the inferencing strategy as well as cues from similarity to words in the learner’s first language. By learning to use the meanings of roots, prefixes and suffixes, we can figure out a lot of yet unknown words.

### a) Learning words and expressions in root groups

There are lots of words in English that are related to the same root. For example: relate, relation, relatively, relationship, correlation, correlate, inter-relate and so on. Students can learn words by adding to the lists of words based on the same root.

Example: *handy single-handed give me a hand a handful.....*

### b) Using prefixes to guess the meaning of words

A prefix is a word part with a distinct meaning of its own that is added to the beginning of a base word or a root to make a new word. Example: knowing that *mis-* can mean ‘wrongly’ will help to figure out the meaning of ‘*misperceive*’.

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Example</u>
<b>Anti-</b>	against	antonym
<b>Ex-</b>	out of, from	exclude
<b>In-(il-), (im-), (ir-)</b>	not, without	inaudible, illiterate, irresponsible

Some other common, useful prefixes are:

*Ante-, auto-, co-/con-/com-/dis-, inter-, per-, pre-, sub-, super-, trans-;*

And suffixes: *-able, -er/-or, -ic, -ify, -ism, -ist, -ise/-ize, -ment, -ness, -tion,...*

Hendrich in his book *Didaktika cizích jazyků* stresses the importance of the knowledge of word-formation. According to him it has several advantages, especially, it helps expand one's wordstore, mainly the so called 'potential vocabulary'. The author refers the term 'potential' to the words which the learner has not come across yet. Nevertheless, he/she is able to figure out the meaning by means of analogy, by comparing with one's native tongue, through context and on the basis of the knowledge of word-formation. (p.137) It is recommended that foreign language learners are introduced at least the basic word-formation rules from the very beginning.

### **1.3 Keyword**

A *keyword imagery method* creates a visual and personal association between meaning and sound thereby individuals form a native-language homophone (the keyword) for the target word in the second language. Then one imagines a scene in which the homophone and the referent object of the target word are interacting in some manner. In other words, it is associating the target word with a word which is pronounced or spelt similarly in the mother tongue, but it is not necessarily related in terms of meaning. These mental links help you to remember the vocabulary item better.

Example: *Rathouse* (German, meaning 'town hall') sounds like 'rat house' in English. The learner then imagines a visual image of rats coming out of his local town hall, for instance. "It appears to aid memory if the meaning and the key word are made to interact." (Gairns and Redman 1991:92) This type of 'mnemonic' or memory aid has a very limited application, though. It can be useful for certain types of learners and it is believed according to Gairns and Redman that "...many learners make use of this in the very early stages of learning a language for a handful of items." (p.92)

The effectiveness of the keyword method has been investigated in a series of experimental studies and proved to be especially reliable for vocabulary recognition of easily visualized words. (Pressley, Levin, Delaney, 1982)

## 1.4 Transfer / Cognates

This strategy involves using what we already know about language (prefixes, suffixes, roots,..) to help us recognize and remember new words. In other words, it entails focusing on word forms. It also involves recognizing words that have obvious parallels to word in one's native language (*cognates* - words that sound similar in different languages). Example: The German word *Telefon* is a cognate for *telephone*

## 1.5 Substitute

This strategy involves substituting known words or phrases when we do not know a specific word or phrase. It is usually used when we know another way to communicate what we want to say. It is an excellent way how to improve as it allows us to quickly solve the problem *How else can I say this?* by relying on language that one knows.

Example: We do not know how to say 'key' in the target language. We could describe it by saying that 'it is a small specially shaped device which we put into a lock and turn in order to lock or unlock a door, start a car etc'.

## 1.6 Use resources

It involves using reference materials such as dictionaries, textbooks, the internet and so on to look up unfamiliar information which can help us solve complex problems. It is especially helpful when something does not make sense and we do not know how to say something that is crucial to our message. One of the later chapters and the practical section will deal with a dictionary use.

## 1.7 Groups

Grouping involves creating categories by classifying words according to various attributes. Example: If the word means 'summer', think of words that are associated with it, such as holiday, hot weather, sun, beach, travelling etc. This is a very effective technique as it creates mental links which facilitate recalling related words. The semantic grouping is a visual approach that can help students to associate words, remember them and extend the network themselves. There are many ways of grouping words as it is outlined below in this chapter.

## 1.8 Translation

Translation is often being criticized for its dangers. One of them being that pupils continue to use their mother tongue and learn to be too much dependent upon it and thus losing the feeling they are in a language learning classroom. On the other hand, when used wisely and in moderation, it can be a very good tool for vocabulary work. According to Gairns and Redman (1991),

*“It can save valuable time that might otherwise be spent on a tortuous and largely unsuccessful explanation in English, and it can be a very quick way to dispose of low frequency items that may worry the students but do not warrant significant attention.” (p.75)*

It may, for instance, highlight the dangers of the ‘false cognates’. (See chapter two)

## 1.9 Brainstorming round an idea

This technique entails writing a single word in the centre of the board and asking students to brainstorm all the words they can think of that are connected with it. Every item that is suggested is written up on the board with a line connecting it to the original word, so that the end result is a “sun-ray“ effect. This activity is mainly for revising words and their consolidating, but new ones may be introduced as well.

As has been pointed above, learning strategies are often used in combination as a series of steps when faced with a task. On encountering a problem, one first attempts to solve it by using inferencing when relying on one’s knowledge and clues in the text. If this fails, one goes on to other strategies like asking someone available for help or consulting some kind of reference material to look up answers to the question. Used in combination, the strategies can be of tremendous help to a learner.

Only a few of the common strategies were presented in this section. The choice of the other combinations depends mainly on the task requirements and learner characteristics.

## 2. GROUPING OF ITEMS OF VOCABULARY

### Items related by topic

It can help greatly to learn if we group together words relating to one particular topic. For example, we might collect a group of words relating to the topic ‘weather’ together



and learn them at one go. The words can be organized differently as long as there is a logical connection of the person who learns those words. Semantic fields, or lexical sets as they are often called, are made up of sets of semantically similar items. These fields may range from very broad categories to smaller areas.

Example: How would you organize the following words into topic groups?

<i>salt</i>	<i>limp</i>	<i>ugly</i>	<i>garlic</i>	<i>dash</i>	<i>snub-nosed</i>
<i>to fry</i>	<i>crawl</i>	<i>skinny</i>	<i>colander</i>	<i>stagger</i>	<i>plump</i>

One way is to put together the four adjectives describing people's appearance, the four verbs describing ways of walking, and the other four words are all connected with food.

Similarly, it is helpful to divide words into various groups according to a broad topic such as 'Travelling', 'Shopping', 'Nature', or according to various situations such as 'At the doctor's', 'At the airport', 'In a shop', etc.

**Language functions** such as 'Greetings', 'Likes', 'Dislikes', 'Preferences', 'Complaints', 'Apologies', 'Requests', 'Suggestions', 'Advice', etc. are a very useful type of grouping.

**Items similar in meaning** are easily confused, e.g. 'pretty', 'lovely', 'attractive', or ways of looking, e.g. 'peer', 'squint', 'glance', 'stare', etc. This type of grouping needs to be dealt with carefully, above all contextualized and the differences clearly pinpointed.

### **Words with their opposites**

Whenever possible, it is advisable to learn items which form pairs like synonyms or contrasts/antonyms. For instance, we can learn 'bland' with 'spicy', 'polite / impolite and rude', 'lend / borrow', 'obstinate / stubborn' etc. If we can think of more than one possible opposite, the better. Grouping words into pairs of opposites are an effective way how to help fix the words in memory. E.g.:

<i>whisper</i>	<i>deliberate</i>	<i>charming</i>	<i>sensitive</i>	<i>simplify</i>
<i>yell</i>	<i>accidental</i>	<i>repulsive</i>	<i>thick-skinned</i>	<i>complicate</i>

### **Word ladders indicating the level of intensity, frequency etc.**

temperature words: freezing > cold > cool > warm > hot > boiling;

adverbs of frequency:

never > hardly ever > rarely > sometimes > usually > regularly > often > always

### **Items grouped by style**

It may be useful to distinguish between words which are neutral or colloquial:

toilet = loo, man = bloke, chap

Similarly, British and American English differences may be pinpointed:

petrol = gasoline; pavement = sidewalk; flat = apartment; underground = subway.....

### **Learning words that have a grammatical similarity together**

Another way of learning words in a way that may help is to learn them in groups relating to some grammatical rule. For example, what do the words *mouse*, *tooth*, *goose* have in common? (We are aware of their irregular plurals). What about the verbs *beat*, *cut* and *split*? (Irregular verbs which do not change in the past tense or in the past participle). Or can you see what the connection is between *depend*, *rely* and *focus*? (All words are followed by the preposition 'on'). Students can go on adding other words to these groups.

Categorizing can be based on other criteria as well, word banks being for instance 'Compound words', 'Link and referring words', 'Prepositional phrases', 'Phrasal verbs', 'Idioms', and so on.

Various lexical sets as listed above are convenient and can be revised and expanded further as students progress.

## **3. TYPES OF EXERCISES FOR PRACTISING VOCABULARY**

In order to expand one's word-store, it is necessary to practise by building on the previous knowledge. This can be done by working with words actively, putting them into a context that carries meaning or suiting the words in meaningful sentences. There are numerous activities available focusing on vocabulary acquisition:

**Filling the gaps** – useful for testing confusing words. Students are given at least three possibilities of words to choose from. These words may be very similar in meaning and therefore it is a very useful exercise as it necessitates thinking of the word meaning within the context.

**Matching the words with their definitions/translation/synonyms/opposites** – the students' task is to find the right definition and match them together. It is good for practising nouns, adjectives or verbs.

