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Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Japanese University Students

Shotaro Ueno & Jonathan Aliponga

Abstract

One of the many recent research interests in English language teaching in Japan is to develop student's language skills through vocabulary learning, especially focusing on vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs). Our study examined the different vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) that proficient and non-proficient Japanese university students used to accomplish the learning tasks in the English language classrooms. It also sought to find out the significant difference between the two groups of students in vocabulary learning strategy use. The findings revealed that as many non-proficient students as proficient students used the same various VLSs in their English language classes. There were significant differences found between the two groups of students in their use of VLSs, specifically in four kinds of VLSs. These differences in VLSs use included social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive VLSs. In fact, there were instances when non-proficient students used VLSs more than proficient students. Implications for EFL as well as further research directions are discussed.

Keywords: *Vocabulary learning strategies, English as a Foreign Language, learner strategies*

Introduction

As the society becomes more globalized, improving English skills is becoming more important. In response to globalization, Japanese government has been making drastic changes to its education system. In 2001 and 2002, the following were done: the revision of the curriculum guidelines and the implementation of the foreign language activities in elementary school (MEXT, 2014a), the Strategic Plan to Cultivate Japanese Abilities in English and English Activities in Elementary School as well as English Classes in English in junior high school. In 2013, three major plans took into effect: English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization, in which English became a regular subject in elementary schools; English classes were taught in English in senior high schools; then the National University Reform Plan, in which one of the goal was to implement TOEFL in 2021 as a standardized proficiency test to examine student's skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening. In short, Japanese students are required to enhance much higher English language skills. How students can develop their English skills is for individual schools to plan and implement.

Especially in Japan, one of the many recent research interests in the field of English language teaching to develop student's language skills is vocabulary learning. Many researchers have insisted the importance of vocabulary learning to improve English skills. For instance, Akagawa (1997) and Takeuchi (2003) underscored that English learners need to memorize considerable amount of vocabulary because it

is the fundamentals of four skills. Laufer (1992) argued that learners should learn approximately 95 percent of the words to understand English passages. Laufer further argued that this knowledge of vocabulary is necessary so that they can successfully employ reading strategies, such as guessing the meaning of words from context or skimming the passages. Many other researchers support the important role of vocabulary learning in the success of language learning. One example is Tanaka (2012) who explained that it is impossible to do performance without learning certain amount of vocabulary. Also, Ikeda and Takeuchi (2005) found that English learners who have memorized a lot of vocabulary were much better than those who have not memorized vocabulary when reading sentences in English. However, other previous studies have argued that language learning will not improve by simply learning vocabulary without using any strategies. It was also strongly suggested that learners have to consider about phonemes and syntagmatic relation through vocabulary learning. Others like Yoshida et al. (1998) have emphasized that Japanese English learners do not have enough vocabulary to understand English. However, many studies have shown that learners who carried out vocabulary learning frequently was not an assurance for an increase in English skills. What is worse, as explained by Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2008) is that Japanese English learners face difficulties in vocabulary learning. This is because there are effective vocabulary learning strategies and ineffective vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs), which they can use (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2008; Schmitt, 1997). For instance, proficient learners of English seemed to understand about how to learn vocabulary, while low proficient students lacked this ability. Furthermore, Takeuchi (2003) has illustrated some examples of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) used by both proficient students and low proficient students in English learning. One of the examples is that proficient learners memorized vocabulary used in sentences at the onset, while low proficient learners did not. Another example is that proficient learners confirmed the pronunciation of new vocabulary, while low proficient learners did not. The third example, on the other hand, revealed that low proficient learners memorized vocabulary using the list, while proficient learners did not. As seen from these previous studies, English learners utilized vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) in learning English.

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs)

Vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) are considered as part of learner strategies (LSs), which can be defined as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). Researchers like Wakamoto (2009) grouped LSs into four, namely: cognitive, communication, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies. However, Robbins (1996) simply grouped them into three, when focusing on on-line processing of language learning. These were cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective.

