

Blends as Discourse Markers for Enhancing Students' Competency of English Vocabulary at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

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This research aims to investigate various vocabulary learning patterns of the Saudi learners majoring in English language at Prince Sattam Abdulaziz University. Studies have revealed that English as first language/English as second language (EFL/ESL) language abilities, which include both reading and writing, are heavily dependent on learners' vocabulary competency. A common practice in vocabulary learning is decoding and building vocabulary through word recognition and its meaning. However, despite several syntactical and morphological patterns for decoding and practice, some barriers still exist for Saudi learners in decoding their meaning accurately and cohesively. This research is based on investigating how the acquisition of blends can happen, and how it can be used comfortably as discourse markers. A blend (also termed a portmanteau) is not linguistic jargon, though its construction looks uncommon or abnormal. It is a type of lexical item in which the beginning of one word is combined with the final part of another word – for example, 'brunch' is a combination of 'breakfast' and 'lunch', and 'smog' comes from 'smoke' and 'fog'. This study has also attempted to segment portmanteaus according to their affixes and roots or morphemes, which could be seen as a theoretical and methodological contribution to the study of psycholinguistics. This study recommends a Vocabulary Acquisition Model (VAM) for vocabulary instructors to teach blends or portmanteaus.

Key words: Derivations, collocations, Vocabulary Acquisition Model (VAM), vocabulary learning strategies, portmanteaus, blends

Introduction

Blending generally refers to joining the beginning of one word to the end of another to make a new word with a new meaning (Gries, 2004). For instance, *smog* is formed from *smoke* and *fog*; *brunch* is from *breakfast* and *lunch*; *electrocute* is from *electrify* and *execute*; and *transistor* comes from *transfer* and *resistor*. A vocabulary instructor would teach such blended words by asking learners to identify the root words that had led to the invention of new blends. Hence, newer words such as *televangelist*, *rockumentary* and *dancercise* are invented that are recognisable from the structure. A few of these are difficult to recognise – for example, *Cubonics*, combining *Cuban*, *Spanish* and *English*, and *acrobranching*, a new sport involving acrobatics in trees.

A blend is also often known as a portmanteau and in this study both are used to denote the same meaning. The word ‘portmanteau’ of French origin was first created by Lewis Carroll in *Through the Looking Glass* (published in 1871); Carroll coined several portmanteaus in his classic works, including *mimsy* (*miserable* + *flimsy*) and *chortle* (*chuckle* + *snort*). To clarify, Humpty Dumpty tells Alice about creating new words from parts of existing ones: ‘You see it’s like a portmanteau – there are two meanings packed up into one word.’ Recently, portmanteaus have become increasingly common in English, particularly due to the widespread use of the internet and technology. Moreover, the creation of new technical terms through blending has contributed to the growth of the English lexicon (Bednarova, 2014).

Teaching and Learning Vocabulary

Enhancing students’ competency in English vocabulary at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University requires methods specific to the English as first language (EFL) environment. It is a crucial issue, since vocabulary is considered one of the important linguistic elements, the acquisition of which leads to learners’ communicative competence. McCarthy (2001, cited in Fan, 2003: 222) states that ‘vocabulary is the biggest part of meaning of any language and it is the biggest problem for most learners, so vocabulary learning is the real key to second language learning’. Kitajima (2001) asserts that language skills cannot be achieved successfully, and the intended meaning cannot be conveyed accurately, without understanding words that label objects, actions and concepts. This led several writers (e.g. Nandy, 1994; Krashen, 1989) to emphasise the importance of vocabulary in expressing oneself vividly and with self-confidence. Kristiansen (1998) observes that language understanding is significantly inhibited if content words are not understood by learners.

Several factors can inhibit the vocabulary enhancement or the understanding of content words. Carter and McCarthy (1988), for instance, believe that such inhibitions are due to the instructor’s understanding and the learner’s perception of difficult words that are often not consistently similar. In Laufer’s (2010) view, learners’ past (bad) experiences of vocabulary

learning or interference between L1 and L2 may also create a mismatch of function and meaning in two languages. Laufer further speculates that inhibitions may occur during the vocabulary acquisition process. If the effect of teaching is constructive, students develop advanced vocabulary, but if nothing is acquired, then the effect is negative (Nation, 1990).

Nation (1990) also suggests that similarity between words may complicate the process of acquiring new words. He notes that the higher the rate of similar items, the more they are likely to have a closer connection among themselves, which complicates the process of acquiring vocabulary. For example, words that are closely packed together, including long as well as short words, are adjectives and antonyms, with opposite meaning. This may be cumbersome to learn, particularly when placed together, as students can combine or jumble the meanings of the two words due to their closer association. This applies to the blends or the portmanteaus, the two terms used identically in this study. This is consistent with the findings of Laufer (2010), who emphasised intra-lexical features, namely multiple meaning, abstractness, semantic characteristics, length and phonological factors, including inflection methods to construct new words.