**Odd one out** – the task is to exclude one word that differs from the others in some way. It can be done either according to meaning, pronunciation, area of occurrence etc.

**Finding the mistake** – it is supposed to recognize the wrong word and correct it.

**Underlying the correct word** – it is a very universal kind of exercise, both for vocabulary and grammar.

**Rewriting sentences** – this entails rewriting the sentence without changing its meaning by choosing a different word with the same meaning. This can be done especially with phrasal verbs.

Today's good textbooks based on the combination of best of traditional methods with more recent approaches offer a systematic vocabulary syllabus providing a wide range of stimulating and motivating vocabulary activities and exercises.

#### **4. NOTE-TAKING - VOCABULARY RECORDS**

Taking notes is by no means a waste of time. On the contrary, it can be a good memory aid. Keeping some sort of written record of new lexicon is an important part of language learning. It has been proved that the very act of writing a word down often helps to fix it in the memory. There is no one correct way to organize a vocabulary notebook, but it is a good idea to think about possible ways of doing so. Here are some possibilities and examples.

##### **a) Organizing words by meaning**

A notebook is divided into different sections according to topic, such as words to 'movement', words for 'feelings', 'parts of the body', or phrases and expressions according to the language functions such as 'giving opinion', 'greetings', 'apologies', etc. In this way it is possible to build families of words related in meaning. The grouping of words in the vocabulary notebook can be done on the basis of the criteria as previewed above in the chapter 'Grouping of items of vocabulary'. It has proved to be useful to put words into various semantic fields depending on the individual's preference.

**b) Using diagrams of various types**

Words are grouped under a heading or a more general word. The examples are tree diagrams, bubble-networks, 'spidergrams' to which new words can be added.

**c) Organizing by word-classes**

Different word-classes can be written in different colours. Colours can be quite important as monotonous (single colour) notes are visually boring.

**d) Writing a translation next to the new word**

**e) Using a synonym or an antonym by entering it next to the word**

**f) Putting the new words in sentences**

This technique is being recommended widely the reasons being as stated before throughout the paper. Realizing a word in a meaningful sentence has a great impact.

As I have considered some ways of learning vocabulary in the preceding chapter, it is vital to look through the students' notebooks. When we explore typical student notebook, we find a variety of entries and what is obvious is that better students have their notebooks better and more neatly organized. As a part of my research, I dealt with note-taking and as an illustration I gathered two authentic extracts from students' notebook (Appendix n.3). This issue is going to be dealt with in the research section as well. By occasionally looking at learners' written records of vocabulary, teacher can learn a lot about what strategies the students use.

McCarthy in *Vocabulary* (1990) says, "Student notebooks offer a fascinating insight into the individual learning styles and can alert the teacher to learning problems which might not be otherwise so clearly revealed." (p. 129) The author also believes, "use of a range of recording strategies can all act as important feedback on the lesson and on the performance and progress of individuals". (p.128)

There are a lot of students who do not keep a notebook at all because they say they are used to memorizing the word lists right from the book without rewriting it. They do not appreciate the value a vocabulary notebook has for language learning. Persuading the students to take advantage of such tool is important because they not only can provide the learner with a store of new lexicon but, mainly, they provide independence for students as there is no limitation as to what to include and therefore they are more in charge of learning.

## 5. DICTIONARY IN USE - HOW CAN A DICTIONARY HELP?

This chapter focuses on the use of a dictionary as one of the highly effective strategies helping to develop one's word-store. The size of our vocabulary is not fixed. As is the case with our mother tongue, we try to enlarge vocabulary of the foreign language. The main way how to achieve this is by means of using a dictionary, referring to a thesaurus, reading, listening and of course practising. Regrettably enough, it has been found out, however, that using dictionaries in the language lessons is highly neglected.

Gairns and Redman (1991) say that bilingual dictionaries were frowned upon, particularly in the 1960's when methodology moved away from translation. In the late 1970's "many teachers were suspicious of the dictionaries, feeling that this was synonymous with laziness on the part of the student who was unwilling to use his own resources.." (p.79). Today, however, there is an awareness of certain advantages in the use of dictionaries.

"A learner who makes good use of a dictionary will be able to continue learning outside the classroom, and this will give him considerable autonomy about the decisions he makes about his own learning."(p.79)

As the teacher of English and learner at the same time, I must admit that using dictionaries in the classroom is very limited, which is an unfortunate reality. Quirk and Stein in their book concentrate on description of various types of dictionaries giving emphasis on what a good dictionary can offer and thus pronouncing the significance of working with them. The authors stress the importance of the choice of a dictionary depending on the type of learners and their command of language. The most outstanding ones are: THE LONGMAN DICTIONARY OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH, COLLINS COBUILD ENGLISH LANGUAGE DICTIONARY, THE OXFORD ADVANCED LEARNER'S DICTIONARY OF CURRENT ENGLISH. A good dictionary is an essential tool in the process of language learning as it helps learners to develop language skills by providing them not only with **the precise meanings of words** but also indicating:

π **The part of speech** of each entry, so helping the learner to use the word correctly in a sentence. The following abbreviations are used in most dictionaries:

<i>n.</i> noun	<i>pron.</i> pronoun	<i>v.</i> verb
<i>adj.</i> adjective	<i>adv.</i> adverb	<i>prep.</i> preposition
<i>conj.</i> conjunction	<i>interj.</i> interjection	<i>vt.</i> or <i>v. tr.</i> transitive verb

- π **Inflections:** changes of words in plural, progressive forms, past participle forms, comparative / superlative of adjectives, etc.
- π **Pronunciation:** this will mean learning symbols of phonemic transcription which are different from the letters of the English alphabet. It is printed inside parentheses or brackets and follows the entry word.
- π **Word stress:** often shown by a mark before the syllable to be stressed or by underlying.
- π **Usage:** how a word is used and any special grammatical pattern that goes with it.
- π **Style:** guidance is given on **style** (e.g. pejorative, slang)
- π Giving some synonyms and related words and phrases which widen the learner's choice of words.

The most important information that dictionaries provide is definitions, or meanings, of words. When an entry word has more than one meaning, each meaning is indicated with a number or a letter.

There are activities that can help learners develop their dictionary use skills. *Headway* Students's book as well as *Workbook* by John and Liz Soars are good examples. To illustrate, one of the activities introduces the abbreviations used for part of speech (n., v., adj., etc.). The task is to look up certain words in a dictionary and indicate the word class of the given word. Another activity concerns derivations. Students are asked to form other parts of speech from the given words by adding suffixes, changing roots, etc. (independent → independence; peace → peaceful; believe → belief; elect → election;...)

A dictionary has come into focus recently as an important type of resource for vocabulary teaching. A monolingual dictionary in the classroom is a necessity and ought to be regarded as one of the strategies for handling vocabulary. The advantage of such tool is primarily in providing examples of contextual use. In a practical section, which follows, an action research concerning the use of dictionaries is presented.

It has been mentioned that words have a crucial role in our life. All the time we are expressing ideas and thoughts for which there are often several words. We do not

want to repeat ourselves, we want to choose the most suitable word according to the situation. At such times when we are 'stuck' for words we can refer to a thesaurus for a wider selection of possible synonyms and related words. As far as I am concerned, it has always proved a great help while pondering which word would be most apt and appropriate. As the thesaurus will not give us any definitions for the words it lists, we may need to refer to a dictionary to check the meaning. It functions therefore as a very useful complement of a good dictionary.

As the authors of the book *English in Use* point out,

“It is clear that there are many books which we ought to consult about words, books which can enlarge our experience by making us see our world in greater detail and which can help us to communicate our experience of it to others with greater precision.” (Quirk:171)

I have recently encountered a sentence which read:

*“The learning of a foreign language is a voyage over an endless ocean”.*

Taking into account all the language's complexities, a wealth of ambiguities but at the same time above all the beauty of the language, there are without doubt many reasons that seem very well to substantiate this thought.

## **PRACTICAL PART**

Following the theoretical section, the objective now is to turn attention from theory to practice and to demonstrate some of the aspects dealt with in the previous chapters. This section is the result of my own research as it deals with practical applications of learning strategies in the classroom. My intent here is to share what I have learned through research and practice.

Recently there has been a trend to develop a more student-centered approach to learning. This makes the student more responsible and allows to pay attention to individual needs. As it has been emphasized in the theoretical section, there is a great importance now being put to equipping students with the necessary strategies for dealing with various vocabulary activities. In the process of learning vocabulary this involves for instance using a dictionary, proper use of notebooks, making use of context to deduce meaning and guessing. I am going to find out how students approach new vocabulary and what strategies they employ in the process of learning.

Research has been carried out by means of a questionnaire which was to elicit the students' attitude towards vocabulary learning and English in general. There is a range of elicitation research instruments. According to Nunan (1999) they probably belong to the most frequently used methods in language research.

One of the systematic ways of gathering data is an interview which I used to find out about approaches to learning of 'good learners'. Furthermore, an action research has been used which focused on a dictionary use. Learning how to use a monolingual dictionary is not typically included in the language lessons. I made a point of introducing this issue in the classroom as I had found out that the pupils had not had any experience dealing with such a reference book before. One of the best facilitators of learning new words is keeping a vocabulary record or a notebook. Therefore, I tried to explore how my pupils find this helpful and what their notebooks look like.

Because most of the strategies are not observable, I needed to rely on students' own reports about the strategies they have used. In the appendix section there are the actual data gathered such as a copy of students' descriptions of the steps when learning



vocabulary, a filled-in and a non-filled-in questionnaire and a sample taken from a student's notebook.

First, a quick look into a strategy training will lead us to the main body of this section.