As far as understanding language materials in direct ways, Oxford (1990) explained that learners use cognitive strategies (Oxford (1990)). Examples of these cognitive strategies are reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, and outlining. Regarding memory strategies, learners frequently use them because of their directness and familiarity. They are easy to use because these strategies are simply rote-memory strategies. When communicating with people, learners use communication strategies. Examples of these strategies are using circumlocutions or synonyms to maintain communication in English. As far as managing learning process, learners use metacognitive strategies, which include identifying one’s own learning style preferences and needs, planning for an L2 task, gathering and organizing materials, arranging a study space and schedule, monitoring mistakes, and evaluating task success and assessing success of any type of learning strategy. Sanaoui (1995) explained that metacognitive strategies are also important when learning vocabulary. English proficient learners who understand effective vocabulary learning strategies often use metacognitive strategies. Likewise, Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009) and Rasekh and Ranjbar (2003) have clarified the effects of instructing vocabulary learning strategies

including metacognitive strategies. Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2008) suggested that metacognitive strategies for vocabulary learning were fairly correlated with TOEIC scores. As evident from these previous studies, metacognitive strategies are very important vocabulary learning strategies for English language learning.

One of the most famous taxonomies of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) is that of Schmitt's (1997), which he categorized into two groups. The two categories are discovery strategies and consolidation strategies. Discovery strategies are used to discover meanings of new vocabulary. Consolidation strategies, on the other hand, are used by learners to keep on memorizing the vocabulary meanings. Discovery strategies consist of determination strategies and social strategies, while consolidation strategies include social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. Social strategies are found in both categories because they can be used at any stage of vocabulary learning. Years later, Nation (2001) came up with another category of all vocabulary learning strategies and grouped them into three classes, namely: planning, source and processes.

Variables affecting choice of vocabulary learning strategies

Yongqi Gu (2003) explains the important role of learning tasks in vocabulary learning strategy choice as follows:

“A learning task is the end product in the learner’s mind. It can be as broad as mastering a second language or as specific as remembering one meaning of a word. He further explained that this conception of the learning task includes the materials being learned (such as the genre of a piece of reading) as well as the goal the learner is trying to achieve by using these materials (such as remembering, comprehending, or using language). In other words, different types of task materials, task purposes, and tasks at various difficulty levels demand different learner strategies. For example, learning words in a word list is different from learning the same words in a passage. Remembering a word meaning is different from learning to use the same word in real life situations. Likewise, guessing from context would mean different things for texts of different levels of new word density (p. 2).”

Learning context is another consideration for vocabulary learning strategy choice, which Yongqi Gu (2003) defines and explains as follows.

“Learning context refers to the learning environment, where learning takes place. The learning context can include the teachers, the peers, the classroom climate or ethos, the family support, the social, cultural tradition of learning, the curriculum, and the availability of input and output opportunities. Learning contexts constrain the ways learners approach learning tasks. A learning strategy that is valued in one learning context may well be deemed inappropriate in another context. For instance, when a person approaches a relatively challenging task, s/he adopts certain strategies to solve the problem. The problem-solving process is constrained by the learning context where the problem is being tackled (pp. 2-3).”

Then there are learner factors, which are also crucial for vocabulary learning choice. The strategies a learner uses and the effectiveness of these strategies very much depend on the learner himself/herself (e.g., language ability/ proficiency, attitudes, motivation, prior knowledge).

Tseng and Schmitt (2008) and Mizumoto (2011) explained that learner's motivation is one of the most important factors for vocabulary learning. Mizumoto (2011) expounded that learners do not intend

to use vocabulary learning strategies without motivation. In the same manner, even though learners have high motivation but without enough knowledge of vocabulary learning strategies, they cannot improve their English skills. In short, the relationship between motivation and vocabulary learning strategy is significantly important.

As important as motivation for vocabulary learning is learner language ability. Successful learners are those with high language ability. These successful language learners have been characterized by Rubin (1994) as those who use broad repertoire of language learning strategies. These learners are able to adopt a particular strategy to facilitate their language learning. Compared with less proficient learners, successful learners demonstrate better application of language learning and adopt language learning strategies more frequently (Javid et. al., 2013).

Our Research Focus

Based on these previous studies, there is no doubt that understanding the vocabulary strategies that learners use will enable us teachers to assist students to master the use of appropriate vocabulary learning strategies for specific learning tasks. It will also give us some useful insights when designing a foreign language curriculum that integrates vocabulary learning strategies so that students will become successful in accomplishing whatever is the assigned task.

Our study, which is exploratory in nature, focuses only on assessing the vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) proficient and non-proficient EFL university students used in learning English as a foreign language. To guide this research, the following research questions were formulated.

- (1) What were the vocabulary learning strategies that proficient and non-proficient students used in their English as a foreign language class?
- (2) Was there a significant difference between proficient students and non-proficient students in their use of vocabulary learning strategies?
- (3) What are the implications of these results for EFL?

