

L2 Learners' Attitudes to English Vocabulary Learning Strategies

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1. Introduction

Classroom setting L2 (Second Language) acquisition mainly consists of two parts: teaching and learning. During 1980 and 1990 the 'learner-centeredness' theory became very popular. It concerns that learners is the main part of the language acquisition process. In the classroom, the teacher teaches students under the same condition using the same teaching method. However, some students can acquire the language successfully but some fail to master it. Why does this happen? Wenden and Rubin state that learners bring a varied repertoire of learning skills in the process of language learning (Wenden & Rubin 1987: xvii). It means that to master a second language, learners themselves should use some learning skills to make their learning more effective. In the 1970s, researches were conducted concerning this part. Since then language teaching activities have become increasingly learner centered. More and more studies show that apart from teaching methodologies, learner strategies are another important factor that can affect foreign language acquisition. They will help learners become more autonomous and make the learning process more effective.

From the aspect of vocabulary learning, it is very important not only to know the meaning of the word, but also to know all the aspects of the word. However, what does it mean to say we know a word? Taylor briefly listed the seven degrees of knowing a word posited by Richards: knowledge of the frequency of the word in language; knowledge of the register of the word; knowledge of collocation; knowledge of morphology; knowledge of semantics; knowledge of polysemy and knowledge of the equivalent of the word in the mother tongue (Taylor 1990: 1-3). Some students find it hard to master a word and when they want to express meaning they find it impossible to select a suitable word. Are words stored separately in the mind? In contrast, words are stored systematically in our minds. Aitchison states that words are not heaped in mind like autumn leaves. Instead, they are organized in a system. The underlying of the principles of the system can be found. (Aitchison 2003:5). So knowing the organization of the mental lexicon will help the second languages learners acquire vocabulary more easily.

This essay discusses the strategies used in second language vocabulary acquisition and the attitudes of different levels of students toward these strategies. It compares the use of these strategies with the learners' proficiency of vocabulary.

1.1 Aim

First, this essay focuses on the strategies applied in second language vocabulary acquisition. Second, the studies illustrate the attitudes to the strategies among successful and unsuccessful learners in their vocabulary learning. Third, it discusses the effects these strategies may have on their vocabulary learning.

1.2 Material

The first hand and second hand materials are introduced here. The reasons why I choose those materials are also explained in this section.

The first hand material used in this study is Chinese junior students in college, who have been studying English as a second language for almost ten years. The reason why I choose college students is that they have been studying English as a second language for a long time and are familiar with it. They are about 22 years old and study in the medical department. They are mature enough to have the learner autonomy. Since my study focuses on learning strategies, it is important that the learner's cognition is fully developed so that he can be aware of the learning process. They have English classes twice a week. In the class the words they learn are mostly related to medicine. Since the words about medicine have some special characteristics, some kind of vocabulary learning strategies may be more useful. For example, the words of medicine used for stomachache may have the same suffix, so affixation may be used more frequently. They also have to take the College English Test (CET). The vocabulary tested in CET has nothing to do with medicine. Thus, they study English after class all by

themselves. In this process, they may use some strategies when learning vocabulary. There are two groups and in each group there are fifteen students. One group is successful learners, who have passed the CET 6, which means that they meet the English level requested for Chinese college students. The other group is unsuccessful learners who failed in CET 4. There is a great distinction of English proficiency between successful learners and unsuccessful learners, so the results may be more obvious and persuasive.

The second hand materials are established theories about second language acquisition, mental lexicon and learning strategies. Articles and case studies are also used as secondary materials.

1.3 Method

The purpose of this section is to explain the main terminology studied in this essay. The motivation and the method used and the choice made are explained here. A specific description of how the study is conducted is presented in this section.

1.3.1 Terminology

According to Rod Ellis learning can be broadly defined as the internalized rules and formulas used to communicate in the L2 (Ellis 1985: 292). In this sense it is the same meaning with acquisition. However, Krashen use learning to refer to the development of conscious through formal study. Acquisition, for Krashen, is the spontaneous process of internalizing the rules from natural language use (Krashen 1981: 19-39). In this study, the students are Chinese students who study English in China. There is no target language environment, so it is impossible for them to acquire (definition of Krashen) the L2. The students not only learn English in formal classroom setting, they can also access English in daily life. For example: they often check the official web set of BBC. Thus, it is not exactly what Krashen defines as learning. In this essay, Rod Ellis' viewpoint is chosen to define learning. It is the synonym with the word acquisition.

According to *Oxford Advanced dictionary*, strategy means the process of planning sth or putting a plan into operation in a skillful way (Oxford 2000:1743). Linguists give several definitions of learning strategy. According to Rubin it means the techniques or devices used by a learner to acquire knowledge (Rubin 1975:43). Stern defines it as broadly conceived intentional directions (Stern 1992: 216). O'Malley and his colleague define it as the operations or steps that are used by a learner to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information (O'Malley *et al* 1985:23). Ellis states that learning strategies are the particular approaches or techniques learners employed to try to learn an L2 (Ellis 1997: 76). Although there are slight differences among the definitions, they all stress the skills used in learning a L2. Appropriate strategies can help the learner acquire the target language more easily and efficiently.

1.3.2 Questionnaire

Questionnaires and interviews are used as research method in this essay. Questionnaire is a good way to access the learner's point of view (Brace 2004: 7). It is convenient and easy to conduct. In this study it is used as the first step of data collection. There are 8 questions for the students to answer. They are about the strategies they would use when they learn vocabulary. Brace mentions that questions should be carefully contrasted and place in proper order in order to get the expected answer (Brace 2004: 43). The first 7 questions describe learning strategies and ask the students to choose from the four choices rating from very useful to not useful at all according to their own studying experience. Multiple choices are used in the 7 questions because it is easy to control the answers of the students and I can get the results I expected. The eighth question is an open answer question. There might be strategies that are not mentioned in the former 7 questions but are used widely by the students. The last question is designed to be a 'what-' question in order to give the students a chance to express their own opinions. The questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

The 30 students were chosen randomly by my friend who is a teacher in a medical college. The only standard is that 15 of them passed CET6 and 15 of them failed CET4. They took part in the study voluntarily. My friend collected their e-mail addresses and sent them to me. I sent the questionnaire to the students via e-mail. When they finished answering the questions, they sent them back to me via e-mail. I divided the questionnaires into two groups according to the grade of CET. One is successful learners who passed the CET6, and the other is unsuccessful learners who failed in CET4.

1.3.3 Interview

After the collection and analysis of the questionnaire, interviews were made to get more specific observation. 5 successful learners and 5 unsuccessful learners were chosen to be the interviewees. The interviewees were the students who did the questionnaire. The results I got from questionnaires may show that learners have different attitudes to the vocabulary learning strategies, so the questions used in the interview may be different for each student. Although the questions are not exactly the same for all the interviewees, they are mainly about how they use these strategies in their study, what kind of effects they bring to them and the advantages and the disadvantages of the strategy. The successful L2 learners and the unsuccessful L2 learners were interviewed separately to see whether they have used some strategies properly when they learn vocabulary. Since the number of interviewees is limited, there might other viewpoints towards the vocabulary learning strategies that I cannot analysis in this study.

The interview was conducted in the form of computer-accessed personal interviewing. It is an interviewing technique that the interviewer and the despondence sit in front of computer and communicate through chatting software. Since the students I interviewed were all college students, they did not have difficulty in using computer. I interviewed the student using MSN, through which I could see the interviewee's reaction to my questions and made judgment. The content of the interview was recorded for further analysis.

2. Theoretical background

In this section, the theories that are relevant to the study are introduced.

2.1 Behaviorism

Behaviorism is an influential learning theory concerning the psychological development of the learner. Behaviorists believe that language acquisition is the result of habit formation (Lightbown & Spada 1999: 9). They use the term of habits to explain all kinds of behavior found in language acquisition (Ellis 1997:31). Behaviorism stresses the association between the target language and the language learner. When the learner receives the linguistic input from the target language, no matter whether it is verbal or non-verbal, the process of association begins. Through practice the association becomes stronger, and through the reinforcement the learner adjusts his language. A habit forms through this process, and the language learning process is regarded as the habit-formatting process. The quality and quantity of language input which learners hear from the environment can help them to form the habit and have an effect on their success in L2 acquisition (Lightbown & Spada 1999: 9). In this aspect, learning a language is mainly about putting language items into the learner's ears and through this learners are forced to establish a habit. When the habit is formed, language system is established in the learner's mind and the learner can make the conditioned reflex to the language.

From the behaviorism point of view, the most helpful strategy of learning vocabulary is hearing the word repeatedly. The more frequently the word is heard, the more it will impress the learner, and the easier the learner will acquire the word. For example, a person often hear the phrase 'thank you' when doing somebody a favor, and although at first he doesn't know what it means, gradually he would understand it means that they appreciate his help. As a habit forms in his mind, the phrase 'thank you' impresses him with its meaning. In this process, through repeated hearing learners can acquire vocabulary.

2. 2 Comprehensible input and information processing

Different from the behaviorism point of view, Krashen, as an innatist, proposes five hypotheses concerning L2 acquisition, one of which is the input hypothesis. Krashen claims that only when comprehensible input is available, the acquisition would occur. Comprehension and acquisition can occur only if the input is just beyond the learner's current level of understanding the target language (Krashen 1985: 3). It means that not any input can be acquired by the learner, and when input flood comes only those just beyond the learner's cognition can be acquired. According to comprehensible input theory, incidental focus on language item can be an effective way of learning language, as soon as the input is comprehensible.

Krashen also emphasizes that undirected pleasure reading can be an effective way of learning language (Krashen 1985: 27). In L2 vocabulary acquisition, the new words should not be too easy or too difficult for the learner. When learning vocabulary it is important to control the level of the word and make it match the level of the learner's cognition. Reading for pleasure is a good way to acquire vocabulary but the reading material should be just beyond the learner's level.

Another theory concerning incidental focus on language items is the information processing theory. Miller claims that the information that human can pay attention to at a time is limited (Miller 1956: 96). If there is enough space in mental for the input, acquisition will happen, no matter learner pays attention on purpose or out of awareness. The information processing theory sees the learner's mind as an unlimited container. However, it does not always have space. When it is temporarily full, it needs time to digest and then there will be extra space for now language inputs. Thus, there is a limited amount of inputs that learner can acquire at one time, no matter whether the input is learned on purpose or not.