In the light of these practices in vocabulary teaching and learning, this study was envisaged with specific outcomes such as including modules on portmanteaus in teaching and learning practices at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. A need was also felt to design a Vocabulary Acquisition Model (VAM) that would be helpful for both teachers and learners in teaching and learning portmanteaus. This could be possible only if a new course on vocabulary were introduced or the modules in the existing curricula of vocabulary and morphology were reviewed to include portmanteaus.

Vocabulary Learning in Saudi Context

Several studies have been conducted in the Saudi context (e.g. Alfallaj, 1998; Alhaysony, 2012; Alkhatnai, 2011; Alhawsawi, 2013; Almutairi, 2008; Alshammari, 2011; Fareh, 2010). Alhaysony (2012) has discussed vocabulary discovery strategies (VDS) and suggests how these strategies could be useful in the context of Saudi learners. The study highlights a few pedagogical considerations for teaching and learning vocabulary within EFL contexts. One of the findings included guessing as a tool of learning vocabulary, a strategy that is often found to be useful in ESL/EFL situation like that of the Saudi learners, who face unfamiliar vocabulary items and have to strive to guess their meanings. Portmanteaus also share a similar situation, where guessing or inference is the only means by which a learner tries to understand their meaning from their contexts. In a homogenous society like Saudi Arabia, where there is not much difference in the sociocultural context, this may seem to be working; however, doubts are raised when it comes to acquiring vocabulary through guessing or inference, despite having an homogenous context in the sociocultural sense.

Research has indicated that Saudi learners have a tendency to using their L1 – that is, Arabic – in learning the English language, as a few EFL/ESL teachers have encouraged them to first think in L1 and then translate their thoughts into the L2 (Alhawsawi, 2013; Richard & Rodgers, 2001), which generally causes inhibitors to learning EFL in general and acquiring vocabulary in particular. Several studies (Alkhatnai, 2011; Alhawsawi, 2013; Almutairi, 2008; Alshammari, 2011; Fareh, 2010) have discussed this issue of L1 dependence, but they have all have been inconclusive, as none has focused on the remedial methods of learning nor tried to suggest corrective measures to prevent learners getting succumbed to such practices. Khan (2011) reports that English in Saudi Arabia is treated merely as an academic subject because most Saudis communicate in their native language with their family, peers, friends and classmates, and have few opportunities to speak English. Alharbi (2015) concurs with Khan's conclusions, confirming that the lack of realistic situations for practising vocabulary outside the classroom impedes the achievement of desired language outcomes in EFL countries because it limits students' opportunities to speak and write English.

There has been a great deal of research on vocabulary learning strategies, examining a variety of learner groups in both ESL/EFL contexts, but limited studies have been carried out within EFL context to study portmanteaus. In such a situation, it may be difficult to incorporate new methods of vocabulary building. Stowe (2014) suggests inclusion of methods such as decoding and code switching in the curriculum for vocabulary development and understanding semantic contexts. According to him, weakness of decoding word meanings is a potent inhibitor in reading comprehension and writing. He also stresses that prior knowledge and awareness of semantics and morphology are strong indicators of vocabulary acquisition. According to him, words in English are thought of as isolated units, whereas in other European languages they often carry additional information, and it is much easier to merge two isolated units than to merge two words carrying a lot of additional information, some of which would inevitably be lost during merging. Since portmanteaus are need-based formations, Arab students' knowledge of these portmanteaus depends on their exposure to these words.

Problem Statement

Although EFL teachers often focus more on teaching grammar and vocabulary in addition to language skills, teaching new words such as portmanteaus in classrooms to enhance students' word proficiency is often neglected. Students are left on their own to acquire vocabulary by themselves. Prior studies have also pointed out that vocabulary is not given much attention and its negligence arises out of the fact that academia does not place much emphasis on vocabulary. The vocabulary curriculum and the textbooks also lack adequate content that would enhance the vocabulary skills of learners.

In EFL situations, language learners often become effective and independent by adopting appropriate vocabulary-learning strategies. A few studies (Schmitt, 1997, 2000) on second language vocabulary acquisition have emphasised vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) that might be applied to learning about portmanteaus. As mentioned above, in the Saudi context several authors have expressed concern about insufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary rules, and a lack of fluency in speaking and writing, which can be attributed to poor knowledge of vocabulary and failure of the learning and teaching process.