## **LEARNING STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION**

It has been discussed throughout the paper that learners use various strategies while learning new lexicon both consciously and unconsciously. People commonly attempt to link items together in sense units, or find some reason to associate them, or look for some kind of personal significance. All these can be enhanced in teaching. A point worth mentioning is that there is a wide range of strategies used by different learners and that a strategy found useful by one learner may not be so to another. Learners need to be encouraged to find what 'works' for them and thus to approach a learning task in an appropriate way.

In order to identify the strategies the students use, it is important to discuss this issue with them since most learning strategies are mental operations and hence not directly observable. My objective now is to give a brief outline of the strategy instruction as I carried it out in the class of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students.

In the lessons which followed I devoted a considerable amount of time to introducing and explaining various strategies for vocabulary learning. Specifically, they were those listed and described in chapter four of the theoretical section. It was done by explicit discussion why and how each strategy can improve students' learning. For example, when reading a text with hitherto unknown vocabulary, we explored how guessing the meaning from context can be applied, how to make use of various word parts to figure out and remember new words and so on. I did not apply the learning strategies instruction as an extra activity but rather tried to integrate it into the lesson. It consists of three main stages (Chamot, Barnhardt, 1999) in *The Learning Strategies Handbook*:

- (a) *Presentation* – the strategy is explicitly named, demonstrated and the reasons for use explained.
- (b) *Practice* – putting the strategy into action with regular language activities.
- (c) *Evaluation* - assessing how well the strategy worked for the students.

This procedure is a kind of action research because what we want to achieve is to bring about a change. We want our learners to change behaviour by starting to apply the learning strategies and to become more self-directed and independent.

## **QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **| APPROACH TO LEARNING VOCABULARY AND ENGLISH IN GENERAL**

#### **Introduction**

Questionnaires are one of the most commonly used elicitation techniques in various studies of second-language acquisition. Administering a questionnaire allows a teacher to investigate a variety of aspects of teaching and learning as it provides a systematic way of collecting information about a range of dimensions in the lesson. The information is retrospective in that students have time to reflect on what they usually do in a situation.

It is important to mention that the research was conducted with a small sample of learners. The objective is not to produce scores and statistics, rather it aims:

- to detect and interpret what the pupils' views about learning vocabulary are
- to allow the pupils to reflect on the results of the survey and discuss them
- to reflect on the research as a contribution for the author's teaching practice

This questionnaire focuses on various aspects of learning the English language with the attention being paid to | vocabulary as well as | general attitude to the subject; | the significance of motivation and | learners' preferences for various language areas. It was administered to 20 students at a Secondary school in Nové Mìsto na Moravì. There were 14 students from the 2<sup>nd</sup> class and 6 from 4<sup>th</sup> class. They all have German as a second foreign language and they are supposed to take a final exam in English at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> year. The average length of learning English is 7,1 years and the average age of the students is 17,1. In terms of sex, there were 30% boys and 70% girls.

Before starting, the students were explained the reasons for and aims of doing the research, which were, above all, the awareness of their priorities, feelings and attitudes towards certain aspects of learning and teaching English with the result of final improvement of the process. The students were asked to read and study all questions carefully and answer them truthfully. They had 40 minutes to fill it in. The items I

those are mainly closed, one of the advantages being that they yield responses which can readily be analysed and quantified. It should also be mentioned that the whole questionnaire was conducted in Czech so that the students could follow the points without difficulty and were able to express themselves freely and precisely. The interpretation of the data that follows below is carried out in English and the Czech version of the questionnaire is enclosed in the appendix section.

### **Analysis of the questions and interpretation of the results:**

#### *1. Which of the areas of the English language do you find the most difficult?*

<b>LANGUAGE AREA</b>	<b>THE MOST DIFFICULT (PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS)</b>	<b>THE LEAST DIFFICULT (PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS)</b>
<b>Listening</b>	20,2%	8,1%
<b>Grammar</b>	19,3%	9,0%
<b>Speaking</b>	16,7%	11,7%
<b>Pronunciation</b>	13,4%	15,2%
<b>Writing</b>	12,9%	15,8%
<b>Vocabulary</b>	10,4%	18,3%
<b>Reading</b>	7,1%	21,8%

From the figures it can be seen that it is listening and understanding of the spoken language along with grammar that the students find the most demanding. The least difficult is considered reading and vocabulary.

#### *2. What do you focus on most in the lessons?*

<b>LANGUAGE AREA</b>	<b>A LOT OF TIME (PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS)</b>	<b>THE LESS TIME (PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS)</b>
<b>Speaking</b>	18,9%	9,5%
<b>Grammar</b>	18,9%	9,5%
<b>Vocabulary</b>	14,5%	14,1%
<b>Pronunciation</b>	13,1%	15,5%
<b>Writing</b>	12,8%	15,9%
<b>Reading</b>	11,5%	17,2%
<b>Listening</b>	10,3%	18,4%

The table shows that speaking, grammar are given most of the time. Vocabulary is given a significant attention too according to the students. They are reported to have

had little experience with listening activities in the previous years of learning the language at school.

*3. Which area of the language do you prefer?*

LANGUAGE AREA	I PREFER THE MOST	I LIKE THE LEAST
<b>Vocabulary</b>	16,7%	11,6%
<b>Speaking</b>	15,7%	12,7%
<b>Reading</b>	14,6%	14,3%
<b>Pronunciation</b>	14,3%	14,3%
<b>Grammar</b>	14,1%	14,4%
<b>Writing</b>	13,5%	15,2%
<b>Listening</b>	11,1%	17,9%

It can be seen that the majority of students prefer vocabulary and speaking in terms of importance and usefulness for communication in the language. Listening and writing are the least popular activities.

*4. How do you learn new vocabulary?*

SOURCE OF LEARNING	PREFERRED BY
<b>Textbook</b>	42,9%
<b>Copying words from articles and texts</b>	26,2%
<b>Computer games</b>	19,0%
<b>Television programmes</b>	11,9%

Most of the students use lists of words in textbooks for learning new vocabulary and only about a third of the questioned stated they copied words from various articles they come across either in the lesson or outside in their free time. Learning word items in lists of translation equivalents is still the most popular way with the learners.

*5. What is the most important for you when learning new vocabulary?*

ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE	THE MOST IMPORTANT	THE LEAST IMPORTANT
Meaning	39,7%	26,3%
Spelling	27,8%	34,2%
Pronunciation	32,5%	39,5%

More than a third of students said the most important aspect when learning new vocabulary was the meaning of the words, only a little less important is pronunciation and as the least important they consider how words are spelled.

6. *Do you have any strategies which help you remember vocabulary better?*

The *yes* and *no* answers were in the ratio of fifty to fifty.

7. *Where are you able to learn most effectively?*

PLACE FOR LEARNING	PREFERRED BY
Home	52,0%
School	44,0%
Other	4,0%

8. *How often do you learn and revise vocabulary?*

FREQUENCY OF LEARNING	PREFERRED BY
Before tests	81,8%
After the lesson	9,1%
In advance	4,5%
Never	4,5%

From this it can be inferred that it is necessary to exert pressure on the students and make them work more independently. Tests and exams remain the main motivators, which is not a good indicator. The topic of motivation was analysed in chapter one of the theoretical section.

9. *Do you think that you learn vocabulary in the right way?*

*YES* – 75%                      *NO* – 25%

10. *Have you tried different ways of learning vocabulary?*

YES – 63%                      NO – 35%

*11. Do you want to improve your ways of learning?*

YES – 63%                      NO – 35%

Here we can see slackness and unwillingness of some students to look for new ways.

*12. Are you aware of any methods and strategies for more efficacious learning?*

YES – 100%                      NO – 0%

*13. Do you want to get to know more about strategies which might be helpful for learning?*

YES – 80%                      NO – 20%

*14. Does English belong to your favourite subjects?*

YES – 80%                      NO – 20%

*15. Do you want to go on learning English after finishing the secondary school?*

YES – 70%                      NO – 30%

*16. Do you think that English is going to be important for you in the future?*

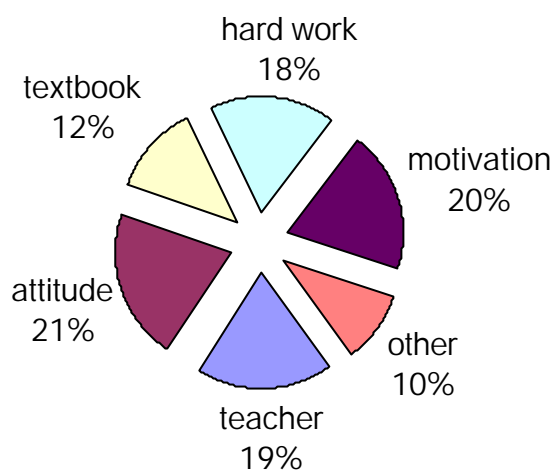
YES – 100%                      NO – 0%

As it has been pointed out, the questionnaire consisted also of questions concerned with the students' general attitude toward the language:

*17. What is in your opinion the most important thing for successful mastering and development of foreign language.*

<b>MOMENTOUS ASPECTS</b>	<b>THE MOST IMPORTANT</b>	<b>THE LESS IMPORTANT</b>
<b>Personal attitude</b>	21,2%	11,2%
<b>Motivation</b>	19,7%	13,1%
<b>Teacher</b>	19,0%	13,8%
<b>Hard work</b>	17,5%	15,7%
<b>Textbook</b>	12,5%	21,7%
<b>Other</b>	10,1%	24,5%

Below is a representation of the same data (question n.17) in the form of a graph.