According to this theory if there is too much new information, the mental processing will be blocked, so it also stresses the comprehensibility of context. As for vocabulary learning, there

should not be too much new vocabulary appears in the context. Nation states that for vocabulary growth, extensive reading should contain no more than 5% of unknown words to ensure that guessing and comprehension occur (Nation 2001: 233). When there is enough space in mental storage and the comprehensible input is not too much, acquisition can happen automatically. When reading a comprehensible context, a small amount of vocabulary can be learnt and it can be greatly expanded if learners do a great quantity of comprehensible reading.

As for vocabulary acquisition, the number of the new words for learner to learner at one time is important. If there are too few, the 'mental space' will be a waste, and if there are too many, learner will not acquire them all. Thus, when learning vocabulary the amount of input is an important aspect to consider.

2.3 The interactionist theory

The interactionist theory stresses the conversational interaction. Much acquisition occurs during the conversational interaction. Long argues that to acquire a L2, only comprehensible input is not enough, the opportunity of interacting with other speakers is also necessary (Long 1983: 177-93). When communicating with L2 learners, native speakers will adjust their language to make the learners understand their meanings. This kind of conversation can help to make the input comprehensible. For example: in vocabulary acquisition, when there is an unknown word that appears and causes difficulty in comprehension, the native speaker would explain it in a more simple way and try to make the learner understand it. In this process, as the learner needs to know what the speaker means, he or she will ask the speaker to repeat the word and pay more attention for its explanation. In this way the word is acquired. Another perspective on the role of interaction in L2 acquisition is provided by Evelyn Hatch. Hatch argues that interactions can help L2 learners produce utterances that they would not be able to produce by themselves. It is called scaffolding (Hatch 1978: 401-35). For example:

Native speaker: Will you come later?

Learner: Sorry, I no come.

Native speakers: That should be 'I can't come'.

Though the answer of the L2 learner is not a correct sentence, he or she cannot produce it without the interaction with the native speaker. When hearing the incorrect utterance of the learner, the native speaker can help him or her to improve it. The environment where conversation takes place also helps learners acquire L2. It forms context for the conversation. When learning L2 vocabulary, the environment of the conversation can help learners understand the word meaning. In L1 learning, children form concepts that would be beyond their cognition, if they play with advanced people, such as adults. Learning through the conversation with an advanced learner can improve their use of vocabulary.

Negotiation also helps learners to acquire L2. One of the important features of negotiations is that both learners and speakers contribute to achieving the understanding. Learners need to show where they understand or do not understand, and refuse to give up trying to understand it. Speakers try to adjust their language and make it more comprehensible. Sometimes they need to repeat, clarify, and explain. It can make the input comprehensible. From the aspect of vocabulary learning, negotiation is also proved to be useful and commonly used. Ellis used an example given by Grass and E. Varonis to explain the common use of negotiation

Hiroko: A man is uh. Drinking c-coffee or tea with uh the saucer of the uh uh coffee set is uh in his uh knee.

Izumi: in him knee.

Hiroko: uh on his knee.

Izumi: yeah

Hiroko: on his knee

Izumi: so sorry. on his knee (Ellis 1997: 47).

Through negotiation the two language learners have achieved comprehension of the use of *his*. In this process they both learned the usage of the word.

In the interactionist's view, learning vocabulary does not only need comprehensible input, the conversation interaction is also necessary. Learners can encounter new words during the

conversation with native speaker, and native speakers would consistently modify their speech in the conversation with non-native speaker to suit their language level (Lightbown & Spada 1999: 43). For the language that the native speaker use is justified, the learner can understand and use it as a comprehensible input. During the conversation the learner also need to produce output. It is a good chance to use the vocabulary they have already learnt. In the conversation with advanced learners the learner of lower level may hear unfamiliar words from the advanced learner and they can negotiate the meaning of the words. This is also a process of acquisition and this will also impress the learner. When a word is learnt, the learner may use it in the conversation with others.

The interactionist theory shows that learning vocabulary through conversation should be an effective strategy. Not matter communicating with native speaker or negotiating with other L2 learners, the learner can get benefit from the conversation.

2.4 Word meaning theory and meaning changes

Aitchison states that there are mainly two arguments about word meaning, the fixed meaning assumption and the fuzzy meaning assumption. The fixed meaning assumption claims that for every word there exists a basic meaning, when learners acquire the basic meaning of a word, the core of the word is acquired. Opposite to the fixed meaning viewpoint, the fuzzy meaning viewpoint argues that word cannot have a fixed meaning (Aitchison 2003: 41-52).

According to Aitchison, words have fuzzy meanings. She describes this vividly using a metaphor that word meanings cannot be pinned down as dead insects. In contrast, they are like live butterflies fluttering around elusively (Aitchison 2003: 41). She explains the relationship between the word and the thing. First, people translate the thing in real life into a concept. Then the word meaning overlaps with the concept to a large extent. Thus, the concept may extend beyond the word (Aitchison 2003: 43). That means it is impossible to pin down a definite meaning for a word.

Word meaning changes through history. During this process, some words disappear, some change thoroughly to other meanings, and some survive and develop more meanings. These words become polysemy. There are only a few rare words that have one meaning. For the less rare words, there are lists of meanings. As the word develops, new meanings creep in alongside the old meanings making several meaning layers (Aitchison 2003: 154). In most cases, there is a relationship between old meaning and the new developed meanings, such as in metaphor, or metonymy. The relationship can be used to learn word meanings.

Words do not have fixed meaning. For a word, there are several layers of meaning. However, the meanings do not shoot off in all directions. Instead, there are several types of meaning change such as expansion, restriction, pejoration, amelioration, acceleration, retardation, association, and differentiation. Words are also usually used in metaphor, metonymy and other expressions. This extends the meanings of words (Aitchison 2003: 151-61).

Since word meanings are fuzzy, when learning L2 vocabulary, it is impossible to translate the word into a fixed meaning in the first language. Thus, learning vocabulary does not only mean just memorizing one or some meanings of a word, it also means using the word appropriately in a certain situation. In different situation the same word will show the different meanings. Putting words in a certain situation and learning them through context would be an efficient way to acquire vocabulary. Fuzzy meanings will be relatively fixed by the context.

2.5 Prototype theories and semantic network

Aitchison quotes Rosch's definition of prototype that when mentioning a species of something, people always tend to give the most typical one. The most typical one is almost similar in most people's eyes (Aitchison 2003: 57). For example when talking about bird, people always think about robin instead of ostrich, because robin is the more typical bird in most people's mind. Prototype theory can be used to explain that people deal words in

categories and people can recognize damaged examples of a category (Aitchison 2003: 57). For example: the tiger with three legs is a damaged example of beast but people can still recognize it is a tiger.

The semantic network is a network that represents the connections of concepts. The semantic network shows that people do not deal with words separately. Instead, they are linked together and form an interconnected system. Aitchison argues that people are likely to pick up words in pairs. For example: *king* and *queen* are linked together. Adults are likely to link words of the same part of speech together. For example: a noun can elicit another noun (Aitchison 2003: 85). There are four main types of word association: coordination, collocation, superordination, and synonymy. Coordination is the commonest association. It shows that words of the same category linked together. For example: when seeing the word *apple*, people would think about *orange*, *banana*, *pineapple*. Opposites also come into this category. For example: *woman* and *man*. Collocation is also a very common association. It shows that words are likely to be found together if they are used together in the speech. For example: *phone* and *number* are collocated together because of the use of *phone number*. Superordination is a less common association. It shows that a word can stimulate the word that includes it. For example: when seeing the word *English*, people would think about *language*. Synonymy is the least common association. For example: *cheerful* and *happy*. (Aitchison 2003: 86)

Since the prototype theory and semantic network show the tight association between words, it would be helpful for learners to learn vocabulary according to these associations. It might be easier to learn the words that have connections between them than words that have no relationship. For L2 vocabulary acquisition, learning the same species of words together should be a good strategy to master words.

2.6 The internal architecture of words

Aitchison claims that the affix is unlikely to be already attached in the lexicon if it can be added on to a stem by a regular rule (Aitchison, 2003: 127). Nation states in *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* that most of the content words in English can change form by adding prefixes (*re-*, *un-*, *in-*, *dis-* and so on) or suffixes (*-ful*, *-less*, *-ly*, *-ness* and so on). These affixes can be divided into two kinds: derivational affixes and inflectional affixes (Nation 2001: 164). Inflectional affixes are all suffixes. For example: *books*, *-s* is an inflectional affix. Derivational affixes consist of prefixes and suffixes. For example: *unknown*, *un-* is a derivational prefix, and *comfortable*, *-able* is a derivational suffix. The word architecture theory states that the inflectional suffixes are commonly added when they are needed in the speech (Aitchison, 2003: 136). For example: he *goes* to school. The suffix *-es* is added to *go*, when it is necessary in the speech. However, derivational prefixes and suffixes are already attached to their stems. For example: *react* and *useful*. A prefix always has a certain meaning. When attached to a stem, the new word will have a new meaning transferred from the prefix. For example: *un-* has the meaning of negation. When attached to *happy*, the word *unhappy* has a new meaning which is 'not happy'. A suffix can change the part of the speech of the word. When a suffix is attached, a word may probably change its part of speech. For example: *-ful* is a suffix of adjective. When it is attached to the word *beauty*, the noun changes its part of speech into adjective. The word *Beautiful* is an adjective. There are rules in attaching affixes, so most of the words attached with affixes are regular. Affixation is one of the important ways to create new words. There are seldom words that are invented out of nothing; most of words are simply additions to the old words or recombination of existing words (Aitchison, 2003: 175).

Learning word parts may be helpful to acquire vocabulary. The study of four prefixes *un-*, *re-*, *in-* and *dis-* shows that approximately 60% of words with these prefixes can be understood by knowing the meaning of the base word. With the help of the context and the less common meanings of the prefixes, approximately 80% of the words with prefixes can be understood (Nation 2001: 164).