In contrast, the Arabic language is richer than English in its number of lexical words, affixation cases (prefixes, infixes and suffixes), which means users can derive a greater number of words from the stem word, a case that is relatively limited in the English language. The Arabic language also does not depend on combining two words or units to create a new word, which makes it difficult for Arab learners of English to use and understand portmanteaus in common applications.

The researchers observed this phenomenon among the Saudi students majoring in the English language at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. They face problems such as word recognition and making correct lexical choices. In addition to this, incorrect pedagogical practices and inappropriate learning processes for learning vocabulary and other lexical (blended words, roots, suffixes and prefixes) as well as morphological items hinder Saudi students' English vocabulary acquisition. This happens because teachers might fail to assign appropriate, need-based reading and writing tasks, so students have insufficient opportunities to practise vocabulary in the classroom as they fail to relate these skills with a vocabulary-building process. This study aims to fill this research gap by designing a Vocabulary Acquisition Model (VAM) comprising regulatory modules that can make teaching and learning easier, with a special emphasis on portmanteaus that could be assimilated in teaching and learning practices in the EFL/ESL curriculum followed in Saudi universities.

Literature Review

Lexical and Morphological Formation of Blends/ Portmanteaus

To understand morphologically complex words, studies (e.g. Drieghe et al., 2010; Fiorentino & Poeppel, 2007; Juhasz et al., 2003) suggest decomposing them into their constituent parts. This could work well with processing of compound words, but it looks complicated when processing blend words or portmanteaus. While compound words are formed by joining two complete lexemes, a blend word is formed from parts of two or more source words, often with phoneme overlap. Morphologically, linguists define blending as the process of combining two words to produce another word – often attention-grabbling phrases in advertising and journalism, the impression of which is often short-lived. In such cases, portmanteaus are innovative and are rewarded by instant popularity (Stockwell & Minkova,

2001: 7). Berman (1961: 279) defines blending using the word *telescoping* as the ‘process of coining new words under which a blend is formed by adding the splinter of the last initial word to the stem or to the shortened substitute of the stem of the first initial word (words)’. This implies that some parts of the source words (SW) are clipped to reduce the length of the new word, which is called a portmanteau. Linguists have been trying to set some working criteria for building words and the way they look.

In general, research states that morphological processes in languages are more or less regular, since there are usually rules that govern them. However, the processes of forming portmanteaus are rather irregular (Hamans, 2010; Gries, 2004, 2006; Jeremić, 2019; Plag, 2014). Beliaeva (2014: 30) argues that the structure of portmanteaus not only seems ‘to be unpredictable’, but linguists are ‘often overshadowed by the puzzlement and the structure of blends’. Yet some attempts have been made to reach a kind of consensus on how portmanteaus are blended (Bednarova, 2014; Gries 2004, 2006; Hamans, 2010; Jeremić, 2019; Plag 2014). An interpretation of prototypical portmanteaus shows that they ‘usually contain back-clipped Source Word 1 [SW1] followed by fore-clipped Source Word 2 [SW2], leading to a portmanteau, an amalgam, or a telescoping of the two source words’ (Bednarova, 2014; Plag 2014).

Such common portmanteaus are words like *skorts* from *skirts* and *shorts*, *glamping* from *glamour* and *camping*, *pleather* from *plastic* and *leather*, *prissy* from *prim* and *sissy*, *cankle* from *calf* and *ankle*, *spam* from *spiced* and *ham*, *smog* from *smoke* and *fog*, *smaze* from *smoke* and *haze*, and *vog* from *volcano* and *smog*.

Based on the structural procedures identified by linguists like Gries (2004), the formation of portmanteaus can be categorised into five closely related types: (1) two source words do not overlap in the resulting blend e.g. *breakfast* + *lunch* → *brunch*; (2), two overlapping letters, grapheme or phoneme, overlap in both source words e.g. *motor* + *hotel* → *motel*; (3) either the first or the second source word is entirely present in the blend e.g. *fool* + *philosopher* → *foolosopher*; *austere* + *stern* → *austern*; (4) both source words are entirely present in the blend – for example, *alcohol* + *holiday* → *alcoholiday*; and (5) one complete syllable from each of the two source words is present in the resulting blend – for example, *automobile* + *suicide* → *autocide*.

Table 1 summarises the formation of portmanteaus into five closely related types. Table 1 indicates Greis’s emphasis on the similarity of forming portmanteaus and the significance of the discourse marker or the blend coiner in their formation.