From the figures it can be inferred that paradoxically hard work is on the fourth place in the importance for being successful in language learning. Personal attitude towards the subject and motivation play the biggest part in successful coping with the foreign language according the students. A teacher along with motivation was placed at the top of the scale. Textbooks are considered less important.

## Conclusion

I am not in the position to do any strict generalizations resulting from my survey. The research was conducted with a small sample of students and rather than to draw any definite conclusions, the intention here was to look closely at how my students approach the issue of studying the English language, what their feelings, views, beliefs about English are. One of the positive outcomes of my project is that the overwhelming majority of learners are genuinely aware of the advantages and necessity of being able to make oneself understood. More than a half of the students regard English as an increasingly important tool for communication nowadays as well as in the future, and they would like to carry on learning the language after they have finished secondary school.

When asked to judge the activities according the difficulty, grammar is considered the most difficult and sometimes a bit boring. It is obvious it cannot be

stopped teaching it just because the pupils do not like it. What can be done instead is to look for new ways of presenting and practising it in order to make it more enjoyable.

As for listening, the pupils admitted that some listening activities are good for example listening to songs. Generally, they find it hard to catch up with the native speakers talking. Therefore, there needs to be more listening activities integrated into the lesson.

For me, as a teacher, this exercise was increasingly stimulating: the opinions of my students helped me realize not only what their strengths and weaknesses are but also indicated strengths and weaknesses of teaching and thus inspired me for some changes. At this point we are getting towards the key issue which explores the students' individual steps while encountering new lexicon.

## **HOW DIFFERENTLY STUDENTS ORGANIZE THEIR VOCABULARY LEARNING**

Below is a list of techniques the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students (20) described to be using when encountering new vocabulary. Most students stated more than one technique, so that we can see how many times a certain strategy has occurred. The students were asked to give an account of what exactly they do when learning new vocabulary. Some copies of authentic statements are shown in appendix n.2. Here are the collected and translated students' replies. They stated it was helpful when they:

*π learn new vocabulary in groups (e.g. a group of 5 followed by other 5, etc.) – 7x*

*π memorize the words by covering the English side of the list, then the Czech one and vice versa and learn them by heart – 7x*

*π look up the unknown and urgent words in the dictionary and put the word down along with its pronunciation and translation into a special notebook – 6x*

*(2 people said they hated looking up words)*

*π associate the word with certain things or other words – 4x*

*π use the 'helping words', as they call it, and associate these words with the new ones (these helping words have something in common, e.g. the first letter, they think of a Czech word which looks or sounds similar...) – 5x*

*π write Czech words on a piece of paper along with the English equivalents – 3x*



- $\pi$  *write the English word a couple of times to be able to spell it correctly and at the same time learn to pronounce it* – **4x** (2 people said they did not need to learn pronunciation as they found it easy to recognize the phonetic shape)
- $\pi$  *learn words from the computer games and the internet* - **3x**
- $\pi$  *memorize the words by heart with the background music* – **2x**
- $\pi$  *memorize the words by heart while walking to and fro* – **1x**
- $\pi$  *use little bits of paper and stick them wherever it was possible at home* – **2x**
- $\pi$  *write the words on a big piece of paper and put it where you look often, when you know the word, it is erased and replaced by a new one* - **1x**
- $\pi$  *watch language courses and films on TV, listening to the news in English* - **1x**
- $\pi$  *try to use context to get meaning as much as possible* – **1x**
- $\pi$  *no special technique at all* – **2x**

From the information above it can be inferred that not all the students approach the learning of the new vocabulary in the same way. The data gathered seem to correspond with the statements in the chapter three in the theoretical part. There it is continually emphasized how differently students tend to handle vocabulary depending on the differing individual styles. As has been said the different approach of every learner is determined by a whole range of factors. (See chapter one).

One of the prevailing techniques is memorizing lists of words in parts. This seems to be a very common method when using one side of the list as prompts and cover the other side in order to test oneself. When it involves writing down the items, it is even more effective. Out of 20 students, 6 said they were using a dictionary when they needed help. Associating the new words with something else, such as a similarly sounding or looking Czech word was reported to be used altogether by 9 people. 7 students are said to be learning better when writing the word down on a piece of paper in order to learn the correct spelling. Only 1 person sticks a card with new words somewhere to be noticed and seen often. 2 students said that they had not any strategy.

It was interesting, though, that there were more than those 2 students who said they were not doing anything special but in fact what they described further on are actually their specific ways of learning. They just do not realize it and do not consider

the ways as the strategies since most of them have become automatic in the course of time. It is obvious that the learners use quite a variety of tricks and strategies.

### **CASE STUDY – “GOOD LEARNERS“**

#### ***Initial reflection***

Chamot and Malley (1990) in their book *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition* discuss the main characteristics of the so called ‘good learners’. There have been numerous surveys conducted with a view to find out what are the common features of those learners (See chapter three). My attempt too was to find out about some common aspects of successful learners in my school environment. I was interested in the following questions:

1. *What learning strategies are used by good language learners in my classrooms?*
2. *How do learners feel about learning English?*

#### ***Planning***

Two students, aged 17 (F) and 18 (M), from two classes were chosen. They are considered to be good language learners compared to the rest of the class. Information was collected by means of classroom observation and an interview. The interview was carried out in Czech. Below is the English translation.

#### ***Action***

From classroom observation which took over a term, the following information was gathered. These students pay full attention in the lesson; they are actively involved in the activities and tasks; listen attentively; they have a small dictionary with them and are accustomed to using it; they are willing to ask questions and give answers; take risks to say something even if they might be wrong; have their homework done.

The students were given the following questions:

- Are you enjoying English lessons?
- What aspect of language do you consider more important grammar or vocabulary?
- Do you think vocabulary should be given more attention?
- How do you manage to remember new words better?
- Do you have any concrete techniques you apply when dealing with new vocabulary?

- Do you learn new vocabulary on your own or does anyone help you?
- Do you spend much time on learning new words and how much?
- Do you like being tested on vocabulary?
- Do you get home support to language learning?

### **Observation**

The students were observed for a period of time and then interviewed. In analysing and looking over my data, I found out that both the students agree on most of the questions and have very similar views upon the problem.

The most frequent answers were translated and are as follows:

- *English is a good subject, I enjoy it and I look forward to lessons of English.*
- *Both grammar and vocabulary is important, I cannot say which of them more.*
- *I spend time outside lessons learning English words.*
- *I write the new words in a special notebook and sometimes on cards and look at them often.*
- *I do not know whether they are special techniques but as for me grouping new words according to a topic is a good idea. I also write an example sentence where the word is used.*
- *I occasionally ask my mum to test me on vocabulary.*
- *I do not have anybody helping me. I learn on my own. Nobody tests me.*
- *To have a big wordstore is an advantage.*
- *It is important to repeat and practise a lot.*
- *I practise new vocabulary with friends, we sometimes test each other.*
- *I learn vocabulary especially before tests, I spend quite a lot of time in order to get a good grade. Sometimes when commuting to school I have a look at vocabulary.*
- *I do not mind vocabulary tests as they are easier than grammar ones.*
- *My parents insist learning a foreign language is a necessity these days but do not really check if I do learn.*

### **Reflection**

The data gathered from the investigation further confirm the scientific knowledge in the theoretical section. It may be concluded that these are some of the typical attributes of the so called 'good learners' as discussed earlier in the paper (see chapter three). It is obvious there are certain tactics which help learners in their work. To sum up, some of the main characteristic features of the students observed are:

- Positive attitude and motivation to the subject
- Awareness of the utility of language knowledge

- Active involvement in the activities and responding to teacher's questions
- Repeating items of language regularly
- Writing down new language in a special notebook
- Being organized and prepared for the lessons

These features are usually common to the successful learners, who are able to organize their learning.

### **ACTION RESEARCH – USING A DICTIONARY**

Action research is meant primarily to improve one's teaching. It is based on a cycle of investigation, action and re-investigation. As I am concerned with encouraging effective vocabulary learning habits, I have been trying to persuade my students that they need to take some responsibility for their own vocabulary acquisition. As Quirk (1990) seems to suggest, dictionaries offer a great help. There are many exercises in the textbook either where they are given a set of pictures (so they know the word in their own language) and have to find the right word in English, or they are given the English word and they have to find the equivalent in Czech. A number of coursebooks nowadays are designed to be used with dictionaries.

#### ***Step 1: Initiation***

The area of concern in my classes was the incompetence and unwillingness of the learners to use dictionaries. A dictionary has seen a great growth in use and popularity among language learners recently. I have found out, however, that using dictionaries in the lessons is neglected, which is an unfortunate reality. Upon asking the pupils whether they use a dictionary at home, the answer was mostly negative as majority of the pupils admitted even not having one and if they do it is just a pocket bilingual dictionary.

#### ***Step 2 : Preliminary investigation***

After I had started teaching, I found out within a short time that the pupils do not know how to use a dictionary and that they are even unwilling to use it. It was obvious that

they were having difficulties tackling the task of looking up unknown words in a dictionary and therefore they tried to avoid it.

### ***Step 3 : Hypothesis***

After reviewing my initial data, I could formulate my hypothesis as being that the unwillingness of pupils to work with dictionaries might to do partly with a lack of motivation but to a great extent, as the pupils admitted, it is caused by the absence of experience working with a dictionary before . A good and effective learner cannot go without a dictionary as it is an essential tool in the process of language learning in that it helps learners to develop language skills by providing them not only with the precise meanings of words but also much more useful information as already given attention in the theoretical section

### ***Step 4 : Intervention***

In order to achieve a positive change, I put a plan into action, which included using dictionaries in lessons by doing a range of tasks which involved working with this reference book. Learners were first introduced to the format of a monolingual dictionary in order to help them to find their way around the information a dictionary offers. There are many exercises in the textbook either where they are given a set of pictures (so they know the word in their own language) and have to find the right word in English, or they are given the English word and they have to find the equivalent in Czech. Another activity which I try to include in the lesson is reading texts taken out from English magazines such as 'Bridge' and 'Friendship' which offer many interesting topics and catch pupils' attention. By reading various articles, we encounter numerous unfamiliar words. What I often recommend is for them to underline the unfamiliar word, in the meantime to continue reading but return to the underlined words. It is advisable to try to guess the meaning of the word in the first instance from the context. If this fails, a dictionary should be ready to consult.