Affixation, compounding and conversion are three very useful ways of creating new words. Affixation consists of suffixation and prefixion. Suffixation is a common method of forming new word. There are three characteristics of suffixation. The first characteristic is that they are attached to whole words. The second one is that they are added on to the major word classes. The third one is that different word classes have their own suffixes. Different from suffixes, prefixes are not often combined. Only one or two of prefixes can change word class. Compounding is another way of creating new word. For example: *aeroplane*. The new compound word must convey some further information. Furthermore, the relationship of the two compound parts should be a permanent or habitual one. A third way of creating new word is conversion. The most common conversion is from noun to verb. For example: *I will text you tomorrow afternoon*. Here *text* means sent text message. The word *text* is used as a verb. To understand the conversion, the context is always needed (Aitchison 2001: 175-87)

The internal architecture also can be used to direct L2 vocabulary acquisition. The prefixes and suffixes all have their own functions and meanings, so when learning vocabulary, it is much easier to divide the word in to several sections according to its formation. Adding affixation is also a useful way to enlarge vocabulary. The stem will have a new meaning, when it is attached with different prefixes or suffixes. Learners also can guess the meaning of a new word according to its affixations. It also can be an efficient way of learning vocabulary.

2.7 Sound patterns

Aitchison claims in *Words in the Minds* that words are not stored evenly as they are written in dictionary. Instead, they turned out to be stored unevenly, with some parts more prominent than others. Then she further explains it as ‘bathtub effect’, which means that people memorize the beginning and the ending of the word better than the middle part (Aitchison 2003: 138). For example: when memorizing *literature*, people are more likely to remember *lt* and *ture*, and the middle part *tera* is always forgotten. Length of the word also has some effect

on memorizing word by sound. The memory for the ends of long words was better than for short words (Aitchison 2003: 139). Aitchison also suggests that words with similar pronunciation are not always helpful to memorize words they sometimes may block it (Aitchison 2003: 147). The syllables within a word also have their own structures. The first consonant is less attached to the following parts of the word. Thus, the words with similar beginnings, similar endings and similar rhythm tend to be bonded tightly (Aitchison 2003: 146). The sound structure of the word might be used in learning vocabulary.

In *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* Nation states that there is evidence showing that through listening to a story learners can acquire vocabulary (Nation 2001: 118). However, not all kinds of material are suitable for learner to learn new vocabulary through listening. Nation concludes five conditions which are important for learners to learn vocabulary through listening. They are interest in the content of the story, comprehension of the story, understanding of the unknown words, and generative processing of the target vocabulary, such as contexts, pictures, discussion and negotiation used to help learners stretch the knowledge of the word (Nation 2001: 118).

Sound structure theory provides another strategy of learning vocabulary. Since words may be stored according to pronunciation, learners can learn the words with similar pronunciations together. It might be easier to learn words with similar sound patterns than those with different sound patterns. In English, letters in the word have regular rules in pronunciation. Some combinations of letters have fixed pronunciation in words. Thus, knowing the sound structures will at least benefit memorizing the spelling of words. Listening to stories or songs may also be helpful in learning vocabulary. They can interest learners and the contexts are helpful in vocabulary acquisition.

2.8 Incidental learning

Learning vocabulary from context is a kind of incidental learning strategy. How does context

contribute to the vocabulary learning? Nation argues that the more often an unknown word is shown in the context the more likely it can be guessed and learnt (Nation 2001: 233). The nearer the repetition is the easier it can be acquired. Context provides clues for word guessing. Different contexts provide more clues for guessing the same word. The clues that are near the unknown word are more likely to be used. The more clues there are, the easier guessing will be. The synonyms in the context can help guessing. If the word is essential for understanding the context, learner will put more effort in guessing. The topical knowledge about the context also can be helpful in guessing new words. Learning vocabulary in context can be very efficient. An analysis of twenty studies shows that fifteen percent of the unknown words are learnt from guessing in the context, in which the unknown words make up three percent of the running word (Nation 2001: 243-5).

Learning vocabulary in daily life belongs to incidental focus on form. Different from learning in context, learning vocabulary in real life stresses the interaction between learners and the environment in which the word appears. Loewen (2005) suggests four potential benefits of incidental focus on form. First, it can make learners pay attention to form, meaning and use in a single cognitive event. When they encounter an unfamiliar word in life, learners can see the word spellings or hear the pronunciation of the word. Usually learners need to make some reactions to the word. For example: the sign on the highway. The learner can see the word written in Chinese, followed by a word written in English. When seeing the sign, the learner needs to do what it says. That is the reaction to the words. Though the learner pays attention to the Chinese characters, the English words also give him an impression. Second, incidental focus on form can provide learners with the opportunities of alternating their attention between processing language for meaning and for form. When the learner sees the sign on the high way, he does not only see the written words, but also sees its meaning in Chinese. Third, it also can force learners to produce pushed output. According to the interactionist, only comprehensible input is not enough, output is also necessary to acquire a L2. Fourth, producing output can make learners process language syntactically rather than semantically. If learners only pay attention to meaning, they may not fully acquire the target language, for sometimes they do not need to know every word to understand what a context means.

However, output force learners understand the utterance thoroughly, because they need to make some reactions according to it.

2.9 Learning from word cards

Learning from word cards might be the simplest strategy of learning vocabulary. Nation describes this strategy in *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* that a learner writes the foreign word on one side of a small card, and its translation of the first language on the other. The learner goes through a set of cards and tries to recall its meaning (Nation 2001: 297). It is one of the most commonly used strategy of learning English among Chinese student, through some of the students do not think it is very useful, it still helps a lot in their learning vocabulary.

Learning from word cards belongs to decontextualised learning, which meaning there is no context helping learners to understand the meaning and usage of the words. It can help learners with learning the written form of the word, learning the concept of the word and making connection between word form and meaning.

2.10 Learning strategies

In *Understanding Second Language Acquisition* Rod Ellis defines learning strategies as how learners accumulate new L2 rules and how they automatize existing ones. This process can be conscious or subconscious. He further explains it as the mental processes of acquiring and using the L2 (Ellis 1985: 299-300). They are the techniques, approaches, methods, or intentional actions learners take to fully acquire the target language. A good user of learning strategies can be a good self-teacher.

Rubin classifies the strategies in to three kinds according to their contributions to language learning: learning strategies, communication strategies and social strategies. Learning

strategies can directly contribute to language learning but communication strategies and social strategies only contribute to language learning in an indirect way.

Two major kinds of learning strategies have been recognized recently: cognitive learning strategies and metacognitive learning strategies. The former one refers to the steps or operations used in language learning or problem-solving that requires direct analysis, translation, or synthesis of learning materials, while the latter one refers to the knowledge of cognitive process and regulation of cognition or executive control or self-management through such process as planning, monitoring and evaluating. (Wenden & Rubin 1987: 23)

Then, Rubin further classifies cognitive strategies into six categories

- 1) Clarification/verification. It refers to those strategies which learners use to verify or clarify their understanding of new language
- 2) Guessing/inductive inferencing. Those are the strategies used to obtain new language knowledge using the concept and knowledge that learners already have.
- 3) Deductive reasoning. It is a problem-solving strategy. Learners use the general rules to approach the L2.
- 4) Practice. It refers to strategies which contribute to the storage and retrieval of language while focusing on accuracy of usage.
- 5) Memorization. It is strategies used for storing the target language knowledge.
- 6) Monitoring. It refers to the strategies in which learners notice errors and correct them. (Wenden & Rubin 1987: 23-4)

The second type of strategy is called communication strategies. It does not contribute to the language learning directly as the metacognitive strategies and cognitive strategies do. However, it stresses the effect of practicing and focuses on the process of taking part in the conversation (Wenden & Rubin 1987: 26).

The third type is social strategies. Rubin defined it as the activities that afford learners the

opportunities to be exposed to the target language (Wenden & Rubin 1987: 27). It does not contribute to the language leaning directly either. However, different from the communication strategies, social strategies do not provide opportunities to practice the knowledge they learnt (Wenden & Rubin 1987: 27).

Concerning vocabulary learning, Nation develops a general classification of vocabulary learning strategies (Nation 2001: 218-22). The first one is planning, which is to choose what to focus on and when to focus on. There are researches showing that learners who are aware of what they are planning to learn are more likely to succeed. When learning vocabulary, choosing certain aspects of word (usually meaning but for listening and writing, the form of word is also needed to be paid attention to) to focus on and using varieties strategies can make learning process more efficient. Repetition is another important strategy for vocabulary learning. Planning for repetition is useful of strengthen the memorization of vocabulary.

The second vocabulary learning strategy is sources, which is finding information about words. Analyzing word parts is a useful strategy, because being familiar with the stems and affixes is useful for remembering word forms, guessing from context and seeking relations between words. Guessing form context is another important strategy of learning vocabulary. Meanwhile, consulting reference sources properly and using parallels can also be helpful in acquiring vocabulary.

The third vocabulary learning strategy is processes, which is establishing vocabulary knowledge. Noticing is a widely used way of recording vocabulary, and it can be a very useful first step for further learning of vocabulary. Retrieving strengthen the connection between the word meaning and its form. It is superior to noticing. Generating is the production of the word. It is the further step of learning process.

3. Analysis and discussion of results

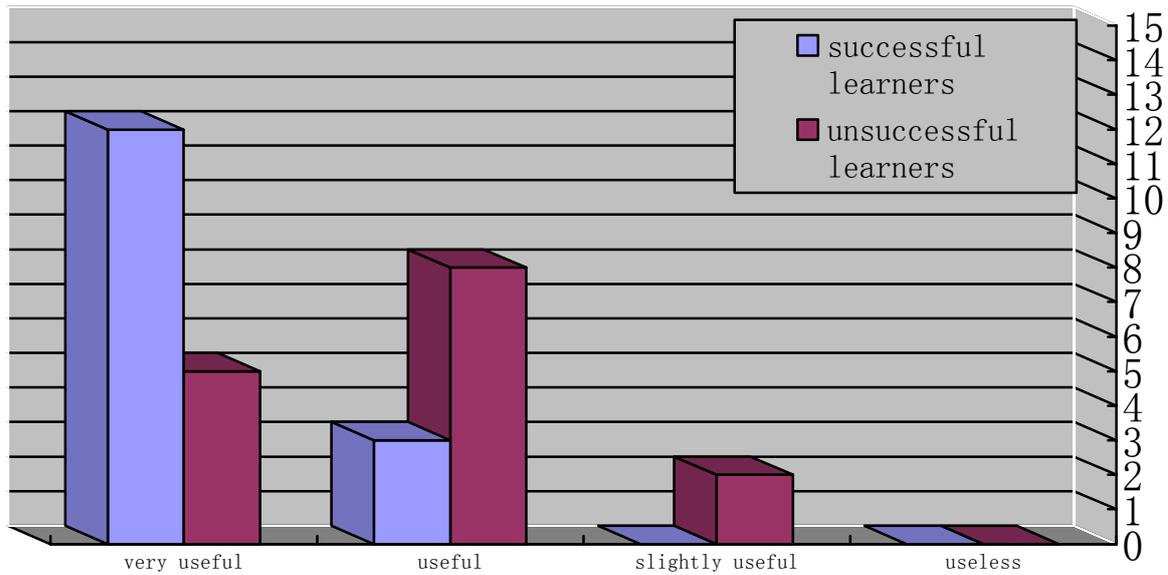
In this section, the attitudes of successful and unsuccessful learners towards learning strategies are analyzed and discussed.