Table 1: Formation of portmanteaus based on Greis's classification (2004)

Type of portmanteau	Examples
1. Two source words do not overlap in the resulting blend	Email = electronic + mail Oxbridge = Oxford + Cambridge Sitcom = situation + comedy
2. Two or more letters (grapheme or phoneme) from each source word overlap in the resulting blend	Slanguage = slang + language Screenager = screen + teenager Brexit = Britain + exit Labradoodle = labrador + poodle Netocracy = interne + aristocracy Advertorial = advertisement + editorial Guesstimate = guess + estimate Infomercial = information + commercial Sexting = sex + texting Sheeple = sheep + people Smash = smack + mash Smog = smoke + fog Brunch = breakfast + lunch Spanglish = Spanish + English
3. Either the first or the second source word entirely present in the blend	Brainiac = brain + maniac Breathalyser = breath + analyser Dumbfound = dumb (mute) + confound Fanzine = fan + magazine Frankenfood = Frankenstein + food
4. Both source words entirely present in the blend	Breakfast = break + fast Backyard = back + yard Whitehouse = white + house Manpower = man + power
5. Complete syllable(s) from each of the two source words present in the resulting blend	Alcoholiday = alcohol + holiday Autocide = automobile + suicide Electrocute = electro- + execute Forex = foreign + exchange Botox = botulism + toxin Stagflation = stagnation + inflation Cyborg = cybernetic + organism Cosplay = costume + play Hazmat = hazardous + material

There are seemingly two benefits to their formation: first, the blend coiner apparently joins the source words in such a manner that the semantic elements are retained in the portmanteaus to give the intended effect, which is made possible by choosing source words that are similar to each other in terms of letters, phonemes and stress patterns. The second benefit is that the identified source words are blended in such a way that (1) the source words continue to be recognizable (e.g. breakfast = break + fast or manpower = man + power) and (2) the newly formed blend continues to be satisfactorily similar to both source words in terms of letters, phonemes, length, and stress pattern (e.g. smog = smoke + fog or brunch = breakfast + lunch) (Greis, 2004).

This fact reiterates the prerequisites of blend words, which are that the source words should be similar to each other and that be blended in a way that increases overlap and preserves lengths and stress patterns. It is also evident from Greis's classification that the degree of recognisability of the source words interacts with the desire to maximise similarity. This requires putting as much of each source word into the blend as possible, although this might happen at the cost of economy of expression. But this is compensated for by the benefits that are retained in the blends, which later prove helpful to learners and users in terms of understanding the meaning.

In another study, Miller (2014: 203) argues that 'similarity-motivated preservation of one source word's stress pattern [is] considered more important than the recognizability-motivated preservation of letters and phonemes'. Miller also argues convincingly for the importance of metrical structure. At the heart of the issue lies 'the compositional transparency of the output' (Miller, 2014: 204). Miller adds that the length of the blend itself is a factor in this compositional transparency of the output, as longer and shorter blends have different templates. Examples that confirm Miler's argument of retaining very little material or its recognisability in blends are: *bit* from *binary* + *digit*, *brunch* from *breakfast* + *lunch*, *goon* from *gorilla* + *baboon*, and *smog* from *smoke* + *fog*. This type of blending is known to scholars as an analogical pattern, where productivity of blends is notable, and so becomes a variable that supports the hypothesis of blend recognisability (Kovacs & Miller, 2014; Lehrer, 2007; Szymanek, 2005).

Vocabulary Learning Strategies in Saudi Society

Since blend words can appear in both contexts – textual and non-textual – there is a need to learn more about vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) that can ideally be implemented in the Saudi context and that are helpful for the Saudi learners to enhance their ability to recognize, learn and use blends. VLSs are an essential part of vocabulary learning and teaching, as they help second/foreign language learners not only to acquire a new word of a

target language but also to obtain resources for new words and understand their meanings, their formation patterns and their application (Gu, 2003).

In the Saudi context, acquiring knowledge or learning of portmanteaus require(s) a learning strategy that is both lexically and semantically appropriate to their learning patterns. Alhaysony (2012) discusses vocabulary discovery strategies (VDS). His findings suggest how these strategies could be useful in a Saudi learner's context. One of the findings includes guessing as a tool for vocabulary learning; this is a strategy that is often found useful in ESL/EFL situations like that of the Saudi learners, where learners encounter an unfamiliar word and have to strive hard to guess its meaning. Portmanteaus, which rarely appear in dictionaries, fall into this category, so guessing or inference is the only means by which a Saudi learner can try to understand their meaning from their contexts or the formation procedures as explained.

In a homogenous society like that of Saudi Arabia, where there is not much difference in the sociocultural context, it is difficult to think of acquiring vocabulary through guessing or inference. Nation and Coady (1988) draw attention to two problems that Saudi learners might face: one arises inside the specific text, which refers to its morphological, semantic and syntactic information; the second is more general, comprising the non-textual context that refers to the learner's knowledge about the subject that they have acquired from other sources.

