ENRICHING VOCABULARY INTAKE THROUGH BOOK FLOOD PROJECT

Dwi Wulandari

English Department, Diponegoro University

Abstract: The aim of this study is to find out the possibility of retaining vocabularies through book flood project. This library study is targeted on defining vocabulary intake, the reading on foreign language, by focusing on what kinds of reading that may create comprehensive input, the book flood project, and how the project may help retaining vocabularies. The discussions suggest that book flood project indeed help learners’ proficiency in language, though it may take longer time, as the vocabularies are learn incidentally; that is through reading in a lot of context. Another positive result form book flood project is that it helps develop literacy by creating reading habits. This is way, through this project not only learners will develop proficiency on foreign language (target language) but they will also develop proficiency on first language as well.

Keywords: vocabularies intake, reading, book flood project, literacy

Introduction

Vocabulary is the building block for the language because through its use the speakers form sentences and utter their meaning. How many vocabularies are acquired determines the success in language learning, both in first and second language. It is crucial for language learners to know a certain amount of vocabulary knowledge, even at the earliest stages of learning, so that they will be able to develop the language skills receptively and productively.

In second or foreign language acquisition, learners learn second or foreign language in stages too. Most likely, what is apparent is that learners start learning from vocabularies, though we must understand that in the process, learners learn the phonemes and morphemes as well. For second or foreign language learners, it is necessary to acquire vocabularies fist before the learners are able to acquire other sub skills such as grammar or fluency (Higgs, 1985), and vocabularies are also crucial in developing other skills, such as speaking or reading (Allen, 1992; Hunt and Beglar, 2005).

Accordingly, there is no argument on how important it is to develop vocabularies in learning a language. What is argued perhaps is on how the vocabularies are learnt. One of the inputs considered greatly in developing vocabularies is the input from reading, and one of the techniques in giving reading exposure to learners is through book flood project (Elley, et.al, 1996). This article will look at several issues on how book flood may help learners retain the vocabularies they learnt, and the constraints of its implementation for foreign language setting.

Vocabulary Acquisition in Foreign Language Learning

Foreign language setting is a term used to refer to the condition where the language learnt is not used for daily communication (Gass and Selinker, 2001). This term is to differentiate with second language setting where the language learnt is used commonly as the means of communication daily. Of course, the different setting will provide different exposure on the language learnt, and therefore give different result in learning. In foreign language setting, most of the exposures on the language learnt are done in the classroom where teachers play significant roles in deciding what materials to use, what to learn, and how it is learnt.

Vocabulary input

Undoubtedly, the role of input is a major factor for vocabulary acquisition both in first and in second/foreign language learning. Input will give learners access to what to learn. Simply, it always seems right to say that no input means no output. Studies by neuroscientists in L1 acquisition show that a child’s language capacity is dependent on the quality of language input (Christie, 2003). Children’s ability to develop language proficiency is determined by the amount of the input given by parents or caregivers through consistent interactions.

As with their first language, learners’ second/foreign language development also depends greatly on the input given. Learners need to be exposed to the target language as often as and as much as possible so that they will be able to take some of what they read, or listen, or experience in learning.

Input for vocabulary acquisition can be given in many forms. Among the popular ones are reading, listening, and vocabulary based exercises. Reading and listening provide context where the vocabularies are put into sentences, then they give more opportunity to understand the difficult words. However, as the vocabularies are learnt incidentally in reading and listening, some researchers (Wesche & Paribakht (1994)) mention that
learning vocabularies through reading and listening are slow process, unless some other treatment are taken to generate vocabularies intake.

**Vocabulary intake**

Vocabulary intake is the actual number of words from input which are acquired and are able to be retained. It is necessary to acknowledge this notion because vocabulary development actually depends on the number of vocabulary retained. There are some factors that may influence the possibility of input to be retained, to name a few are comprehensible input and the method of teaching. Krashen (1982) in his input hypothesis states that it is very important for second/foreign language learners to receive comprehensible input; otherwise they will not be able to develop language competence. He defines comprehensible input as the input that is a bit ahead of learners’ current knowledge.

Another factor which may lead to vocabulary intake is the method of teaching. Since we are aware now that not all input will lead to vocabulary intake, the teachers should consider the appropriate method to teach, hence the learners are able to pin point what is important to be learnt and retain the vocabularies. There are of course many methods that can be used in teaching English, but the following discussion will be focused on using reading material to help learners improve their vocabularies.

**Reading in Foreign Language**

What is assumed so far is that vocabulary in L2 learning is mostly obtained by reading because reading is composed of many vocabularies arranged in meaningful texts (Huckin, Haynes & Coady 1993; Huckin & Coady, 1999; Waring & Nation, 2004). In this view, learning vocabulary through reading is known as incidental learning, because learners acquire new words incidentally, while they are trying to comprehend the reading. Coady mentions that the incidental acquisition hypothesis suggests, “there is gradual but steady incremental growth of vocabulary knowledge through meaningful interaction with text” (in Huckin, Haynes & Coady 1993, p. 18).

Many scholars agree on the importance of texts in vocabulary acquisition, suggesting that except for the basic words, vocabulary acquisition predominantly occurs through extensive reading with the learners guessing at the meaning of the unknown words from the texts (Haynes in Huckin, Haynes & Coady 1993; Huckin & Coady, 1999).

Rapaport (2000) argues that there are two conditions for a reading text to be powerful for vocabulary acquisition. First, learners should be able to internalize the text. This means that the level of difficulty in the text suits learners’ ability. Second, the text should relate to readers’ prior knowledge. When learners do not have prior knowledge relates to the information in the text, it will take more effort for them to understand the text, hence they are not able to pay more attention on the unfamiliar words.