3.1 Learning vocabulary from context

Nation mentions in *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* that learning from guessing word meanings from context is the most important strategy of all the sources of vocabulary learning (Nation 2001: 232). According to Rubin's classification, it belongs to cognitive learning strategy. It can contribute to the learning process directly. Context can connect the word knowledge to the knowledge that learners already have. The comprehensible input theory, word meaning theory, and incidental learning theory all suggest that learning vocabulary from context should be an efficient strategy (theoretical background). It is a useful way for learning the first language and for learning a second language.

Successful learners tend to prefer learning vocabulary in context. Most of them think it the most useful strategy of acquiring vocabulary. However, less successful learners seem not to notice the usefulness of this strategy.

Figure 1 Effectiveness of learning vocabulary in context



From Figure 1 we can see that among 15 successful learners, 12 successful learners think learning vocabulary in context is a very useful strategy, compared to 5 among unsuccessful learners. Only 2 of the successful learners see it as a useful strategy. However, most unsuccessful learners think it is just useful. None of the successful learners thinks it is slightly useful or useless. However, there are 2 unsuccessful learners who think it helps a little.

Through the comparison, learners' attitudes towards learning vocabulary in context are clearly seen. Students who are more successful are more likely to use context to learn vocabulary. The interviews of successful learners show that they learn a great many words using this strategy. It is an interesting strategy and does not cost so much time to learn a word. Moreover, they can get some other knowledge from reading a context. When reading a context, they always find it easy to understand the meaning of the context and when they encounter an unknown word, it is not difficult for them to guess the meaning of the word. Krashen claims that human acquire language only by understanding messages or by receiving 'comprehensible input' (Krashen 1985: 2). If a reading material is just beyond the learner's understanding, it can be a good source of input. According to Krashen, learner do not need to attempt to learn the language item on purpose. If learners are provided with input of the right quality and quantity, they will acquire them automatically (Krashen 1985: 2). Thus, when

using the comprehensible input theory to explain learning vocabulary in context, we can see the word needs to be acquired as the input, and the context can make it comprehensible. By using the information provided in the context, learners can infer the meanings of the unfamiliar word. The sentence where the word appears can show the form and the usage of the word. For example whether the noun is a single or a plural form, or what kind of tense the verb is. Learners are able to understand the unacquired word with the help of the context. In this process acquisition happens. Successful learners have vocabulary large enough to help them understand the context so it is not hard for them to guess the meanings of unknown words.

Most unsuccessful learners do not think learning vocabulary in context is very useful, maybe because it is not easy for them to guess the word meaning through context. The interviews of unsuccessful learners show that most of them think the context is hard for them to understand. They barely know what the context is talking about, so it is impossible for them to guess the word meaning. In the article collected in *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition* Laufer studies how much vocabulary a learner needs to apply effective strategies in learning. The result shows that 3,000 word families or about 5,000 lexical items are needed in order to use strategies effectively in vocabulary acquisition (Laufer 1997: 20-34). It is a large amount of vocabulary for a learner to master. The successful learners are students who have passed the CET6, so their vocabulary number can meet this requirement. However, for unsuccessful learners, it is hard to meet the minimum number of vocabulary required for understanding the context. This can be an explanation of why they find guessing from context not very useful.

Guessing word meaning from context is not so easy. There are some factors that can affect guessing meaning in context. Laufer gives four reasons why guessing words from context is hard (Laufer, 1997: 20-31). The first reason is nonexistence of clues. One cannot rely on the redundancy in context if there is no proof that the redundancy is sufficient to provide a clue. If there is no clue guessing will be impossible. The second reason why guessing from the context might be difficult is unusable contextual clues. If the clue used for guessing the unknown word happens to be unfamiliar to learners, though there is a clue, learners still

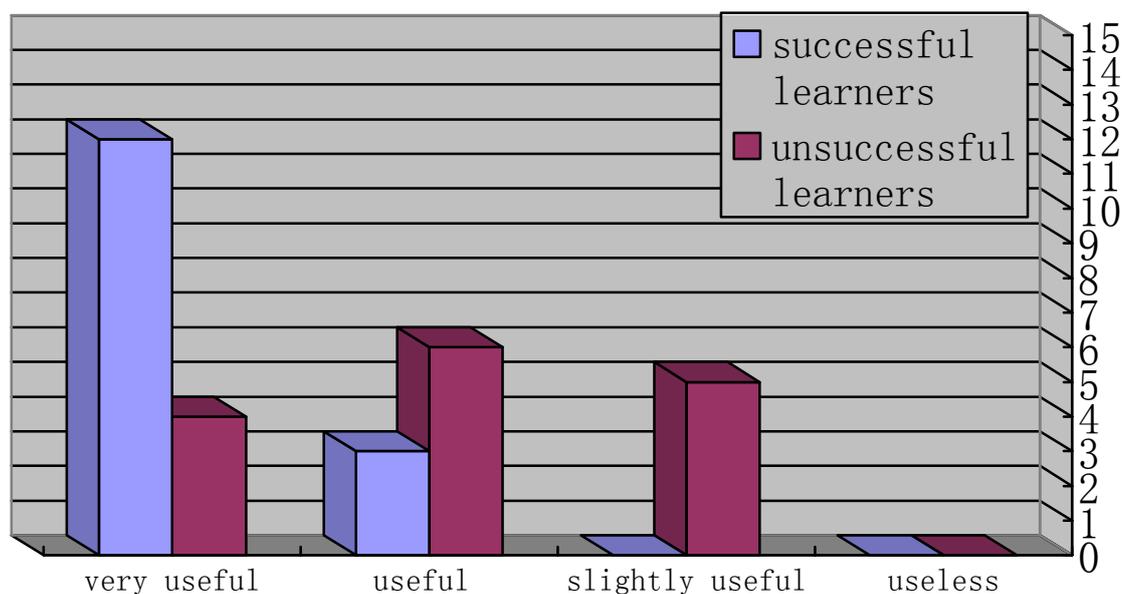
cannot use it. Thus, knowing a large number of words is essential for guessing word meaning. As mentioned before, most successful learners' vocabulary is large enough to decode the clue but unsuccessful learners always encounter unknown words in clue. This prevents them from guessing the word meaning correctly. The third reason why guessing from the context might be difficult is misleading and partial clues. Context can provide clues that mislead learners in guessing the word meaning. There are also times that the clues are not enough for learners to guess the word meaning. Partial clues are more likely to make learners make faulty inferences of the unknown word. To avoid this, learners need to have relatively high language ability to identify whether the clue is misleading. Most of the successful language learners have the ability of selecting useful information from context. In contrast, unsuccessful learners always find it confusing with so much information. The fourth reason why guessing from the context is difficult is suppressed clues. The learner's background knowledge can contribute much to guessing word meaning. When the background is used for guessing word meaning, the learner intends to infer the meaning that is most suitable to his knowledge. Successful learners usually have relatively richer knowledge. It may help them to guess the word meaning correctly.

3.2 Learning vocabulary in daily life

Learning vocabulary in daily life is mainly about noticing the word. It belongs to social strategy and does not contribute to learning directly. Incidental focus is a very useful way of learning vocabulary (theoretical background). In daily life, there are so many chances to encounter English. This may be helpful for learners to learn vocabulary.

The result of the questionnaire shows that successful learners tend to think learning in daily life is very useful. However, unsuccessful learners do not prefer this kind of strategy.

Figure 2 Effectiveness of learning vocabulary in daily life



From figure 2 we can see that 12 out of 15 successful learners think learning in daily life is a very useful way to acquire vocabulary, compared to 4 of the unsuccessful learners. Only 3 successful learners think it is useful. However, 6 unsuccessful learners think it is useful. None of the successful learners think it is slightly useful or useless. In contrast, 5 unsuccessful learners think it is slightly useful. It is 1/3 of all the unsuccessful learners.

Through the comparison we can see that most successful learners think learning vocabulary in daily life is very useful. However, unsuccessful learners seem not to prefer this kind of strategy. The result of the interviews of successful learner shows that most of them think it is an easy and simple way to learn vocabulary. It does not require so much effort. Most of the words for daily use are acquired in this way. Loewen claims that incidental focus can draw the learner's attention, and then makes a connection between the form and meaning (Loewen 2005: 363). Since the learner has to make a reaction to the word, it connects the word meaning and the learner. In this way, the learner acquires the word incidentally. One interviewee of successful learners gives an example of how he acquires the word *capsule*. He caught a cold, and the doctor asked him to take 'Cefradine capsules' three times a day. After two days he incidentally acquired *capsules*. Every time he took the medicine he could see the word. It drew his attention, and gave him an impression that *capsules* are the thing he had to

take everyday. This process also made a connection of the word form and its meaning in the learner's mind. Then he had to make a reaction to the word. Since the form of medicine was *capsule*, he had to drink some water when taking the medicine. After doing this process for some times, he acquired the word *capsule*. The study of Loewen (2005) also shows that based on the individual tests, incidental focus on form does have some effect on L2 learning.