VLSs have been studied by numerous researchers. Schmitt (2008) refers to VLSs as a collection of steps, operations, routines and plans that a learner uses to enhance the cognitive process in language learning or derive the meaning of words. Fan (2003) outlines five main stages in the lexical learning process that are involved in VLSs, like obtaining resources for new words, understanding meanings, understanding new word forms, visual and/or auditory, having concise knowledge of relating forms and word meaning, and word application. The Oxford (2003: 12) explains VLSs as 'specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations'. Oxford (2003) also asserted that VLSs make learners become independent in the learning process, have the ability to take full responsibility for their learning and gradually gain confidence and proficiency.

In the context of the current study of portmanteaus, these theories and beliefs about VLSs are quite relevant. One can argue that a VLS requires choosing a strategy from many available strategies, or it requires the learner to be multifaceted as there are multiple stages needed to acquire vocabulary. Finally, it necessitates understanding the value of learning new words or lexical items like portmanteaus and enhancing the process of their acquisition. This is consistent with Catalan (2003), who also considers VLS as a good mechanism or a best

practice applied in vocabulary acquisition with multiple stages, including discovering the meaning of new words, their retention and finally applying them in spoken and written forms. Thus the role of memory or retention as a method of vocabulary acquisition is carefully examined in this study to assess whether memory can play a role in decoding words such as portmanteaus.

A learner acquiring vocabulary – particularly portmanteaus – needs to adopt two approaches, one that keeps them confined within the text, including morphological, semantic and syntactic information about the text; and one that is non-textual and relates to the background knowledge of the learner, which in this case is a Saudi learner for whom English is a foreign language. In an EFL situation, it is too difficult to gain any type of linguistic knowledge or involvement in communication or discourse ‘without the mediation of vocabulary’ (Laufer, 1989: 275). Vocabulary is significant in daily discourse, and unless learners are familiar with the meanings of key words, they cannot participate in any verbal exchange, even if they understand the morphology and syntax of the language. This is consistent with the findings of Laufer and Shmueli (1997) and Krashen and Terrell (2000), who recommend that learners generate lexical items for convenience of meaning; and the research of Richards (2000), who argues that vocabulary and lexical units are at the heart of learning and communication.

Derivations and Collocations as a VLS

At this stage, it is worth investigating whether teaching and learning of portmanteaus can also follow the same process as in the case of derivations and collocations. The focus can be shifted to define similarities between portmanteaus and derivations and collocations in order to adopt strategies that may be useful in both cases. Derivation refers to a process of word formation in which prefixes and/or suffixes are added to the base form of a word (lexeme), to possibly put it in a different word class category expressing different meanings. Likewise, a collocation is made up of two or more words that commonly go together. They are word pairings – combinations used together in a restricted context (Crystal, 2005).

Often words of diverse contexts aid in learning new vocabulary by making use of derivations and collocations. Applying words in new contexts is particularly critical and more challenging than simply remembering a word. Derivations and collocations are sometimes termed ‘lexical phrases’, ‘lexicalized chunks’ and, semantically, ‘multiword’ or ‘multi-meaning’ units. Scholars are of the opinion that application of derivations and collocations might make learning a language in the EFL context more natural. They describe collocations as ‘institutionalised phrases’ that represent sub-classes or multi-word expressions that are dominant in language and may be a major problem for natural language processing, professional translators and EFL or L2 learners (Arnaud & Savignon, 1997; Bahns & Eldaw, 1993).

EFL students prefer to adopt both derivations and collocation practices for vocabulary acquisition rather than acquiring vocabulary through isolated words out of context. Derivations and collocations become popular among the EFL learners because they refer to phrases or words that co-occur or occur in blended forms, and often are restricted in their application and meaning. Scholars have observed this co-occurrence as a correlation between a lexical-grammatical pattern and a lexeme (Hunston & Francis, 2000) underlying their inflectional or collocated partners as discourse markers. This correlation assists the learner to memorise these words, as well as understand their semantic and morphological meaning. Contextually, Hulstijn (1997) observed that learners used paired mnemonic associations of vocabulary items and such associations helped them remember vocabulary more effectively.

While focusing on vocabulary learning strategies, word frequency is also an essential element in an EFL situation. Nation (1990) differentiates between vocabulary learning models as higher frequency vocabulary and lower frequency vocabulary. A learner who acquires higher frequency vocabulary has higher and more specific aims behind acquiring vocabulary such as fluency, language-oriented and meaning-oriented learning. On the other hand, a learner with lower frequency vocabulary restricts himself to petty techniques such as use of dictionary, reading the word parts, using word cards and making word guessing from contexts.