Participants

A total of 40 students (20 proficient learners and 20 non-proficient learners) were involved in this study. Participants, who are Japanese, were chosen using convenience sampling. These participants were first year to fourth year levels, English majors, and were learning English as a foreign language at three private universities in Kansai region in Japan. They were divided into two groups, namely, proficient learners and non-proficient learners based on their institutional TOEFL ITP and TOEIC scores. TOEFL and TOEIC tests are standardized assessments which are widely used in Japanese universities. Both tests have different focus, but many Japanese universities use them as placement tests. ETS (2021) defines TOEFL ITP as 'an assessment that offers colleges and universities, English-language programs and other organizations the opportunity to administer a convenient, affordable and reliable assessment of English-language skills' (p. 1).

Instrument

Survey questionnaire was utilized in this research. This questionnaire was used to find out about the participants' vocabulary learning strategies and motivation toward vocabulary learning. It is the SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) type of inventory, which is an easy-to-use inventory to evaluate learner's strategy use.

The first part had personal information, such as gender, year level, age, test scores (TOEIC, TOEFL), years of studying and or living abroad, length of studying English, reasons for studying English, and motivation for studying English.

The second part, consisting of 15 questions, was about vocabulary learning strategy, which was created based on Schmitt's classification of vocabulary learning strategies.

Table 1: *Vocabulary learning strategies based on Schmitt's classification*

	Discovery		Consolidation			
	Det	S	S	M	C	Met
1. Checking vocabulary meaning your own way	✓					
2. Checking vocabulary meaning by using dictionary	✓					
3. Checking vocabulary meaning by asking to other people		✓				
4. Memorizing vocabulary through communication			✓			
5. Memorizing vocabulary with synonyms and antonyms				✓		
6. Memorizing vocabulary by utilizing audio visual materials				✓		
7. Memorizing vocabulary by utilizing prefix and suffix				✓		
8. Memorizing vocabulary by writing					✓	
9. Memorizing vocabulary by pronouncing					✓	
10. Memorizing vocabulary in sentences					✓	
11. Memorizing vocabulary by using a word list					✓	
12. Making the best goals before carrying out vocabulary learning						✓
13. Maintaining high motivation through vocabulary learning						✓
14. Learning vocabulary by using the best strategy						✓
15. Evaluating vocabulary learning after finishing it.						✓

Det-Determination S-Social M-Memory C-Cognitive Met-Metacognitive

Table 1 shows the vocabulary learning strategies in the survey questionnaire. There were three discovery strategies (Items 1, 2, 3). Discovery strategies were subdivided into Determination (Item 1 and Item 2), and Social strategies (Item 3). On the other hand, Consolidation strategy group had twelve items

(Items 4 through 15). Consolidation strategies were subdivided into Social (Item 4), Memory (Item 5, Item 6, Item 7), Cognitive (Item 8, Item 9, Item 10, Item 11) and Metacognitive (Item 12, Item 13, Item 14, Item 15).

The questionnaire was written in English and translated into Japanese and back translated into English to verify consistency. The Japanese version was administered to the participants.

Data Analyses

The gathered data was analyzed using IBM SPSS. In order to determine the significant difference between two proficient groups in the use of VLSs, chi-square (χ^2) test combined with adjusted standardized residuals analyses was utilized. As we repeatedly used the chi-square test to compute p-values, which might have led to the issue regarding Type I error (i.e., despite no significant difference, a significant difference might be found between or among groups, see Mizumoto, 2014 for details), we adjusted the significance level with Bonferroni's adjustment before the data analyses ($p=.05 \rightarrow p=.004$). We also used a phi-coefficient (ϕ) as an effect size to show the extent to which VLSs use differed according to the student's L2 proficiency. Following Takeuchi and Mizumoto's (2014) data analysis, we set up the criteria for the effect size (ϕ) as follows: $\phi=.10$ for small, $\phi=.30$ for medium, and $\phi=.50$ for large.