Taking readers’ prior knowledge into account, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of text familiarity. Pulido (2004) works on the idea that for vocabulary acquisition to occur through reading, readers must also attend to the connections between new lexical forms and their meanings and integrate the new linguistic information into their developing L2 system. If the new words appear in the type of passages that learners encountered previously, the words are likely to be learnt (Baddeley, 1998). Identical with this finding are findings from Gharidian’s study which show that the major obstacles in gaining new vocabulary from reading are the high number of unfamiliar words in the text, and the insufficient number of repetitions of a target word (Gharidian, 2002).

To support the idea that reading for vocabulary acquisition is best to treat proficiency, Hermann (2003) did a study on multiple comparison on two techniques for acquiring vocabulary. He finds that although learners do not acquire more vocabulary from reading rather than from the other technique, the reading exhibits superior retention rates for particular words.

**Book Flood Project**

Book flood project is a project of giving as many reading as possible for learners. To purpose of most of these projects is not only to give more inputs for learners, but also to develop literacy. That is why most of book projects are conducted in the area where literacy is not yet developed, such is in Fiji Island (Mangubhai, 2001), South Pacific, Singapore, Sri Lanka and South Africa (Elley, et.al., 1996). The basic concept for book flood project is “to ‘flood’ the classroom with the high-interest illustrated story book in the target language, and to train the teachers in a simple method of ensuring the pupils interact with the books frequently and productively” (Elley, et.al., 1996:1). In conducting these projects, what should be considered is not only the level of learners’ proficiency – which is used as the base for what kinds of story books appropriate for the learners, but also the learners’ background so that the books may be suited with their interest.
**The Benefit**

The studies conducted on book flood projects reported positive result in language learning. The book-flood projects address similar problems; L2 learners are unable to develop adequate proficiency in language learning because of a lack of resources and competent teachers. Hence, they have great difficulty in learning to decode and understand L2 vocabulary. So, the book-flood projects expose learners with many books, so that they can have a contextual access to the L2. These projects show that the amount of exposure to L2 is important in helping learners take the best advantage of the input given. The more learners are exposed to the input, the more they are able to recognize and guess the unknown words. Through repeated guessing, learners finally are able to achieve the mastery of the new words. Mangubhai’s study (2001) on Fiji Book Flood project also suggests that by giving sustained regular reading, not only have learners accelerated their reading and listening skills, but the project also give positive improvement on their first language proficiency.

The projects also show tremendous positive results on how story books may lift the levels of literacy in Third World countries (Elley, et.al, 1996). Most of the learners involved in these projects are learners in the basic or lower level, mostly those who are in young age. That is why the books used as the sources of the projects are the illustrated story books. Not only do the books provide good stories, but the pictures in the books will increase the learners’ interest and help the understanding as well. So, the books themselves help learners shape their interest in reading, and the sustained regular reading will create a reading habits for the learners. If the projects are duplicated at homes or at the community by the optimum utilization of public library, the reading habits created at schools will be continued and preserved. When the children find the benefit from reading, such as increasing their knowledge, knowing wonderful stories, they then will be willing to read more in the future. They will develop curiosity over books, and they will read to satisfy their curiosity.

**The Challenge of Its Implementation**

Conducting book flood project is not without a problem. As with many methods in teaching foreign language, problems may occur in various areas, the learners, the teachers, the materials, or the infrastructure. When the issue is related on the vocabularies intake, book flood project may not be seen as the best strategies, because the vocabularies learnt are incidental, so the vocabularies learnt can not be seen directly after reading. However, since the book flood project are mostly conducted for quite some time (one or two years at the minimum), the tendency for encountering the targeted vocabularies are higher, as the exposure to the inputs are also higher, and therefore the possibility to have the proficiency toward certain vocabularies are higher. Hence, vocabulary intake in book flood project is not targeted for acknowledging the vocabulary quickly, but more on proficiency though it may take longer time.

If not carefully conducted, the book flood project will also create difficulties. Developing learners’ interest in reading in target language is challenging especially when learners do not have habit in reading in first language. Hence in starting the project, both learners and teachers should agree on one point; that it will take patient to start the program and endurance to continue on. Giving appropriate books for the starts hence is the key for the success of the start. Teachers should be wise in choosing the books, and should be creative in motivating the students to read, not only focusing on the benefit of reading, but also focusing on the books about to be read themselves, by giving a prompted questions that the book may interest the learners, by discussing the pictures without necessary reading to the students, or by relating learners’ background knowledge to the books to be read.

Providing ample books for every learner is also another challenge. The challenge grows harder as the books must be interesting and easy reading. Such books may be expensive, and therefore, unless government help to conduct the project, it will be difficult for schools to support the project themselves.

Fortunately, the challenge of conducting book flood project mostly stays at the start of the project. When the project has been established, teachers can even leave the students to choose and to read their own books. The books can also be improved not only those which are easy reading and has interesting story and pictures, but later on learners will also be willing to read books which may have no pictures, or even to read event such as those in magazine or newspaper.

**Conclusion**

Book Flood project is not a new strategy in teaching second language, but this strategy is not always used by teacher due to the indirect result gained from the project. By giving a lot of interesting story books as reading material, learners will develop proficiency not only on vocabularies but also in grammar and language in general. Book flood project also develops literacy mostly in the areas where the literacy is not yet established, such as in the third world countries. Though it promotes many positive results, yet the book flood project is not yet conducted widely, especially in Indonesia, since providing the books and motivating teachers to help learners to learn in this strategy is difficult.
References