Looking at the semantic, lexical and morphological similarities between derivations and collocation methods, and the patterns used to construct portmanteaus, there could be a possibility of developing such teaching and learning strategies for portmanteaus following the same practices used in the case of derivations and collocations. So far, no such study exists to provide evidence of such a possibility; however, this is quite feasible, as De Groot and colleagues (2016) sum up. They maintain that learning a word in its context should be totally understood with its 'semantic, syntactic, and collocation features' and that all vocabulary learning should occur in context, and presented in lexical and morphological sets. This is quite applicable to portmanteaus as well.

Research Objectives

Both the teaching and learning of portmanteaus in Saudi universities are currently unfamiliar with the construction of a blend or a portmanteau, since there is a lack of a systematic rationale despite a frequent recurrence of these structures in various datasets and corpora. This requires a conceptual analysis in line with psycholinguistics of bilingualism in general and a socio-cultural analysis of learning patterns in the Saudi EFL context in particular. Hence, word recognition and making correct lexical choices are issues that are faced consistently by Saudi students majoring in English language at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. This is aggravated by incorrect pedagogical practices and a lack of appropriate knowledge about learning processes of vocabulary and other lexical items such as blends, roots or stems, prefixes and suffixes, and other

morphological items. As a result, not only does the teacher fail to assign appropriate, need-based reading and writing tasks; students also have insufficient opportunities to practise reading and writing in the classroom as they fail to relate these skills with vocabulary building processes. This study aimed to fill such research gaps.

The objectives of this study were:

- 1 to identify various procedures required for the construction of portmanteaus
- 2 to identify such pedagogical practices that can assist vocabulary building among the Saudi learners and to suggest suitable instructional strategies
- 3 to find out how to align vocabulary learning with skills courses
- 4 to study a separate curriculum on vocabulary in Saudi universities
- 5 to devise a Vocabulary Acquisition Model (VAM) comprising discourse markers to make teaching and learning easier, with a special emphasis on portmanteaus and blend words.

Research Methodology

This study attempted to design a theoretical framework to be utilised for preparing an appropriate teaching methodology to teach vocabulary items, especially portmanteaus, consistent with the needs and requirements of the learners. Such a framework is consistent with the existing theoretical underpinnings and the procedures adopted to understand morphological, semantic and lexical construction of portmanteaus. The framework is an attempt to create a Vocabulary Acquisition Model (VAM), wherein learners are first made aware of the formation of words (viz. blends, derivations, collocations, etc.), before choosing the most appropriate learning method, such as guessing, high frequency and low frequency, or reading and speaking, until they acquire a good knowledge of vocabulary.

The model designed by the researchers in this study (Figure 1) for vocabulary acquisition in general and portmanteaus in particular deals with different aspects, starting from the language input where portmanteaus are met in different language contexts, and ending with the preferable deemed status of vocabulary acquisition. The strategies and operations taking place between these two input and output language practices are the most vital in the acquisition process, as they cover the linguistic component of morphology and phonology in the first phase, followed by the instructional strategies implemented by the teacher and the learner, and ending with the different indicators of acquiring the vocabulary items targeted. All through this learning and teaching process, there should be a kind of assessment of the different forms of practice, performance and achievements.