### ***Example of activities***

To illustrate, we pick a particular word, say **prefer**, and I want the pupils to notice how different parts of speech and words formed from the headword (*prefer*,

*preferable, preferably, preference, preferential, preferment*) are given in the same entry. As it has been said earlier, a good dictionary contains a great deal of information about grammar of words. We are told of which word-class the particular item is, whether a noun is countable or uncountable, which prepositions it is used with, whether a verb is transitive or intransitive and so on. In order to help the learner to comprehend this information, these dictionaries provide example phrases and sentences for illustration. It gives information about the inflections – how they form changes when they are used in the past tense, the plural, the comparative, or in some other way. Some dictionaries give information about synonyms and antonyms.

In another lesson I focused on words which often go together. These words are called *collocations*. Firstly, the pupils were to look up the words, specifically, **joke** and **draw**. The conclusion was that one verb that often goes with the word **joke** is **tell** and one noun that often goes with the verb **draw** is **picture**. The students went on looking up other words. They came up with combinations like *make a phone call, ride a horse, take a photograph* and many others.

#### ***Step 5 : Evaluation***

Having implemented the plan and carrying it out over a period of time, I could see some progress has been made. There is always a dictionary at our disposal in the lesson and when other strategies fail pupils can consult a dictionary and find the necessary information. It has been proved that a dictionary may be an excellent helper while doing such activities like reading texts, particularly the authentic ones. From my own experience as a teacher, I can openly and with confidence say that working with a dictionary is by no means a waste of time since it is another way of introducing vocabulary and consolidating them at the same time. While learners are encouraged to first guess the meaning from context, there are many a times when this is not of much help and thus consulting a dictionary is a useful way out. Along with finding the correct word and its meaning, learners seem to enjoy this activity and that is just what we desire. It is generally known and it is without doubt that we learn a lot when we are enjoying ourselves. Someone has once said that it is the lifeblood of effective learning. Because of a shortage of time in the lessons, working with a dictionary cannot be at the expense of other important aspects of language learning. Therefore, there still remain

difficulties such as slowness and little flexibility while using a dictionary and for the pupils it is still much easier and quicker to ask the teacher for translation.

### ***Conclusion of the action research***

An action research has been carried out which allowed me to evaluate new initiatives I tried out with one of my classes. (Though I am trying to encourage a dictionary use in the other classes as well). In the lessons we started actively using a dictionary, first demonstrating advantages of a monolingual dictionary over a small bilingual one in providing examples of contextual use, stress patterns and other features mentioned earlier. The pupils are continually reminded that inferencing meanings and then looking up unknown words helps with the retention of the word.

Having done a number of tasks, observing the pupils, it may be inferred that the pupils are not “reserved“ and “scared“ so much of making use of a dictionary as they had been. Having managed to encourage them, that is the first and most important step towards making them more responsible for their own learning. In order to be successful in the initiatives, we will have to wait and give it more time, reflecting on the process, then pinpointing remaining difficulties and looking for extending our strategies accordingly.

## **HOW DIFFERENTLY STUDENTS ORGANIZE THEIR VOCABULARY LEARNING | NOTE-TAKING**

From discussion about how students go about learning vocabulary the following information about taking notes of new vocabulary was gathered. Here are some of the questions and answers:

***Question:*** *Where do you keep a record of the words and phrases?*

***Answer:*** 12 students out of 20 said they kept a special note-book with the new vocabulary from the lesson. 8 out of 20 learned new words in lists direct from the textbook. 5 out of 20 said they sometimes noted down the new words on little pieces of paper.

***Question:*** *How do you record vocabulary?*

a) in alphabetical order b) in topic groups c) at random d) in some other way ?

*Answer:* 11 out of 20 said they recorded new vocabulary at random without any rule or order. 5 students replied they recorded vocabulary either randomly or in topic groups according to topics talked about in lessons. 4 people use grouping according to various criteria, not only topic but also grammar, function,...Such notebooks contain, for example, lists of verbs, adjectives, a page with prepositions or irregular verbs, or functional words concerning various situations etc. As has been pointed out earlier, grouping helps remember better because we organize the vocabulary and we think about how we organize it thus establishing numerous mental connections. (See chapter four)

*Question:* How much information do you note down?

a) translations-Czech equivalents b) English explanations c) notes on grammar  
d) some other information ?

*Answer:* Majority of respondents put down translations only. About half of them said they sometimes note down some grammar characteristics as well when it is important and especially when it is pointed out to them. 7 people said that when they meet a new word they write in the word, its translation, and a sentence with the word. Only 4 students said they sometimes noted down English explanations either with or without Czech translations.

From this it follows that students need to be encouraged to use English-English explanations more often.

To conclude, more than half of respondents (60%) have some kind of notebook. More than a half of the students (55%) prefer to put words at random order, fewer people put them in groups, especially according to a topic like fruit, colours, clothes and so on. Some people have special grammar pages in these notebooks but majority of pupils have a special exercise book for the grammar items dealt with in the lessons. From the information it can be inferred that students use translations quite a lot. This topic has been discussed in chapter four of the theoretical section. Nevertheless, it is worth repeating that although translation may convey easily a more or less exact sense of an item, a real danger with translation is that students will continue to use the mother tongue as a framework on which they base the L2 (English) items.



## EASE AND DIFFICULTY OF LEARNING VOCABULARY

A part of my research gave attention to the students' impressions of ease and difficulty in dealing with new words. Students were supposed to write their answers to the following questions and they were discussed in the classroom together. The results are not very surprising or illogical:

*Question: What kinds of words are the easiest for you in English? Give examples*

*Answer:* For majority of the students such words are those similar to our native Czech words; words which are easily pronounced and spelled; and words frequently occurring, e.g. brother, family, sun, homework,.....

*Question: What kinds of words are the most difficult for you to learn? Give examples*

*Answer:* Most of them replied that such words are compound words; easily-confused words; words with difficult pronunciation; phrasal verbs; similar-sounding words in English, e.g. self-conscious; unsuccessful, frightened, through, though, tough,.....

Students often express a need to expand their vocabulary. From the interview I conducted I can infer specific difficulties most students refer to: a lack of vocabulary to express what they want; confusion between similar sounding or looking words; and using a word incorrectly.

### ***A summary of important ideas worth pointing out to the students:***

- *It is helpful to organize words and phrases into meaningful groups, e.g. according to various topics or functions.*
- *It is not always necessary to understand every word.*
- *It is helpful to try to recall words or phrases via association, by thinking of e.g. the first letter, the pronunciation, etc. What the association is does not matter at all.*
- *It is good to use any method which seems helpful, e.g. pictures, diagrams, word ladders, etc.*
- *It is not advisable to memorize too many words at once.*
- *It is recommended to memorize and revise for a short time each day rather than for too long, or not at all.*
- *It is much more effective to memorize and revise vocabulary in context rather than in isolation, as well as useful groups of words rather than random lists of words.*

### ***In a few words about the research***

I would like to summarize the impact of the research I have carried out in the classroom. One of the main outcomes of the survey were the suggestions which were yielded. They were undoubtedly very inspiring and challenging not only for me as a teacher but for the students themselves. Maybe one of the problems I had to face was a lack of time to devote to all of the components of the survey. Even though we spent a couple of lessons on every item of research over the term, it certainly was not enough for the discussions with respect to the syllabus.

On the whole, the choice of the instruments was good as they were easy to devise and use, though it was rather demanding to analyse the data afterwards. These tasks helped me to get into a closer contact with my students which I think improved the overall atmosphere in the classroom. It made me think more deeply and thoroughly about a variety of issues faced regularly in the learning and teaching environment.

Due to the low sample of only 20 students it cannot function as an adequate resource for comprehension of the problems. Nevertheless, the results are of significant value to me as a teacher and consequently useful for further pedagogical work. I can benefit from the learners' responses by taking them into account and possibly modifying some of the aspects of the lessons accordingly.

## Conclusion

The aim of the summary is to capture the main points of the thesis. It will provide an overview of the areas discussed throughout the paper, which primarily attempted to demonstrate the complexities of learning the English lexicon.

Vocabulary teaching and learning is developing greater importance in the classroom, although it has not reached such level of systematicity and consistency as grammar did. There is much evidence that in recent years vocabulary has not received the recognition it deserves and therefore, a recurring theme in the literature of English language teaching and learning has been the neglect of vocabulary. Hedge illustrates this by asserting that, "*The neglect of vocabulary is also surprising in view of the fact that errors of vocabulary are potentially more misleading than those of grammar.*" (2000:111) In spite of this, recent years have seen a bigger awareness of a range of issues which are being addressed by researchers, teachers, and material designers. It was continually emphasized that vocabulary is that part of a foreign language which is not given an appropriate attention, even though it is the sufficient amount of vocabulary which is one of the key prerequisites for successful communication in a foreign language.

One of the chief aims of the paper was to ascertain what exactly students do to learn vocabulary, what strategies they employ when encountering new words, and to suggest possible techniques for more effective learning.