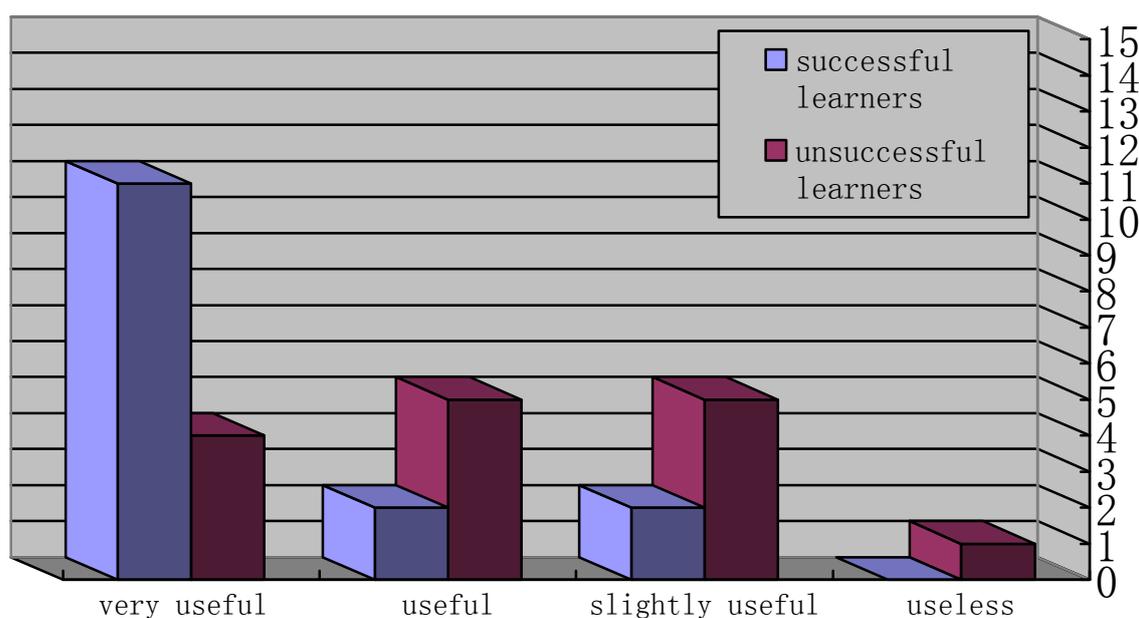
However, the unsuccessful learners have a different attitude toward learning vocabulary in daily life. Of all the 5 interviewees, 4 interviewees do not think it is very useful and they hardly can get any benefit from this kind of strategy. They think learning vocabulary in daily life only can help them to learn one aspect of the word. Sometimes they see the word spelling and sometimes they hear the pronunciation of the word. Moreover, they mention the use of the word. Even if they acquire the word in one situation, they can seldom use it in other situation. When they use it, they always make mistakes. In Loewen's study he also mentions that through learning from incidental focus on form, learners always have incomplete knowledge of a linguistic item (Loewen 2005: 382). Learners make errors in the use of the item or have questions about it. Loewen argues that the FFE [Focus on Form Episode] represents the learner's lack of implicit knowledge of the L2 vocabulary, which prevents accurate production during relatively spontaneous oral production (Loewen 2005: 382).

Most successful learners seem not to be bothered by this problem. They can find some ways to solve this problem using their previous knowledge. They are more likely to link the new words to their old knowledge, and use it in learning new word. Loewen argues that learners are more able to produce successful uptake if the linguistic item is partially known to them (Loewen 2005: 383). According to this, maybe the previous knowledge of language helps successful learners to use this strategy when learning vocabulary. Since the previous knowledge of unsuccessful learners is relatively poor, they may find learning vocabulary in daily life not so helpful.

3.3 Learning vocabulary through communication

Learning vocabulary through communication is an important strategy. It belongs to communicate strategy according to Rubin's classification of strategies. Though it does not contribute to vocabulary learning directly, it allows learners to be exposed to the target language. In this process, learners can produce the utterance and test the knowledge they have learnt (Wenden & Rubin 1987: 26). Learning vocabulary in daily life is supposed to be a very useful strategy according to the incidental learning theory and interactionist theory (theoretical background). However, successful learners and unsuccessful learners have different attitudes to it.

Figure 3 Effectiveness of learning vocabulary through communication



In figure 3 we can see that 11 of 15 successful language learners think communication is a very useful strategy of learning vocabulary compared to 4 of unsuccessful learners. 2 successful learners and 5 unsuccessful learners think it is just useful. It is the same number with those who think it is slightly useful. None of the successful learners think it is useless but there is 1 unsuccessful learner who thinks it is not useful at all.

In order to get more specific results, when doing interview, I divided my questions about

learning through communication into two kinds. One is communicating with native speakers, and the other is negotiation with other L2 learners. All the interviewees of successful learners agree that through communication with native speakers they have acquired a great number of new words. One of the most mentioned reasons is that communicating with native speakers can help learners to use more accurate words. The word meanings are fuzzy. Some words have similar meanings when translated into Chinese. However, they may have different usage, different degree of expression, or should be used in different situation. It is hard for foreign language learners to master. Nation and Newton states that through communication, listener can help speaker by pointing out the incorrect use of item in his or her speech (Nation & Newton 1997: 244). Feedback is given immediately and learners can benefit from it. Another reason is that it is interesting to communicate with people from a different cultural background. According to the study of language learner characteristics, emotion is an important factor that influences language acquisition. Positive emotion can make learning more efficient. Thus, when learners are interested in what they learn, they are more likely to acquire it. The successful learners also mention the learner's role in the communication. Since there is interaction between native speakers and learners, learners have to give some reaction to the speakers. Thus, they would concentrate on the speech and give response. In this process, they would encounter some word repeatedly and they have to produce output. According to Nation & Newton, when learners encounter the new item in communication, they are more likely to be required to use them productively in the activity (Nation & Newton 1997: 244).

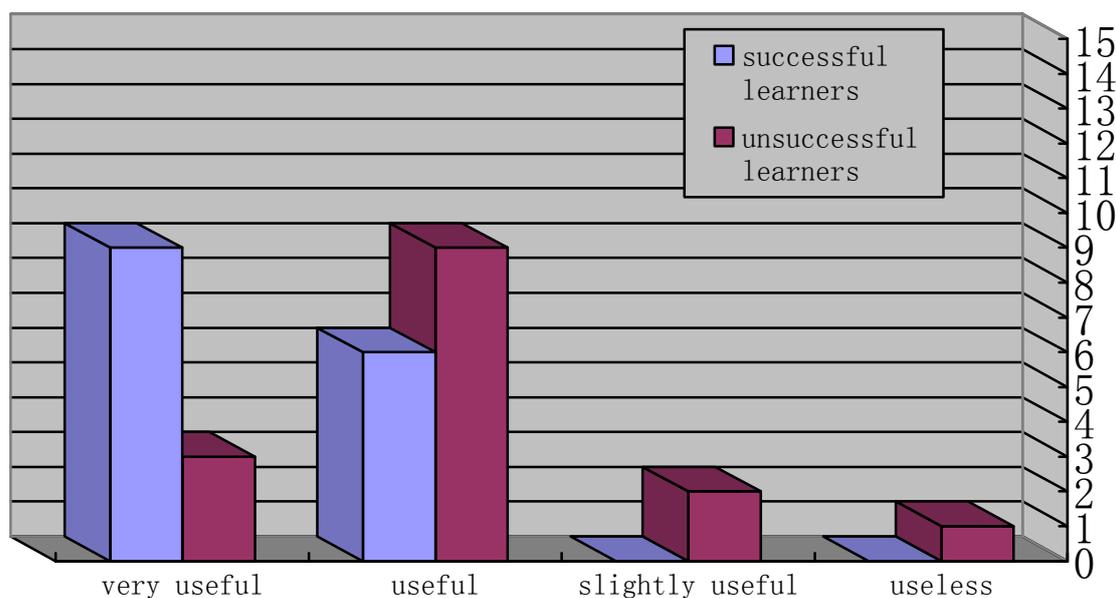
The interviews of unsuccessful learners show that some unsuccessful learners also think communicating with native speakers is useful. However, there are two major problems for them to use this strategy. One is it is hard to find native speakers in their daily life, and in class they seldom have chance to communicate with the foreign teacher individually. Another problem is that when they have a conversation with the native speaker, they cannot understand what he says. Even though they can understand, they do not know how to express what they want to respond. These two reasons stop the communication from going further, so they can seldom learn new words.

Communicating with other language learners seems not so popular as communicating with native speakers. The interviews of successful learners show that negotiation with other language learners is useful. They are not under so much pressure and when they cannot achieve understanding they can use their first language to help. However, they also mention that there is a problem. When both of the two language learners are not so sure about the language point they negotiate, there is a chance that they may achieve an incorrect result. However, the unsuccessful learners' attitude to negotiation with other language learner is more positive. The main reason is that in this process they can use their first language to help. They also mention that communicating with advanced learner is especially helpful. Because they may use more advanced words and when the learner cannot understand, they can explain it in their mother tongue. In this method they keep the conversation going on and acquire more new vocabulary.

3.4 Learning vocabulary through transition of meanings

Learning vocabulary through transition of meanings is a cognitive strategy. It can contribute to learning directly. The theory about word meaning changes shows that this strategy may be useful for learners to learn vocabulary (theoretical background). Through the transition of word meanings, learners can enlarge their vocabulary and acquire more knowledge about word meanings.

Figure 4 Effectiveness of learning vocabulary through transition of meanings



Most successful learners think learning from transition of meaning helps much in vocabulary acquisition. The attitude of unsuccessful learners is more complicated. From figure 4 we can see that 9 successful learners think learning vocabulary through transition of meaning is a very useful strategy, compared to 3 of the unsuccessful learners. 6 successful learners think it is useful. However, most of the unsuccessful learners think it is useful. There are 9 of them who made this choice. None of the successful learners think this strategy is slightly useful or useless. However, there are 2 unsuccessful learners who think it is slightly useful and 1 thinks it is useless.