Results

Table 2: *Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) Use Between Proficient and Non-Proficient Students*

Items in the Questionnaire	Types of VLS	Proficiency				Sig	ϕ
		Proficient (n=20)		Non-proficient (n=20)			
		Used	Not-used	Used	Not-used		
1. Checking meaning of vocabulary your own way	Det (Dis)	15	5	12	8	ns	.16
2. Checking meaning of vocabulary by using dictionary	Det (Dis)	13	7	14	6	ns	.05
3. Checking meaning of vocabulary by asking to other people	Soc (Dis)	7	13	15	5	.002*	.40
4. Memorizing vocabulary through communication	Soc (Con)	11	9	12	8	ns	.05
5. Memorizing vocabulary with synonyms and antonyms	M (Con)	16	4	15	5	ns	.05
6. Memorizing vocabulary by using audio visual materials	M (Con)	7	13	8	12	ns	.05
7. Memorizing vocabulary by utilizing prefixes and suffixes	M (Con)	5	15	16	4	.001*	.30

8. Memorizing vocabulary by writing	C (Con)	12	8	16	4	ns	.02
9. Memorizing vocabulary by pronouncing	C (Con)	20	0	10	10	.001*	.50
10. Memorizing vocabulary in sentences	C (Con)	17	3	15	5	ns	.12
11. Memorizing vocabulary by using a word list	C (Con)	7	13	9	11	ns	.10
12. Making the best goals before carrying out vocabulary learning	Met (Con)	11	9	15	5	ns	.20
13. Maintaining high motivation through vocabulary learning	Met (Con)	15	5	13	7	ns	.10
14. Learning vocabulary by using the best strategy	Met (Con)	7	13	18	2	.001*	.06
15. Evaluating vocabulary learning after finishing it	Met (Con)	18	2	17	3	ns	.07

Notes: VLSs are specified as follows: Dis=Discovery, Con=Consolidation, Det=Determination, S=Social, M=Memory, C=Cognitive, Met=Metacognitive, ns=not significant, * indicates $p < .004$. $\phi = .40$.

As shown in Table 2, many (more than 50%) of the proficient and non-proficient students used the same nine out of fifteen vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs). Furthermore, there was no significant difference in the use of these VLSs between the two groups. These VLSs included 1) Discovery strategy for checking the meaning of new words on their own way as determination strategy (Det Dis, Proficient=15, Non-proficient=12), 2) Discovery strategy for checking the meanings of new words using a dictionary as determination strategy (Det Dis, Proficient=13, Non-proficient=14), 3) Consolidation strategy for memorizing new words through communication as social strategy (Soc Con, Proficient=11, Non-proficient=12), 4) Consolidation strategy for memorizing vocabulary with synonyms and antonyms as memory strategy (M Con, Proficient=16, Non-proficient=15), 5) Consolidation strategy for memorizing new vocabulary by writing as cognitive strategy (C Con, Proficient=12, Non-proficient=16), 6) Consolidation strategy for memorizing vocabulary in the sentences as cognitive strategy (C Con, Proficient=17, Non-proficient=15), 7) Consolidation strategy, which is memorizing vocabulary by making the goal as metacognitive strategy (Met Con, Proficient=11, Non-proficient=15), 8) Consolidation strategy for memorizing vocabulary by having high motivation as metacognitive strategy (Met Con, Proficient=15, Non-proficient=13), 9) Consolidation strategy for memorizing vocabulary by evaluating it as metacognitive strategy (Met Con, Proficient=18, Non-proficient=17).

On the other hand, there was a significant difference between proficient and non-proficient students in their use of four out fifteen vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs). These VLSs included checking the meaning of vocabulary by asking others (Soc Dis, $\chi^2 = 6.5$, $df = 1$, $p < .004$ (.002), $\phi = .40$). Non-proficient students (15) used the strategy more than proficient students (7). Another significant difference was in the use of consolidation strategy for memorizing vocabulary by utilizing prefixes and suffixes as memory strategy (M Con, $\chi^2 = 12.1$, $df = 1$, $p < .004$ (0.001), $\Phi = .30$). Non-proficient students (16) used the strategy more than proficient students (5). The third significant difference was in the use of consolidation strategy for memorizing vocabulary by pronouncing it as cognitive strategy (C Con, ($\chi^2 = 16.4$, $df = 1$, $p < .004$).

(.001), $\Phi=.50$). Proficient students (20) used the strategy more than non-proficient students (10). Finally, there was a significant difference in the use of consolidation strategy for memorizing vocabulary by using the best strategy as metacognitive strategy (Met Con, $\chi^2= 12.9$, $df = 1$, $p> .004$ (0.001), $\Phi=.06$). Non-proficient students (18) used the strategy more than proficient students (7).