The first part of the paper dealt with some theoretical framework of the topic whose main points are outlined below. Then the attention shifted to a practical application and reflection in the classroom. The first chapter concerns the topic of words in general, their significance in human communication and interaction. A distinction is commonly made between active or productive vocabulary (what we can use) and passive or receptive vocabulary (what one can recognize and understand). A learner's receptive vocabulary is generally much larger than his or her productive vocabulary. It is because language learners can usually understand many more words than they actively use. The process of learning new words is never complete. Even very

advanced students can go on to become more proficient in their choice of words and expressions by studying and understanding various nuances of meaning.

Motivation, attitude and anxiety are only a few examples of the so called affective factors which play a significant role in language learning. Intrinsically motivated people learn for their own sake rather than for an external reward. Extrinsically motivated individuals, on the other hand, engage in learning for reasons coming from outside such as rewards, good marks, being the teacher's favourite etc. Motivation to learn a foreign language is increasingly complex and experiments are still being carried out to bring new insights into this area. The learner may feel the need to learn certain words in order to please the teacher or to pass an examination, which may produce learning, but such learners will gain little of permanent value. But those who want to learn a language for some personal purpose are more likely to succeed. This is what is usually connected and referred to as the *extrinsic* and *intrinsic motivation*, which was explained and discussed in chapter one.

The focus of the second chapter is the mental lexicon and discusses the problems of input, storage and retrieval of words. Extensive research in memory suggests that words are stored and remembered in a network of various associations. Words in our lexicon are tied to each other in a number of ways, not only by meaning, form and sound, but also by sight. Vital factors in retention of words are obviously the amount of time and effort devoted to practice and revision.

In order to learn words learners use a range of strategies and approaches. This issue is looked into in the chapter three. Learning strategies are the operations that learners use in order to make sense of their learning. "Students need to develop effective study skills if they are to become effective independent learners." (Wallace 1991:27) Unlike learning styles which describe a general approach to learning, strategies refer to specific actions that one uses to tackle a particular problem. What is important is the fact that strategies can be learnt. There is a wide range of strategy classification. Generally, some of them are called cognitive, which are direct mental operations functioning in order to understand, categorize and store new words in the mental lexicon. Specifically, they are: making associations, learning words in groups, guessing meaning, memorizing and many others working at a cognitive level.

Metacognitive strategies which regulate and self-direct learning include such processes as planning, monitoring, setting goals, checking the outcomes of learning, self-management etc. In other words, metacognition entails 'knowing about one's knowing'. (Williams, Burden 1997:148)

There are a number of ways in which teachers can help students to develop strategies. Students need practice in deciding which words are crucial to the overall understanding of the text and which they can ignore. Students also need help in deducing the meaning of words: by comparing words with those in their own language; by looking at the parts of the unknown word (guessing the word from their knowledge of roots, prefixes and suffixes), by guessing from the context, the sentence or the whole passage and so on. Numerous studies have shown that making meaningful associations with new words and phrases can make vocabulary acquisition more effective and efficient.

While some learning strategies, such as taking notes, are observable, most strategies are mental processes that are not directly observable. Teacher can gain insight into their students' mental processes by discussing with students their approaches to specific learning tasks and any special techniques or tricks they have for understanding, remembering, and using information.

Strategies most often recommended for vocabulary learning are as follows:

- |                               |                                       |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| π learning words in groups    | π making various associations         |
| π making use of word-networks | π memorizing word-lists               |
| π making word-cards           | π using a dictionary                  |
| π using contextual clues      | π collecting words from reading texts |

Contextualization has been widely emphasized recently because of its significant value for language learners. Another term is inferencing and involves guessing the meaning of an unfamiliar language based on what one knows, the context and other contextual clues (e.g. pictures). The reason for its value is that presenting words in context provides support and if learners have to work on the meaning of an unfamiliar word, it is more likely for them to be able to retain the words better. As yet, there is not much scientific evidence to support this. Nevertheless, it is very much in accordance with self-reports from learners and it is based on the idea that remembering a word is

highly influenced by depth of processing. It is worth pointing out that texts compared to lists of isolated words provide a linguistic and psychological reality. If the learners are not able to deduce the meaning from the context or if they need to check they understood and guessed correctly, they need to be able to use dictionaries quickly and effectively.

As far as translation is concerned, it has been a contentious issue recently. Even though it is recommended that it be avoided as much as possible, it can be a very effective way of conveying meaning in that it can save a lot of time rather than to spend it on a prolonged explanation. As long as it is used sensibly and moderately, translation is a valuable tool.

Memory for vocabulary, and the ability to recall words and phrases when one needs them improves with time and with practice. It is vital for the learners to:

- Use a vocabulary notebook or vocabulary cards
- Organize one's vocabulary into meaningful groups
- Memorize words regularly
- Have a good dictionary and use it effectively
- Develop and use one's own personal learning strategies

Not only an aptitude, intelligence and abilities are crucial for successful language learning. More recent research has looked at other factors which seem to correlate positively with effective learning. This leads us to the problem of effective versus ineffective students whose differences are reflected in the range of strategies used and the way in which individual strategies are used. In general, more effective students use a bigger variety of strategies and use them in ways that help them complete the language task successfully. Less effective students, on the other hand, not only have fewer strategies in their repertoires but also the strategies are often used inappropriately.

The final chapter of the theoretical section examines a variety of ways for developing our vocabulary by means of a range of strategies which are treated in detail. This is followed by a demonstration of various types of exercises for practising. Note-taking and a dictionary use are the last issues discussed. A dictionary has come into focus recently as an important type of resource for vocabulary teaching. The advantage is primarily in providing examples of contextual use. Students need to discover and

appreciate the special aids which are offered by all-English dictionaries: pictures, example sentences, simple definitions, grammatical information and so on. It is natural, however, that students turn first to dictionaries which define English words in their mother tongue. For the start, it is useful to use a bilingual dictionary and then to continue with the all-English one. As part of expanding students' skills and strategies, developing reference skills and encouraging the use of vocabulary records are being stressed in particular because learners need to be able to use dictionaries quickly and effectively.

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that the most effective way for students to increase their vocabulary store is for them to be actively involved in the learning process. To reach this goal, it involves learner training in the various strategies in order to develop vocabulary in a systematic way. Students need to develop effective learning practice such as the use of collocations, semantic fields, networks, guesswork etc. This is being emphasized for instance by Gairns and Redman who introduce the so called 'students-centered approach' which includes three main strategies. They are: asking others, making use of context to deduce meaning and using a dictionary. This approach is proved to be especially effective as it increases learner's independence.

A practical section follows after the theoretical study and consists of a research which has been conducted by means of a questionnaire, an interview, observation and an action research which was supposed to support or refuse statements presented throughout the paper. I may state that the practical part managed to shed light on the problem since it looked into the way the students approach vocabulary learning.

The questionnaire was distributed among the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students of a Secondary school in Nové Mìsto na Moravì. The research methods concentrated not only on vocabulary but also on the general attitude towards English. The whole process of gathering information, observation and analysis proved increasingly valuable since undertaking the investigation resulted in greater understanding of the chosen area.

Firstly, a questionnaire has been administered to the students with the aim to find out how they view various issues of language learning. The interpretations of responses have been made in the practical section by means of tables and figures from which various conclusions have been drawn. Below the main points are going to be summarized again. Surprisingly, it can be seen that as far as vocabulary is concerned, it

is placed at the bottom in terms of difficulty with more trouble being attributed to grammar. Students answered that vocabulary is given big importance in the lessons right after speaking and grammar. It is vocabulary area together with speaking that is given the greatest significance. As far as the strategies are concerned, there is a lack of awareness of the existence of strategies for more efficacious mastering new lexicon. A textbook is the major source of vocabulary where the words are presented in word lists. 75% of students are convinced they learn vocabulary in the right way and 63% said they had some techniques, 80% are interested in getting to know more about some good techniques. The actual use of the strategies was closely looked into in the next part of the research. As for the opinion on the most important factors for successful progressing in language proficiency, 21% think personal attitude plays the biggest part; 19,7% regard motivation nearly equally important; the third most important factor is the teacher taken as a whole personality with his or her attitude toward the subject.

Secondly, students were asked to give a detailed account of how they go about learning new vocabulary. From the gathered data it can be inferred that although the pupils said they were not using any strategies, there in fact occurred quite a variety of them. They are outlined in the practical section along with their frequency of occurrence among the students. Looking for a similar word in sound or appearance; writing the new word down a couple of times; memorizing lists of words in small groups etc. are just a few of the techniques reported most often by the students.

Thirdly, an action case study in the form of an interview has been conducted. Two 'good students' were questioned on a number of issues and their replies along with conclusions are shown in the practical section.

Fourthly, an action research concerning using a dictionary as a facilitator has been carried out with a rather negative result since it has shown that students very rarely use dictionaries. The problem is that they have not been acquainted with the qualities a good dictionary offers.

This fact inspired the initiation of a kind of learning strategies instruction with the focus on vocabulary. The great contribution of the discussion was sharing the strategies among learners. Some students do perhaps very little, some have some interesting approaches. Some new strategies were also added, explained and demonstrated.



It has been shown that students mostly use word lists in their textbooks to memorize, which is not always the best way. A common technique among students is memorization of language items either silently or aloud and usually involves writing down the items (often more than once). A common practice is for the learner to use one side of the list as prompts and cover the other side in order to test oneself.

The last part of the research section attempted to explore the ways students note down new lexicon. Although majority of students have a special notebook, they are accustomed to write down only a translation equivalent next to the English word. From this it follows that they need to develop note-taking strategies as well such as putting a new word into a sentence, noting down grammar features of words when necessary, putting words in groups and so on.