Through the comparison we can see that the successful learners are more in favor of learning vocabulary through transition of meaning. The interviewees of successful learners claim that this strategy can help them expand the quantity of their vocabulary. It is also easy to memorize word meaning using this strategy. Because word meaning develops over time, the new meaning is derived from the old meaning. Thus, there may be some relation between the old meaning and the new meaning. The relationship is like a chain that connects the two meanings of the word together, and it is easier to get from an old word to a new word with the help of the chain. Metaphor is an important kind of word meaning relation. According to the

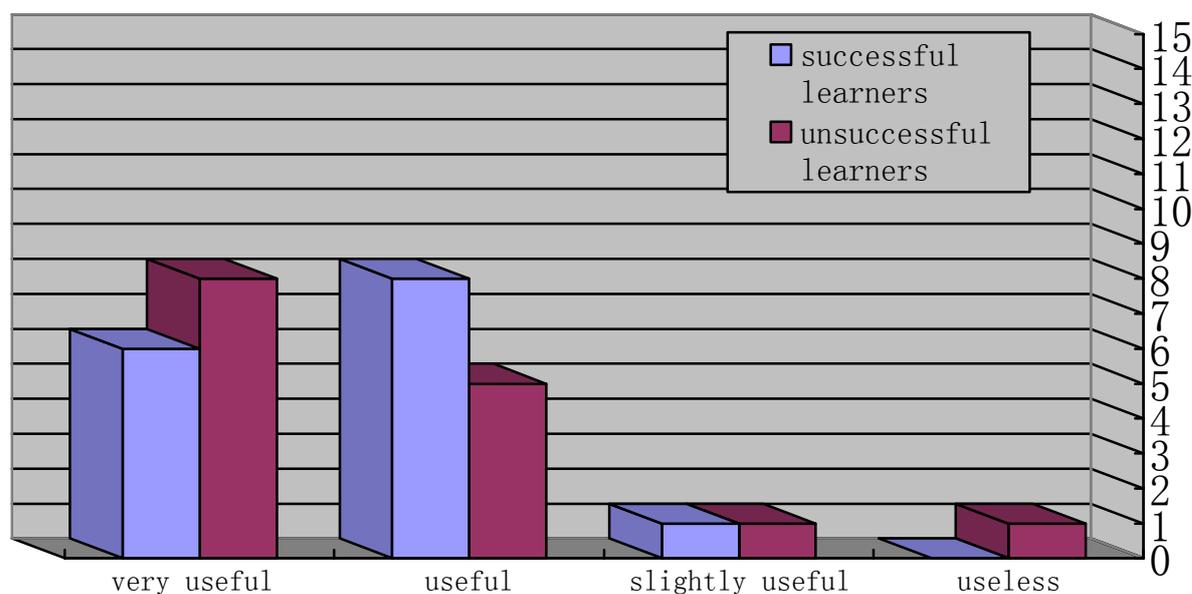
successful learners, it helps them to enlarge their vocabulary. Aitchison argues that there are similarities and dissimilarities between the two items used in metaphor. First, the items must not be too similar. Second, they must share some major characteristics (Aitchison 2003: 165). Some successful learners also prefer to use metaphors to learn new words. The similarities of the items help them acquire the word.

Some unsuccessful learners think learning vocabulary through transition of meaning is not very helpful. They mention an interesting reason that although word meaning is fuzzy and a word may have so many different meanings, the word is still one word. It is just the new meaning that they learn. Thus, this kind of strategy cannot help them to learn vocabulary. Nation claims that knowing a word involves knowing the word form, meaning and use. Concerning word meaning, knowing a word can be further explained as knowing word form and meaning, knowing word concept and referents, and associations (Nation 2001: 27). Thus, knowing word meaning is an important part of knowing a word. According to the interview of the unsuccessful learners, some of them may have mixed the concept of learning a word with reciting a word. Reciting word is just keeping the word form and meaning in mind and the other word knowledge is not necessary. Thus, even though their word knowledge might have developed through transition of meanings, they may not be aware of it when they acquire the word.

3.5 Learning vocabulary through word formation

Learning vocabulary through word formation belongs to cognitive strategy. The internal architecture of words shows that this strategy may be very useful for vocabulary learning (theoretical background). However, the attitudes of successful learners and unsuccessful learners toward this strategy are complex

Figure 5 Effectiveness of learning vocabulary through word formation



From figure 5 we can see the attitude towards learning vocabulary through word formation is quite different from those we have discussed before. The previous analysis shows that the successful learners prefer using strategies in learning vocabulary and most of them think those strategies are very useful for them to acquire vocabulary. However, figure 5 shows that towards learning vocabulary through word formation, successful learners and unsuccessful learners have changed their attitudes. 6 successful learners find learning vocabulary through word formation is very useful, compared to 8 of the unsuccessful learners. There are 8 successful learners who think this strategy is useful. This number is the same as the unsuccessful learners who think it is very useful. 5 of the unsuccessful learners think it is useful. 1 of the successful and 1 of the unsuccessful learners think it is slightly useful. None of the successful learners think it is useless. However, there is 1 unsuccessful learner who thinks it is useless.

Through comparison we can see that most learners think learning through word formation is a helpful strategy to acquire vocabulary. More unsuccessful learners seem to prefer this strategy than successful learners.

Nation states several kinds of knowledge that are needed to use word parts. Firstly, learners

have to be able to recognize that a complex word is made up by several parts, and those parts are also contained in other words (Nation 2001: 274). For example: the word *inacceptable* is made up by three parts: *in*, *accept* and *able*. Learners need to recognize these parts and have concepts of their meanings and functions. It is not an ability that requires so many skills. All the interviewees admit that they can separate a complex word properly according to the rules of affixation. Especially when memorizing words, unsuccessful learners prefer to memorize the complex word separately. However, successful learner would like to see the word as a whole, because when the affixation is attached to a stem and form a word, the word meaning can be seen from the affixation and the stem, and it is not necessary to separate it again to memorize it. The word is stored in whole, and if not necessary, people do not need to separate it into parts (Aitchison 2003: 135). Unsuccessful learners always tend to separate the word intentionally in order to memorize them. This might be why there are more of them than successful learners who think it is very useful.

Secondly, Learners also need to know the meaning of the word parts (Nation 2001: 274). For example: learners need to know the meanings of the parts form *inacceptable*. *In-* is a prefix, which means *not*. *Accept* means *take willingly sth is offered*. *-able* is an adjective suffix, which means *having the quality of*. Most affixations are commonly used and learners are familiar with their forms and meanings. It is not difficult to memorize the stems, because they are usually short and clear. The affixes can be attached to different words. Because the students are from medical school, some of the medicine names they have to learn share the same affixation. This might make them feel it is very useful to use word formation to learn medical words.

Thirdly, learners have to recognize how the affix and stem combine and make a new word with related meaning (Nation 2001: 274). For example: *inacceptable* and *comfortable* share the same suffix *-able*. Learners can infer that they are both adjective and they both mean that something has certain quality. All the interviewees do not think it is hard to see how the new word meaning derived from the stem and affixation. They usually just combine the meanings together and form the new meaning.

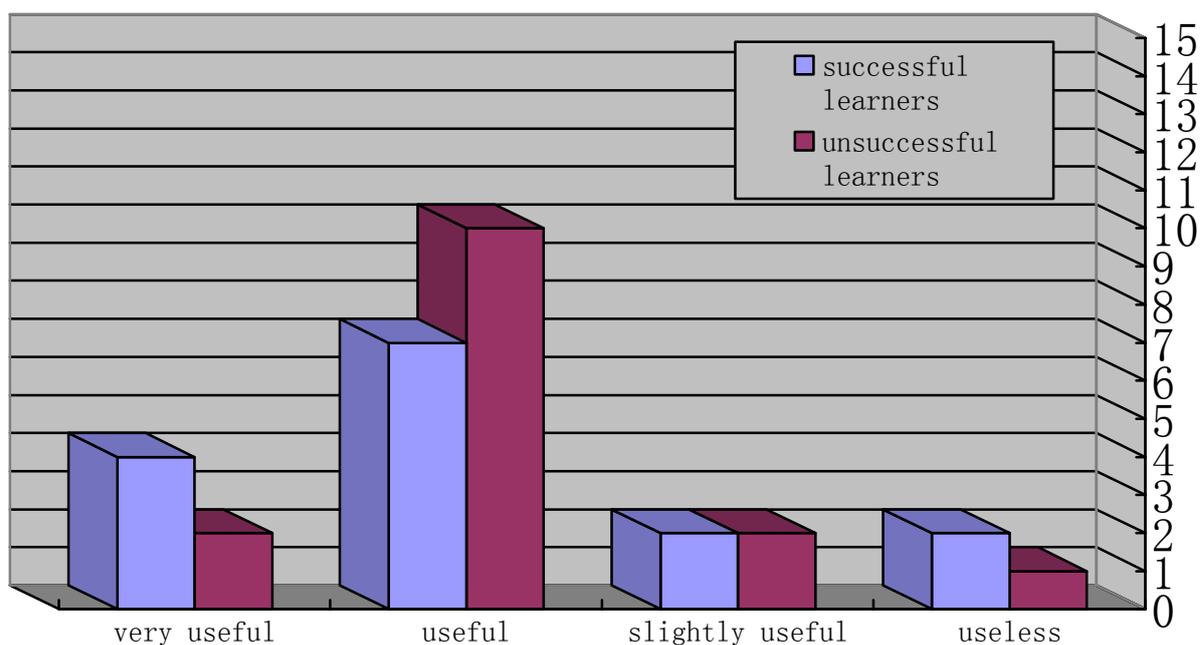
Fourthly, learners need to be aware that there are some changes to stem and affixation when they are combined together (Nation 2001: 274). For example: *happiness* is not formed by *happy* and *-ness*. There is a change to *happy* that the *y* changes into *i*. This is where the successful learners and unsuccessful learners have different opinions. 4 interviewees of the successful learners state that they can find some regularity of the changes that occur as a result of the combination. Through the relationship between pronunciation and spelling, they can master the word correctly. However, the interviews of the unsuccessful learners show that it is a major problem for them. The changes always make them confused, and sometimes, they cannot make the right pronunciation or right spelling. Another reason why learner may find learning through word formation difficult is that there are so many affixations. As an unsuccessful learner mentions that there are so many affixations that they cannot surely know their meanings and functions.

Learning through word formation does not require so many skills as guessing from context and learning from daily life. Thus, it seems to be more popular among unsuccessful learners. It is useful for vocabulary learning, especially for students who study a specific area of vocabulary.

3.6 Learning vocabulary of the same categorization together

Learning vocabulary belongs to cognitive learning strategy. It can contribute to learning directly. The prototype theory and semantic network show that words of the same category are associated closely, so when learning vocabulary it might be easier to learn words of the same category together (theoretical background). However, through investigation, the result shows that the strategy of learning vocabulary of the same category together is not as popular as we assumed.