Discussion

1) *What were the vocabulary learning strategies that proficient and non-proficient students used in their English as a foreign language class?*

Out of the fifteen vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs), nine were used by many (50%~90%) proficient and non-proficient students. Specifically, proficient students used five VLSs more than non-proficient students. These were checking meaning of vocabulary your own way (Det Dis), memorizing vocabulary with synonyms and antonyms (M Con), memorizing vocabulary in the sentences (C Con), maintaining high motivation through vocabulary learning (Met Con) and evaluating vocabulary learning after finishing it (Met Con) Although proficient students used these strategies more than non-proficient students, the data revealed no significant difference between the two groups in the use of these five VLSs. This is also true for the other four VLSs, wherein non-proficient students used them more than proficient students; however, the data showed no significant difference between the two groups. These four VLSs consisted of checking meaning of vocabulary by using dictionary (Det Dis), memorizing vocabulary through communication (Soc Con), memorizing vocabulary by writing (C Con), and making the best goals before carrying out vocabulary learning (Met Con).

The data simply tells us that non-proficient students used the same VLSs in their English language classes as much as proficient students. In fact, both groups used nine (60%) VLSs out of fifteen. Surprisingly, more non-proficient students used many VLSs. This means they were aware of various vocabulary learning strategies, specifically different kinds of memorizing strategies. This supports the claim of Kitao and Wakamoto (2012) who explained as follows:

Japanese students are capable of using a variety of strategies, but they heavily rely on rote-memory strategies to learn vocabulary. This might be the influence of strategies used for learning Chinese characters (Kanji) in elementary school, which is not easy to learn even for native speakers of Japanese. Children are trained to remember them by rote-memory strategies at elementary school.

Fujimura, Takizawa and Wakamoto (2010) termed these strategies as ‘bedrock strategies for Japanese learners of English from elementary school through college.’ Furthermore, using a dictionary to check the meanings of words is commonly practiced in Japanese schools from junior high school to college.

What is surprising was the use of metacognitive strategies by non-proficient students, which are categorized as high level strategies and are commonly used by proficient learners. There are two possible explanations for this. One is that students might have been taught how to evaluate their own learning. Communicative related tasks are commonly practiced in Japanese universities. Thanks to English language organizations in the country, such as the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) and The Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET), which have been active and influential in holding international conferences for English language teachers not only in Japan, but also around the world.

The organizations, especially JALT, have various interest groups and chapters around the country, which are responsible for professional development of English teachers every month, educating teachers about the different informed approaches, methods and techniques in English language teaching, vocabulary learning strategies included. Another reason might be non-proficient students, despite being taught the metacognitive strategies, did not know exactly how to use them to successfully accomplish the tasks. As Yongqi Gu, (2003) has explained, 'different types of task materials, task purposes, and tasks at various difficulty levels demand different learner strategies.' Therefore, it is important to guide students, especially non-proficient students, what, when and how to use different VLSs.

2) *Was there a significant difference between proficient students and non-proficient students in their use of vocabulary learning strategies?*

Four significant differences were found. One significant difference was in the use of discovery strategy for checking the meaning of new vocabulary by asking others as a social strategy ($\chi^2(1) = 6.5$, $p = .002$, $\phi = .40$). This means significantly non-proficient students used the strategy more than proficient students. One possible explanation for this might be the curriculum focus of many Japanese universities for many years. That is, collaborative learning that encourages all students to help each other and not shy about asking for help when needed. The non-threatening and non-competitive collaborative learning classroom atmosphere might have played an important role for non-proficient learners to ask for help from those who were successful in language learning.

The other significant difference was in the use of consolidation strategy for memorizing vocabulary by utilizing prefixes and suffixes as memory strategy ($\chi^2(1) = 6.5$, $p = .001$, $\phi = .30$). This data shows that significantly non-proficient students used the strategy more than proficient students. In fact, only five out of fifteen proficient students while sixteen non-proficient students utilized the vocabulary strategy. It seemed that non-proficient students needed this strategy to accomplish the English learning tasks more than proficient students.

The third significant difference was in use of consolidation strategy for memorizing vocabulary by pronouncing it as cognitive strategy ($\chi^2(1) = 13.3$, $p = .001$, $\phi = .50$). The data revealed that significantly proficient students used the strategy more than non-proficient students. In fact, all proficient students while only half of non-proficient students used it. The big challenge for many universities in Japan is to make students speak even in simple activities like pronouncing the vocabulary. Many Japanese students, especially non-proficient students are hesitant to speak in English even to do the-repeat-after-me or pronouncing the vocabulary because of the fear of making mistakes. This fear of making mistakes is slowly changing for the better due to the rampant communicative teaching and learning practices in the English language classrooms. Also, based on our classroom situations, more and more non-proficient students tried their best to communicate in English with their classmates.