It can be concluded that learners know and employ a variety of strategies and tricks which can help them in learning the language, though they are not always aware of them being strategies and they fail to realize they are using any. The results gained were most valuable for my work, as they seem to support many of my statements and presumptions. Due to research I learned much more about the learners as individuals, about their ideas and difficulties. Last but not least, it seems to have improved the mutual relations not only between the students and me as their teacher but also among students themselves and thus affecting positively the overall classroom atmosphere. On the whole, I found the procedure very inspiring as the aim of inquiry was of practical nature: learning strategies used by the learners were elicited and shared in the class with the intention to inspire rather than to train.

Further research studies might offer new insights into vocabulary acquisition and thus to suggest the most effective procedures for vocabulary teaching. For the learners to be successful, it is necessary to pay great attention to practice and revision as well as it is crucial that learners take more responsibility for their own vocabulary development. This means particularly active involvement and effective use of strategies.

The aim of the diploma paper was not just to instruct, persuade but also to motivate and inspire and thus make the reader aware of the significance and complexity of learning vocabulary as an integral part of the process of mastering a language.

Learners who are aware of their own learning processes, strategies, and preferences are able to regulate their learning attempts to achieve their own goals. For successful vocabulary learning, apart from attention, practice and revision, it is incumbent on learners to take on more responsibility for their own vocabulary development. This means above all active involvement in all activities in and out of class as well as assuming strategies for more effective acquiring vocabulary.

*“If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day;  
if you teach a man to fish you feed him for a lifetime.”*

(Confucian proverb in Hedge 2000, p.100)

## Resumé

Diplomová práce se zabývá tématem učení slovní zásoby jako jedním z hlavních článků rozvíjení kompetence v cizím jazyce. Mnohé výzkumy naznačují, že slovní zásoba se ve vyučování nevínovalo po dlouhou dobu dostatek pozornosti, a to i přesto, že právě dostatečná slovní zásoba je jedním z klíčových předpokladů úspěšné komunikace v cizím jazyce.

První kapitola pojednává v obecnější rovině o významu slov v každodenní mezilidské komunikaci, o postavení slovní zásoby ve vyučování z hlediska současného i minulého. Přestože se slovní zásoba a gramatika vzájemně prolínají, po dlouhou dobu byla ve velké míře upřednostňována gramatika, ale již v posledních desetiletích díky pronikajcímu komunikativnímu přístupu k výuce cizího jazyka se lexikální stránce jazyka věnuje značně větší pozornost. Je potřeba připomenout, že jako prvky slovní zásoby jsou označovány nejen jednotlivá slova, ale i pevná slovní spojení. Nazývají se lexikální jednotky a žák si je osvojuje jako celek, např. *by all means, on no account,...*

Dalším tématem jsou faktory, které ovlivňují zvládnání slovní zásoby. Práce popisuje jen několik z nich, jako je například motivace, osobní přístup atd. Je to právě motivace, která z psychologického hlediska hraje při osvojování cizí slovní zásoby značnou úlohu. Motivace je totiž jednou z nejučinnějších hnacích sil učení. Učí-li se žák se zájmem, je-li například motivován vyhlídkou na uplatnění svých jazykových znalostí, je pravděpodobnost rychlejšího a snadnějšího osvojení větší. Proč se někdo učí cizímu jazyku snadno a jiný s větší námahou, lze vysvětlit také tím, jaký je jeho vnitřní postoj k němu. První postoj je zřejmě výsledkem kladného přístupu a z toho vyplývá chuť učit se, druhý postoj s sebou přináší obtížnější zvládnání, dokonce až odpor. Téma motivace je však oblastí velmi širokou, ale vzhledem k zaměření práce ji zde nelze zcela obsáhnout.

Jaký by měl být výsledek osvojení slovní zásoby? Znamená to nejenom znát pasivně význam nové lexikální jednotky, její výslovnost, pravopis a gramatické fungování, ale především i pohotovost vybavení pro komunikativní záměr, schopnost

správného porozumění významu, vytvoření pevných asociací mezi pojmem a cizojazyčnou realitou.

Slovní zásoba se často rozlišuje na aktivní – produktivní a pasivní – receptivní. Pasivní slovní zásoba, které jsme schopni porozumět, ale aktivně ji nepoužíváme, je vždy podstatně větší než aktivní. Z praxe je zřejmé, že osvojení si aktivní slovní zásoby je mnohem těžší než osvojení pasivní.

Druhá kapitola se zabývá slovní zásobou z hlediska efektivního zapamatování a uchování v paměti. Pro cizojazyčné vyučování je důležité vědět, že existuje tzv. krátkodobá neboli operativní paměť, což je paměť situací, jejímž úkolem je uchovávat informace jen po krátkou dobu a jejíž kapacita je velmi omezená. Vědomosti uložené do dlouhodobé paměti, tzv. produktivní, se mohou po zapomenutí obnovovat. Jak jsou slovíčka v paměti seřazena a uchovávána, je stále otázkou pro výzkum, přesto však víme, že slova jsou shlukována v jakýchsi skupinách ('clusters') s logickými vztahy mezi sebou.

Učení cizího jazyka je cesta oběma směry. Při osvojování slovní zásoby mohou nastat nesnáze, které jsou způsobeny mnoha faktory. Příčinou mohou být rozdíly mezi jazykem mateřským a cizím, nebo v každém jazyce se mimojazyková skutečnost dělí a organizuje jiným způsobem. Tomuto jevu se říká 'interference'. Například jeden jazyk nemusí mít rovnocenný ekvivalent pro určitý výraz jazyka druhého. Kromě potíží významových se objevují i potíže s výslovností, grafikou atd. Problémem bývají tzv. zrádná slova ('false-friends'), mající v obou jazycích obdobnou formu. Získala však v důsledku různého jazykového nebo kulturního vývoje odlišný význam nebo stylové zabarvení. (například sympathy – sympatie. Viz. druhá kapitola.)

Třetí kapitola věnuje pozornost učebním stylům a strategiím, přičemž nejprve vymezuje základní pojmy. Styly učení jsou kognitivní psychologické procesy,

*“charakteristické způsoby, jimž lidé vnímají, zapamatovávají si informace, myslí, řeší problémy, rozhodují se. Styly vypovídají o konzistentních individuálních rozdílech ve způsobech, jimiž lidé organizují a řídí své zpracovávání informací a zkušeností.” (Tennant, 1988, Messick, 1994 v Styly učení žáků a studentů, str. 50)*

Jinými slovy pojem 'styl učení' tvoří jakousi spojnicí mezi pojmy učení, zvláštnosti procesu učení a pojmu osobnost, rozdíly mezi lidmi. Strategie učení jsou postupy konkrétnější, jakési dílečtí taktické kroky, jimiž žák uskutečňuje svébytným

způsobem určitý plán při řešení dané úlohy. Existuje celá řada strategií, jejich rozdělení a klasifikací, z nichž ní které jsou uvedeny v této kapitole.

Z hlediska psychologického je osvojování cizího jazyka neobyčejně komplikovaný proces, silně závislý na individualitě učícího se. Každý žák je jiný jak z hlediska vývoje, motivace, poznávacích procesů, předpokladů atd., z čehož vyplývá, že různí žáci potřebují různé metody a způsoby učení. Důraz je kladen na tzv. *metakognitivní strategie*, níktež autoři mluví o “učení, jak se učit“, založené na ‘metaučení’ – dovednosti řídit vlastní způsob učení, kdy si jedinec své pojetí učení uvědomuje, buduje si repertoár postojů a dovedností, snaží se jednat efektivně a flexibilně organizuje své učení. “Učení, jak se učit“ musí být především iniciováno žákem samotným, přičemž učitel je rovněž nedílná složka tohoto procesu, nebo• by měl být schopen napřodovat princip individuálního přístupu k žákům, rozvíjet metakognitivní dovednosti a tím individuální učební strategie a techniky. Ve hře je však ještě řada dalších faktorů, jako jsou zvláštnosti žáka, jeho rodinné zázemí, podmínky, v nichž učení probíhá atd. Psychologie stylů a strategií není uzavřenou záležitostí, nebo• stále přibývají nové poznatky a teorie, dosavadní se přepracovávají. Jejich největším přínosem je především to, že nám přibližují průběh učení, pomáhají nám porozumět, jak se žák učí, proč se učí tímto způsobem apod.

Tématem zájmu poslední kapitoly je rozšiřování a procvičování slovní zásoby pomocí celé řady způsobů a technik. Teorie zde postupně přechází k praxi a snaží se zdůraznit, že je to právě aktivní práce se slovíčky a neustálé opakování, které vedou k upevnění cizího výraziva. Výsledkem osvojení slovní zásoby je nejenom schopnost pamatování si významu slova, nýbrž také pohotovost vybavování, schopnost správného porozumění významu slov známých a odhadu významu slov neznámých. Při učení nacvičujeme výslovnost, pravopis, gramatickou charakteristiku a význam v souvislosti s okolím. Důraz je kladen na využití kontextu, kdy nové slovo je ve větě umístěno tak, aby v ní mělo klíčové postavení. Je zde vhodné zmínit tzv. potenciální slovní zásobu, takovou, kterou žák ještě nezná, ale které je schopen přesto porozumět pomocí analogie, mateřštiny, na základě kontextu nebo vlastních znalostí o slovech.