Figure 6 Effectiveness of learning vocabulary of the same category together



From figure 6 we can see that only 4 of the successful learners think learning vocabulary of the same category together is a very useful strategy. The unsuccessful learners who think this strategy is very useful are even fewer. There are only 2 of them think it is very useful. However, most successful learners and unsuccessful learners think it is useful. There are 11 successful learners and 10 unsuccessful learners who think categorizing words helps them learn vocabulary. 2 successful learners and 2 unsuccessful learners think it is slightly useful. There are 2 successful learners and 1 unsuccessful learner who thinks it is not useful at all.

Although the successful learners and unsuccessful learners have similar opinions towards learning vocabulary of the same categorization together, they have different reasons why they like or dislike it. The interviews of successful learners show that this kind of strategy might be useful but the type of words must be the kind that you are interested in. One of the interviewees gives an example of how he learnt all the cities of NBA teams. When talking about basketball, the first he thought about is Philadelphia 76ers, because he was a fan of that basketball team. Then he tried to know everything about the team, and gradually he came to care about other teams of NBA. There are so many cities, and he remembered all the names of the cities and even their location, tradition, history, and so on. He could learn those words

because they interested him. If he was asked to learn words about vegetables using this kind of strategy, he would not think it is effective.

According to most successful learners, learning words of the same categorization together is not so useful because some words are not so easy to categorize. For example, *association*, they do not know to which category it belongs. Furthermore, the process of dividing words into different categories also costs a great deal of time.

The successful learners also mention that learning words of the same categorization might be more useful for young learners learning their first language. When young learners learn their first language, they do not have the concept of what a certain thing is, so learning the same kind of things together may help them to form the concept and it might be easier for them to cope with the same kind of things together. However, adult L2 learners already have the concept in their mother tongue, so it might not be of much help to them.

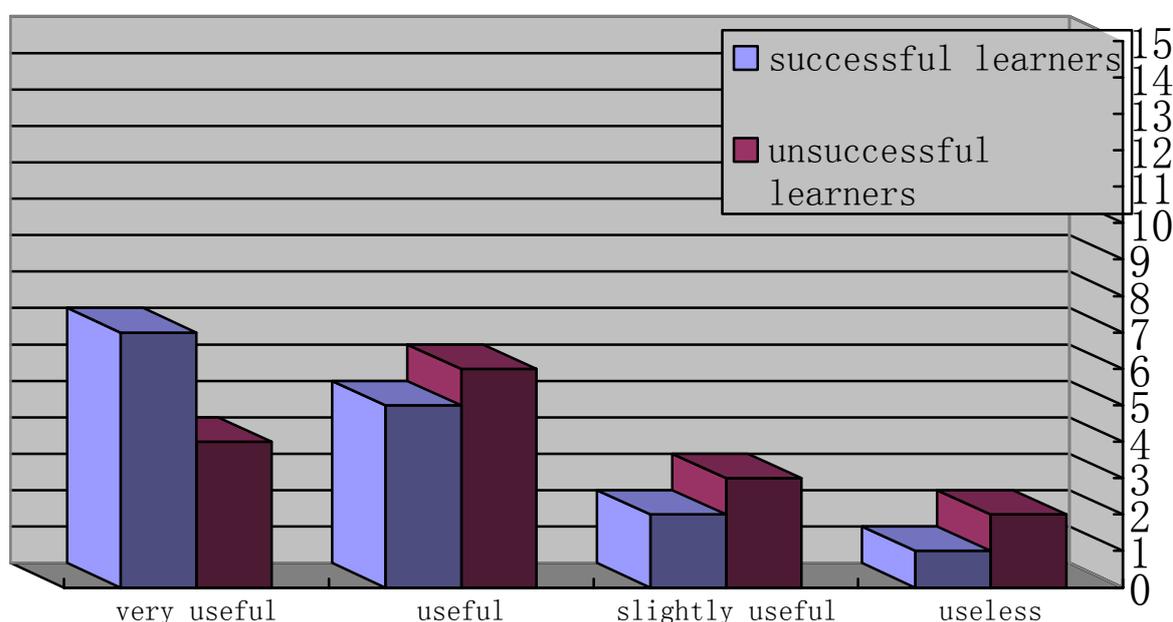
Though most of the unsuccessful learners also do not think learning words of the same categorization together is a very useful strategy, they have a different reason from the successful learners. The major problem for unsuccessful learners to use this strategy is it is easy to mix the words of the same categorization together, especially for some words, which they are not familiar in their mother tongue. For example, they do not have *Brussels sprouts* and *cress* in their daily life and they even do not know what they look like. When learning this kind of words, they always mix up the words and their Chinese meanings. The categorization does not help at all; instead, it may cause confusion, because they are both vegetables and share some similarities.

Some interviewees also mention that though learning the same kind of words together may not be so helpful to learn new words, it might be a good method of reviewing words. The words have already given an impression to the learner. When reviewing, the associations between the words may help learners to recall one word from another.

3.7 Learning vocabulary through listening

Learning vocabulary through listening belongs to cognitive learning strategy. It can contribute vocabulary learning directly. It should be helpful for learners according to the sound pattern theory and listening to story can help learners to acquire unknown words (theoretical background). Though learning vocabulary through listening may be useful, learners' attitudes toward it are complex. They also point out several disadvantages of this strategy.

Figure 7 Effectiveness of learning vocabulary through listening



Through figure 7 we can see that there are 7 successful learners who think learning vocabulary through listening is very useful. 4 of the unsuccessful learners have the same opinion. 5 successful learners and 6 unsuccessful learners think it is useful. 2 of the successful learners think it is slightly useful, compared to 3 of the unsuccessful learners. 1 successful learner and 2 unsuccessful learners think learning through listening is completely useless. Through the figure we can see that learning through listening seems not so popular among either successful students or unsuccessful students.

The interviews of both successful learners and unsuccessful learners, suggest that using sound structure to learn words seems to be useful. They both admit that they get benefit from this

kind of strategy. However, there are still many problems that make it can not be used so widely. The first reason is the limitation of words with same beginnings and same endings. The pronunciation of English words has certain rules, so it is not easy to find words of the same beginning and same ending. Moreover, the words of this kind are always words with prefixes and suffixes, so it is more like learning words using the strategy of affixation. The second reason is that it is easy to mix up the words with same beginning and same ending. Aitchison claims that words with the similar pronunciation may not be helpful to learning vocabulary; instead, they may sometimes block the memorization of words (Aitchison 2003: 147). Slip of tongue also shows that words with similar pronunciation sometimes may be mixed up in mind.

The interviewees of successful learners think learning vocabulary through listening to stories or songs is a useful strategy, especially listening to songs. Stories are always long and hard to remember, but songs are short, and with the music, it is easier to memorize the words. An interviewee mentions that when you like a song, you probably want to learn to sing it. When you want to learn to sing a song, you will force yourself to learn the words. Thus, here interest plays an important role. Repeated retrieval is also very important for learning vocabulary through listening. In the process of repeating, the vocabulary is heard time and time again. Context is also important for learning vocabulary through listening. If the learner has more background knowledge about the story and understand the context of the story, he would have more chances to guess the meaning of the unknown words.

One of the important reasons why successful learners do not prefer learning through listening is that it is hard to master the speed of the listening material. The number of the unknown words is another problem. If there are too many unknown words, learners would not understand the context and lose interest of listening to the material. If there are too few unknown words, learners may probably ignore them.

Most unsuccessful learners do not prefer learning through listening so much. Their problem is that they do not have enough vocabulary to understand the content. Nations claims that

learners would need to know at least 95% of the running words in order to understand the context and make reasonable guess while listening to the material (Nation 2001: 114). However, unsuccessful learners always have a small amount of vocabulary, so it is not easy for them to use this strategy. The written input may help a little in understanding the listening input but there is still another problem that listening while reading might make learners focus on the written material and ignore listening.

3.8 Learning vocabulary using word cards

The last question of the questionnaire is listing other strategies you use that have not been mentioned above and describe it specifically. In this section, most of the unsuccessful students mention word cards. In contrast, only 3 successful students mention this strategy. Learning from word cards belongs to cognitive learning strategy. It can contribute to learning directly (theoretical background).

Table 1 Other strategies used in learning vocabulary

Other strategies	Number of successful learners	Number of unsuccessful learners
Word cards	3	10
Watch TV or movie	1	0
Writing while memorizing	0	1
No other strategy	11	4

From table 1 we can see that learning from word cards is a very popular strategy among unsuccessful learners. 3 successful learners mention learning from word cards is the other strategy they usually use in learning vocabulary. However, there are 10 of the unsuccessful learners who usually use word cards to learn vocabulary. 1 of the successful learners mentions that watching TV or movie could help to learn vocabulary. It is a similar strategy to listening and also belongs to incidental learning. Since those strategies have been analysed above, I

will not do further analysis here. 1 of the unsuccessful learners mentions writing down the word while memorizing. Since not so many students mention this strategy, it will not be analysed here.

In the interview, the successful learners mention that learning vocabulary might be a useful strategy of acquiring vocabulary but the learner should consider when to use it. It might be useful for passing a certain examination. For example to pass CET4 or CET6, the learner should have a great quantity of words. However, time is limited, there is not sufficient time for them to learn by watching TV or by reading books, and the words that will be tested are all included in a word book. If the learner can memorize all the words in the word book, there will be a great chance for him or her to pass the exam. Under this circumstance, most learners will choose using word cards to learn new words in order to pass the exam.

There are two criticisms about using word cards to learn vocabulary. One is that learning from word cards is not good for remembering (Nation 2001: 297). This is proved by the interviews of the learners. When talking about the disadvantages of using word cards, all the interviewees of successful learners say that the words they think they memorized by using word cards will be forgotten very soon. It is not useful for long term memory, either. The most typical example is before the CET6 text, they use this method to memorize new words but after CET6 they immediately forget them all. Another criticism is that learning from word cards does not help with the use of the word (Nation 2001: 297). Learners usually write the most basic meaning at the word in the back of the word cards using their first language. There is no explanation of how the word can be used and no context to show in what kind of condition the word can be used. Even if learners have memorized the basic word meaning, they do not know how to use the word. As we know, knowing a word does not only mean just memorizing its meaning, it consists of knowing the form, the meaning and the use of the word. Thus, word cards are not helpful for learners to know a word.