The fourth significant difference was in the use of consolidation strategy for memorizing vocabulary by using the best strategy as metacognitive strategy ($\chi^2(1) = 12.9$, $p = .001$, $\phi = .06$). The data revealed that significantly non-proficient students used the strategy more than proficient students. Metacognitive strategies are considered as strategies used by successful learners or proficient learners. However, the data showed otherwise. It is possible that non-proficient students thought that their choice of strategy was the best when in fact it was not a good choice. Studies have shown that non-proficient students or unsuccessful learners struggled to make a wise decision about choosing the best vocabulary learning strategies to accomplish learning tasks.

3) *What are the implications of these results for EFL?*

Each student is unique and each possesses different vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) that they have learned by themselves or from their previous classes. Since these VLSs are influential in vocabulary learning, it is suggested that teachers assess each student's VLSs in reading, speaking, writing, listening and other English classes at the beginning of the academic year. Better yet, the department or school should keep records of students' VLSs, which teachers can access for reference to better understand each student's learning growth. The records can be updated each semester or yearly.

The findings showed that non-proficient students employed various VLSs as much as proficient students. Teachers should integrate the teaching of the VLSs in the syllabus, especially how the VLSs can be used effectively in writing, listening, speaking and reading classes.

When in doubt about the meaning of a vocabulary, non-proficient students asked others for help. Teacher should use this to create opportunities both inside and outside the classroom where students can help each other. For instance, teachers could maximize proficient students' potentials by designing tasks that will enable them to assist non-proficient students how to apply the VLSs. By doing so, not only proficient learners could apply through teaching the VLSs that they have learned, but also non-proficient students could learn the VLSs, while fostering cooperative learning among students.

Understanding the vocabulary strategies that learners use will enable us teachers not only in Japan but also in other countries where English is taught as a second or foreign language, to assist students to master the use of appropriate vocabulary learning strategies for specific learning tasks. It will also give us some useful insights when designing a foreign language curriculum that integrates vocabulary learning strategies so that students will become successful in accomplishing whatever is the assigned task.

Conclusion

In this exploratory study, which examined the different VLSs that proficient and non-proficient Japanese university students used in accomplishing the learning tasks in the English language classrooms, the findings revealed that non-proficient students as much as proficient students used the same various VLSs in their English language classes. Although the results were not significant, there were instances when non-proficient students used some VLSs more than proficient students. It shows that non-proficient students were aware of the VLSs, mostly different memorizing strategies. This could be attributed to the rote- memory strategies to learn vocabulary, which students started to use as early as elementary school years when they were learning Chinese characters. Non-proficient students also employed metacognitive strategies, which they might have learned recently in college. Many Japanese universities have been employing communicative related tasks, and teaching students to evaluate their own learning seems to be part of it.

Teachers should integrate the teaching of the VLSs into the syllabus, especially how the VLSs can be used effectively in writing, listening, speaking and reading classes by non-proficient students.

Future research directions

The next step that we will do to further the research related to VLSs is to include some

variables, such as learning contexts, tasks, and more learner variables, such as attitude, motivation, and prior knowledge. These different types of task materials, task purposes, and tasks at various difficulty levels demand different learner strategies (Yongqi Gu, 2003). He further adds that learner's motivation, experiences, attitude and language ability are influential factors in the use and acquisition of VLSs.

We will utilize mixed method to gather data. These include quantitative and qualitative methods. For the quantitative method, a survey questionnaire will also be utilized. This time, more strategies will be included. The survey will also contain some open-ended questions that will enable us to extract possible strategies that the closed-ended questions may not be able to cover. The qualitative method includes interviews and classroom observations. While classroom observations can provide us with ways to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, grasp how participants communicate with each other, and check for how much time is spent on various activities, interviews will provide us with insights into students' perceptions and experiences of a given phenomenon, which can contribute to in-depth data collection. This mixed method will enable us to 'determine causal relationships between learners' VLSs use and the variables related to vocabulary learning, such as motivation, self-regulation, and vocabulary knowledge, which are powerful predictors for successful motivational vocabulary learning' (Tseng and Schmitt, 2008).

The Authors

Shotaro Ueno is an English teacher at Hirakata Junior High School in Osaka, Japan. He finished his undergraduate degree in English language education from Kansai University of International Studies in Hyogo and his master's degree from the Graduate School of Foreign Language Education and Research of Kansai University.

Jonathan Aliponga is a professor at the Department of English Communication of Kansai University of International Studies in Hyogo, Japan. He holds a Ph.D. in applied linguistics. His research interests include vocabulary learning, curriculum design, study abroad and methods of teaching.

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