Seskupování slov podle nejrůznějších kritérií; nahrazování slov jinými slovy podobného významu, tzv. ‘klíčová metoda’; odhadování významu z kontextu, patří mezi efektivní metody úspěšného zvládnutí slovní zásoby. ěetné průzkumy poukazují

na to, že by se zásadně neměla slovní zásoba procvičovat izolovaně, nýbrž v kontextu a to verbálním nebo situačním. Pro žáky je velmi přínosné, aby jim byla poskytnuta příležitost slyšet slova v kontextu užívání. To znamená používání významových spojení, “aby slova umožnily zformovat v mysli žáka podobu, a tím po sobě zanechat trvalé stopy, které vyvolávají asociace..“ (Billows 1995, str. 24)

“Pamatoval jsem si je jen tehdy, když jsem se zabýval texty, ve kterých se tato slova objevovala, sice poprvé, ale zato v určitém kontextu; pak jsem si je pamatoval...Častým čtením se pak taková slovní zásoba doslova uhnízdila v mé paměti.“ (Billows 1995, str.43)

L.F. Billows (str.22) v kapitole ‘Výuka jazyka v kontextu situace’ dále poukazuje, “Jestliže jazykový projev není doprovázen akcí nebo viděním v kontextu situace, zůstává izolovaný a nesrozumitelný.“

Třídění slovní zásoby je další efektivní metodou, kterou lze provádět podle různých hledisek: dle slovních druhů; frekvence; abecedně; z hlediska sémantického (synonyma, antonyma apod.); gramatického (mluvnické vlastnosti). Zvláště užitečnou se potvrzuje organizace pojmů dle semantických oblastí jako například: ‘jídlo’, ‘části oblečení’, ‘popis domu’, atd. Dělení mohou být i další, což závisí na preferenci každého jedince a účinnosti vyzkoušených metod. Především využití znalostí o tvoření slov může být velmi nápomocné pro rozšiřování slovní zásoby a to při práci s kontextem. Proto se doporučuje, aby se žáci seznamovali se zásadami tvoření slov od počátku výuky cizímu jazyku.

Typy cvičení aktivní slovní zásoby jsou různé, obvykle se uvádí pojmenování předmětů; doplňování slov do kontextu; seskupování slov podle různých kritérií; obměny slovních spojení a dosazování nových výrazů; překlad jednotlivých výrazů doplněný slovním spojením nebo zasazením do kontextu; čtení; vypisování nových slov atd. Ve školní praxi se typy cvičení většinou prolínají. Překlad nového slova do mateřštiny je jednou z dalších technik, v poslední době poněkud kontroverzní. L.F. Billows v knize *Kooperativní technika vyučování cizímu jazyku* poukazuje,

“překlad oslabuje dojem, který má nové slovo na žákovy smysly, zvědavost zmizí a napětí opadne dříve, než byl zájem vůbec vzbuzen. V přímém porovnání zanechá známé slovo – tedy mateřština – u žáka silnější dojem, než slovo neznámé; vliv nového slova se stane mlhavým,

zastíněn vlivem slova známého. Proto je vhodné nové slovo nechat působit samo o sobě, bez většího soupeře v sousedství.“ (1995, str. 42)

Podobně další myšlenka autora je velmi výstižná: “Poukazuje-li učitel na význam slov v rodné řeči, jak se mu zlíbí, pak nabízí žákům pravděpodobně málo příležitostí k jejich uplatnění v kontextových situacích.“ (Billows, str. 44) Na druhé straně je výhodou překladu rychlost, přesnost a úspornost. Dnes se doporučuje hlavně v prvním stádiu, kde není možná jiná semantizace. Ovšem i později se překladu používá při osvojování významu nového výrazu.

Vedení slovníků s novými výrazy a ekvivalenty v mateřtině je běžné, ale bývá občas napadáno. Má však své přednosti, nebo samo zapsání výrazu přispívá k lepšímu zapamatování. Doporučuje se připojit informace o gramatických zvláštностech slova a typickém slovním spojení, v němž se nové slovo aktivně použije. Slovníček je výborným a pohotovým přehledem probrané slovní zásoby. Výhodou je, že slovíčka mohou být řazena podle různých hledisek, například dle slovních druhů, tematicky apod.

Nemalá pozornost je věnována používání slovníků jako důležitého nástroje cizojazyčné výuky. Je výborným pomocníkem v procesu učení nové slovní zásoby a jeho význam spočívá především v tom, že umožňuje studentům stát se nezávislími na učiteli. Pokud je to možné, žáci by měli používat jednojazyčný slovník. Jestliže se žáci se slovníkem dostatečně seznámí, není už nutné každé slovo vysvětlovat.

*“Učitel není žádný slovník, jehož úkolem je podávání přesných vysvětlení a definic. Učitel je živý a všestranný řečník, schopný předvést nové slovo ve všech možných kontextech a situacích a jenom on umí obsáhnout pole žákovy zkušebnosti tak, jako to žádný slovník nedokáže.“ (Billows, str.43)*

Důležitým faktorem při osvojování slovní zásoby je samozřejmě opakování, jehož hlavními cíli jsou: a) upevnění slovní zásoby dříve probrané, b) její automatizace v různých spojeních. Jen promyšlené, důsledné a účelné opakování vede k trvalému zapamatování. Je třeba mít na paměti, že čas věnovaný opakování není nikdy ztracen.

K podložení teoretických tvrzení byly použity kromě mnoha citátů také výsledky výzkumu, který byl proveden pomocí dotazníků, pozorování a interview mezi studenty 2. a 4. ročníku SOŠ a SOU v Novém Městě na Moravě. Dotazník obsahoval celkem 17 otázek a zpracovávalo je 20 respondentů, z čehož bylo 14 ze 2. a 6 ze 4. ročníku.

Průměrná délka studia anglického jazyka u této skupiny je 7,1 roku. Ve 30% dotazovaných se jednalo o chlapce a v 70% o dívky.

Na základě získaných údajů bylo zjištěno, že v minulých letech byla oblast slovní zásoby u žáků opomíjena a větší důraz byl kladen na oblast gramatickou. Nyní však studenti považují tuto stránku jazyka za velmi důležitou. Z výsledků dotazníku vyplynulo, že spolu s gramatikou a mluvením se lexikální složce v hodinách věnuje dostatek pozornosti. Co se týká obtížnosti, poslech a gramatika byla na prvním místě. Učení slovíček spolu se čtením jsou pokládány za nejjednodušší. Třetí čtvrtiny dotázaných si myslí, že se učí správně, více než polovina vyzkoušela různé způsoby. Součástí tohoto výzkumu bylo podrobně popsat, co přesně žáci dělají, když se učí nová slovíčka. Výsledky byly velmi překvapující, neboť převážná část studentů uvedla několik konkrétních strategií či technik, které jim zjednodušují proces učení a zapamatování. Nejvíce žáků se učí slovíčka ve sloupcích stádoavým zakrýváním českých a anglických výrazů, psaním slov několikrát na papír, hledáním tzv. pomocných slov podobné výslovnosti nebo grafiky, učením se slověům v malých skupinách, zaznamenáváním nových slovíček na kartičky apod. Přehledný seznam těchto technik s frekvencí výskytu použítí najdeme v praktické části této práce.

Z výsledků dotazníku, jednotlivých popisů učení a následné diskuse ve vyučování vyplývá důležitý poznatek. Žáci, přestože tvrdí, že téměř žádné strategie nemají, ve skutečnosti aktivně používají řadu nejrůznějších technik, aniž si jsou toho vědomi. Při diskusi s žáky byly představeny a pojmenovány další strategie, které by jim mohly napomoci s osvojováním slovní zásoby. Žáci měli za úkol vyzkoušet, jak na ně jednotlivé strategie působí, zda-li mají pocit, že si práci na různých úkolech se slovíčky mohou díky těmto technikám či trikům usnadnit. Jak již bylo mnohokrát řečeno, každý žák je jiný. To znamená, že každý má svůj způsob učení založený na svém učebním stylu. Je však potřeba žáky vést k tomu, aby si již od samého začátku vytvořili svůj vlastní učební styl a strategie, které jim úspěšně pomohou řešit nejrůznější úkoly.

Žáci se ve většině případů učí slovíčka z paměti, což není vždy nejefektivnější způsob, jelikož krátkodobá paměť, která je zde použita, není schopna uchovat větší množství nových informací a není schopna tyto informace udržet po delší časový úsek.

Cílem mé práce nebylo pouze přesvědčit a poučít, ale především motivovat a poukázat čtenáře na to, že je nutné věnovat slovní zásobě větší pozornost, neboť je to



nedílná souèást v procesu rozvíjení kompetence v cizím jazyce. Není důležité pouze naplòovat obsahovou stránku vyuèování, nýbrž i “rozvíjet a trénovat různé strategie uèení a styly uèení.“ (Mareš, str.142)

Závìrem lze říci, že obzvláštì praktická èást diplomové práce znamenala pro mì velký pínos, ponì vadž výzkum pínosl řadu nových podnítù a poznatkù, jak pro mì jako uèitele, tak i pro žáky. Kromì konkrétních výsledkù a dat je to pøedevším dùkladnìjší poznání osobností jednotlivých žákù, jejich názorù a problémù. Snad by se dalo říci, že cenným výsledkem práce bylo zlepšení vzájemných vztahù mezi uèitelem a žáky i mezi žáky navzájem a tím vylepšení celkové atmosféry ve třídì.

L.F. Billows se ve své knize *Kooperativní technika vyuèování cizímu jazyku* v kapitole ‘Hlavní úloha uèitele: pøedávání zkušeností v zacházení se slovy’ zamýšlí tìmito slovy:

*“Žáci mají jazyku nejen rozumìt, jazyk pro nì má být také zkušeností a životním prostøedím. Každý pohyb, každý èin, každé pání a potøeba musejí být uvádìny, doprovázeny, komentovány a uzavøeny slovy. Jednotlivým slovùm, která jsou zpoèátku jako chvost u komety jen prùvodním jevem akce, pøibývá èasem na důležitosti, až koneènì pøevzou funkci zprostøedkovatele mezi jednáním a asociací.“ (str. 24)*

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