Though learning from word cards has many disadvantages, it does not mean it is totally useless. Most unsuccessful learners prefer to use this strategy. The most important reason the

unsuccessful learners mention in the interview is that learning from word cards is simple. It does not require many skills to use this strategy, and for those who are not very interested in learning English, this can force them to pay attention to the words they have to learn. Though it might not be so efficient, it helps them more than using the incidental method of learning words. Nation states three values of learning from words cards. The first one is that it is efficient in terms of return for time and effort (Nation 2001: 302). As has been mentioned before, the successful learner always uses this strategy before examination. The second one is it allows learners to consciously focus on an aspect of word knowledge that is not easily gained from context or dictionary use (Nation 2001: 302). When learning from context, learners might usually focus on the meanings of the unknown words and try to guess what it means in the context. They often ignore the spelling of the word. Word cards can make learners focus on the spelling. This could help learners to know the word more completely. The third one is that it allows learners to control the repetition and processing of the vocabulary to make learning secure (Nation 2001: 302). The successful learners mention that words cannot be kept in mind for a long time but repetition can solve this problem. If learners review the words they have learned according to a time table, the words will never be forgotten.

3.9. Discussion of results

Through the analysis of different attitudes of successful learners and unsuccessful learners toward vocabulary learning strategies used in learning English, we can draw a conclusion.

On one hand, successful learners and unsuccessful learners prefer different types of strategies (Table 2). From the analysis above we can see that most successful learners prefer incidental learning, such as learning vocabulary from reading, learning vocabulary in daily life, and learning vocabulary through communication. In each of the three strategies, there are more than 10 successful learners who think it is very useful. In contrast, unsuccessful learners seem to like rote learning better. Although not listed in the questionnaire, rote leaning is the most

mentioned strategy by unsuccessful learners. There are 10 unsuccessful students who chose it to be the ‘other useful strategy that is not listed above’. The second favorite strategy of the unsuccessful learners is word formation. It is also a decontextualised learning strategy. Unsuccessful learners seem to like to focus on the word itself when learning vocabulary.

Table 2 Top three ‘very useful’ strategies

	Successful learners (number)	Unsuccessful learners (number)
strategies	Learning vocabulary through reading (12)	Learning vocabulary from word cards (10)
	Learning vocabulary in daily life (12)	Learning vocabulary through word formation (6)
	Learning vocabulary through communication (11)	Learning vocabulary through reading (5)

On the other hand, successful learners and unsuccessful learners have different attitudes to vocabulary learning strategies. (Figure 8 (1) & Figure 8 (2)) Through the analysis we can see that most successful learners think vocabulary learning strategies are very useful and help much in their vocabulary acquisition. They can use these strategies intentionally when learning English vocabulary. Moreover, they also can identify whether it is proper to use a certain strategy. For example, their views towards learning vocabulary from word cards are critical. They know when it might be useful and when it might not. In contrast, unsuccessful learners’ attitudes to vocabulary learning strategies are not so positive. Most of the unsuccessful learners do not think vocabulary learning strategies are very useful. There might be two reasons. One is that in order to use some of the strategies efficiently, learners are required to have some skills, such as selecting information, guessing, knowing a certain amount of vocabulary. Unsuccessful learners might not have the ability to use these skills, so it may be hard to use the learning strategies. The other reason is that unsuccessful learners might not be aware of the importance of autonomous learning. The words they learn are almost all learned in a classroom setting and from rote learning. They would just do what they have to do to learn vocabulary and always try to find the simplest way to memorize words.

They may not often use these strategies autonomously, and the strategies they use are more unitary.

Figure 8 (1) Learners who think a strategy is ‘very useful’

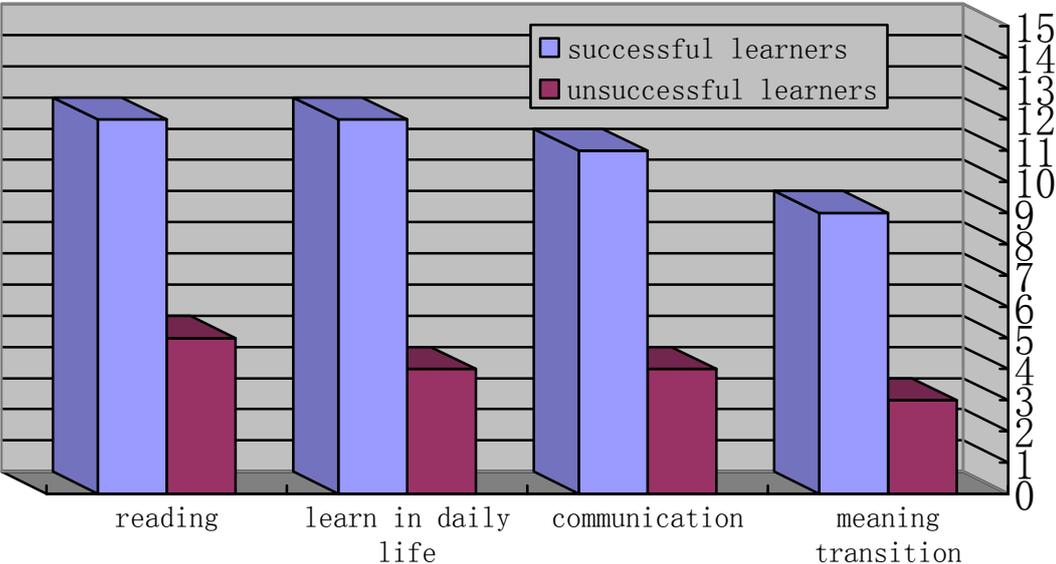
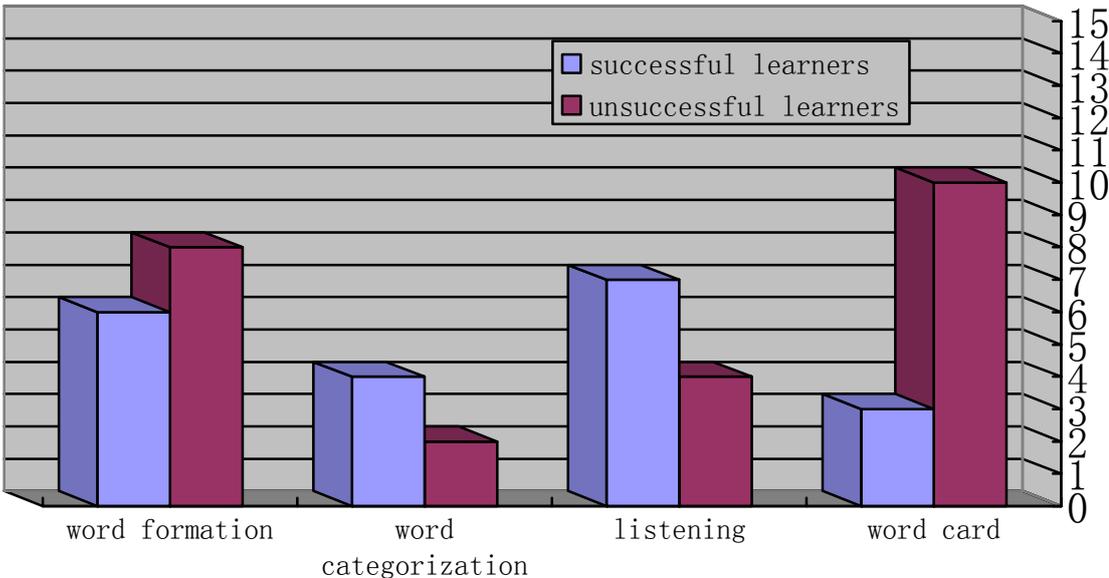


Figure 8 (2) Learners who think a strategy is ‘very useful’



4. Conclusion

All in all, the results of the study show that successful learners are more in favor of using learning strategies to learn vocabulary, and they think most of the strategies are useful. However, unsuccessful learners have different opinions, they seem not to favor using learning strategies in their study and only a few of them think these strategies are very useful. Thus, when teaching vocabulary teachers could teach some strategies and guide learners to use these strategies in their learning process. Learners also should try to learn how to use these strategies properly. Furthermore, studies can be conducted concerning how to adapt these strategies in classroom teaching and learning and how to train learners to use vocabulary learning strategies efficiently.

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Appendix

Questionnaire about the strategies used in vocabulary acquisition

Grade of CET_____

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire about the strategies used in second language vocabulary acquisition. Please notice that here 'acquisition' does not mean just memorizing the word. Here it can be broadly defined as "the internalization of rules and formulas which are then used to communicate in the L2" (Ellis 1985: 292). It is synonymous with word 'learning'.

Please select how useful the following strategies are in your process of learning vocabulary according to your own experience.

1. Learning vocabulary through reading books. For example: guessing the meaning of the words from the context.

A very useful B useful C slightly useful D not useful at all

2. Learning vocabulary in daily life from incidental focus on the words. For example: learn the word 'pharmacy' from the brand of the chemist's shop.

A very useful B useful C slightly useful D not useful at all

3. Learning vocabulary through communication. For example: communicating with advanced learners such as teachers, or talking with the person whose mother tongue is English.

A very useful B useful C slightly useful D not useful at all

4. Learning vocabulary through the transition of word meanings. For example: 'honey' means sweet stick yellow substance made by bee that is spread on bread. However, in informal situation it can be used to address the person that you like or love.

A very useful B useful C slightly useful D not useful at all

5. Learning vocabulary according to its internal formation and the association between the letters or letter combinations. For example: learning vocabulary by the

regularity of prefix and suffix. 'Inacceptable' can be divided in to three parts: 'in', 'accept' and 'able'.

A very useful B useful C slightly useful D not useful at all

6. Learning vocabulary of the same categorization together. For example: the words about vegetable are learnt together: carrot, cabbage, celery, spinach, tomato, potato.

A very useful B useful C slightly useful D not useful at all

7. Learning vocabulary through listening. For example: listening to a passage or a song repeatedly

A very useful B useful C slightly useful D not useful at all

8. Please list other strategies you use that have not been mentioned above. Please describe them specifically.