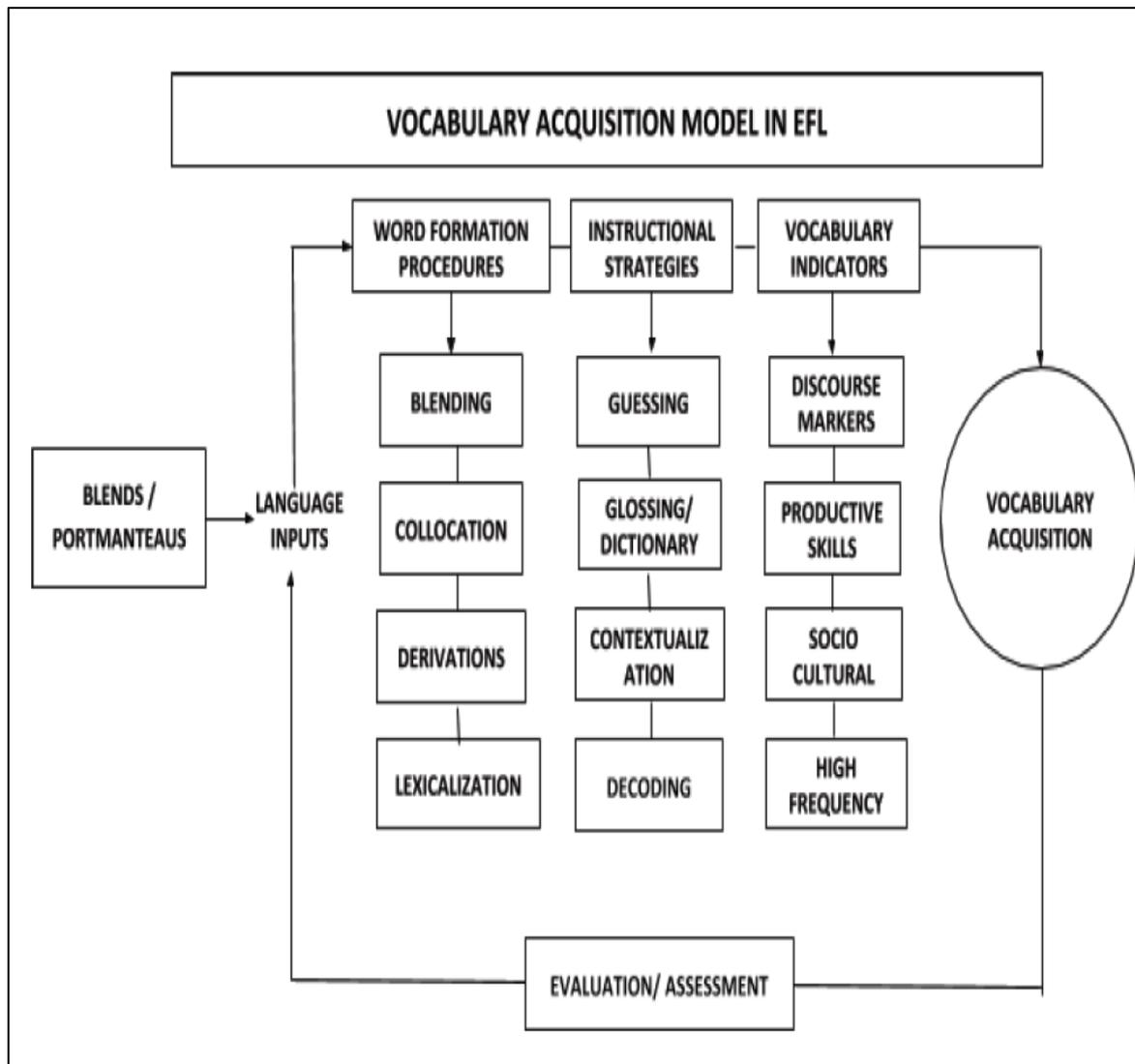


Figure 1. Vocabulary Acquisition Model

As discussed earlier, for effective acquisition of vocabulary items and portmanteaus, learners need to be familiar with the linguistic rules followed to build words: (1) the derivational and inflectional rules; (2) the different forms of building blend words and portmanteaus; and (3) how words operate in collocations to create new meanings. Once this knowledge is put into practice, learners' acquisition of new words is expected to improve remarkably. To put this knowledge into practice, vocabulary teachers should train their students to implement different Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs), which are claimed to increase vocabulary acquisition. Inspired by Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of VLSs, which includes five categories (determination, social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive), the model suggested in this study emphasises the sub-strategies of guessing word meaning through the word's structure, referring to glosses or dictionaries, using the context where the new word occurs to work out meaning, and decoding the new word.

The third component of the model deals with the indicators showing that vocabulary acquisition is taking place. These include the occurrence of new words/portmanteaus as discourse markers, the use of these words by learners in their productive language skills (speaking and writing), the use of these words in learners' daily life communication, and how frequently those words are used in learners' daily life.

The model also clarifies that the whole practice of learning new words/portmanteaus cannot proceed successfully unless learners and teachers perform continuous assessment (what Schmitt (1997) calls 'metacognitive strategy') of the effectiveness of the processes implemented, and the actual vocabulary acquisition attained. The practice suggested requires awareness of this holistic process where all components are interrelated and affected by each other.

Discussion

The current research has been deeply influenced by the cognitive framework of vocabulary learning expostulated by Nation (2001, 2006). This framework contains the three learner-oriented processes of noticing, retrieval and creation (generation). The first phase of noticing refers to 'giving attention to a word item' (Nation, 2001: 63). This process entails giving attention to decontextualised words as they emerge in a text, and trying to re-contextualise or rather derive a meaning or a better understanding of such words. The process of decontextualisation and recontextualisation could take place either consciously or subconsciously while listening or reading, or in a classroom while negotiating with the meaning of words during a presentation or when the teacher explains words either in translation, or in synonyms/antonyms or by definition (Nation, 2001).

Phase 2 is termed 'retrieval'; it involves capturing or retrieving a mental image of the meaning of words through a receptive or productive procedure. In the receptive methods, a learner identifies the form of the word and retrieves its meaning when the word is encountered in reading or listening. In the productive method, the learner conveys the meaning of the word through speaking and writing by retrieving their verbal and written form (Nation, 2001).

Phase 3 of vocabulary learning in Nation's classification is creative or generative use. It takes place when previously encountered words are subsequently or frequently come across or used in ways that differ from previous meetings with the word (Nation, 2001). Those new encounters push learners toward reconceptualisation of their knowledge of these words. This phase of vocabulary acquisition always requires new styles in both reading and listening (receptive skills), as well as generating new ways to utilise the newly acquired vocabulary in new contexts through writing and speaking (productive skill). As a result, a continuum may

be created that moves from low production (low frequency of words application) to high production (high frequency of words application).

A question arises here regarding how human memory functions and whether similar processes of noticing, retrieving and generative approaches can be used to master portmanteau words. One can form an opinion that contextualised vocabulary learning is more effective than learning words in isolation. For example, Oxford and Scarcella (1994) observe that while decontextualised learning (word lists or words in isolation) may help students memorise vocabulary for tests, students are likely to quickly forget words memorised from lists.

Gairns and Redman (1986: 87) maintain that EFL learners' mental lexicon is highly 'organised and efficient', as those learners are able to put together the lexical items with semantic sets and can use words with higher frequency in sociocultural contexts. Such higher frequency in the use of words is due to the repeated encounters of the words existing in their memory. This is consistent with the argument laid down by Craik and Tulving (1975), who reiterate that learners are likely to enhance their vocabulary, including the use of portmanteaus, by memorising words of higher frequency – that is, the words they encounter more frequently in their sociocultural contexts. It is, however, important to ensure that learners are able to visualise, conceptualise and contextualise the meaning of the word. Therefore, they should be involved in mental tasks involving detailed semantic processing rather than mere rote repetition.

Logically, words that occur frequently in texts are termed high-frequency words. The language teachers also prefer to teach with the help of high-frequency words, as this supports teaching and helps students to comprehend and develop vocabulary faster. Moreover, high-frequency words are also easy to recognise, so learners use them quickly without any hesitation. Teaching these kinds of words is significant for students, since they should include them in their vocabulary learning. On the contrary, low-frequency words are termed non-academic and non-technical, as they account for only 5 per cent of the words within a text and mostly comprise names of persons and places. A bigger challenge in this argument is to first find out whether portmanteaus are high-frequency or low-frequency words in a given context.

Nation (2001) observes that 'guessing within context' ideally suits the low-frequency words, and therefore 'guessing' becomes a good teaching strategy for low frequency words. However, Hulstijn (1997) and Hulstijn, Hollander and Greidanus (1996) state that guessing within context may be good as a reading technique, but not a vocabulary teaching strategy. This seems to be true since, in terms of portmanteaus that require lexical and semantic recognisability of the inputs, guessing can assist only in the form of incidental learning.

Holistically, guessing may not give the desired effect in learning portmanteaus but it can assist in the recognition of them as a vocabulary item.

Hulstijn (1997) suggests that learning and teaching of low-frequency words is more appropriate for SL/FL learners rather than L1 learners. Therefore, if instructors are able to focus on lexical and morphological patterns of portmanteaus, and look at them in the L2 or EFL context, guessing could become a good vocabulary-acquisition technique. Likewise, reading and listening, and speaking and writing can help to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Reading and listening improve all frequent encounters with unidentified words, while speaking and writing help learners to infer the meaning of words and apply them correctly.

Conclusion

This study was inspired by the fact that new English blends or portmanteaus are increasingly occurring in our daily life. While some native speakers of English are not aware of the underlying complex sources of some popular portmanteaus, such as ‘smog’ and ‘brunch’, students of English as a foreign language, such as those in Saudi Arabia, are expected to face real problems once they meet blends or portmanteaus, used identically in this study. Saudi students, like others across the world, are exposed to such portmanteaus not only in their academic life, but also in social media, business and technology contexts. Hence there is a great need to understand the use of portmanteaus in different contexts. If the undergraduate Saudi students are equipped with a strategy to analyse or interpret new portmanteaus and to recognise their source components, their language competence will improve and they will be able to communicate interactively (Benczes, 2009).

To sum up, learning and acquiring portmanteaus involves a juxtaposition of two lexemes or morphemes from two different words, and the ability to comprehend them together to recognise the existence of a new word, different from the two constituent words. A well-planned teaching and learning strategy is required for which a VAM should be designed according to the needs of learners and based on their particular contexts.

The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study is significant as it correlates portmanteaus with VLSs and other models of vocabulary enhancement, such as those applicable to derivations and collocations. The study has shown how such a correlation could enhance vocabulary learning even beyond contexts only if the learners are able to decode the embedded lexical and morphological structures in the constructions of portmanteaus. This study has also succeeded in designing a VAM, which is yet another theoretical contribution.



The practical significance of this study is evident in the motivation among teachers and learners for whom the VAM would act as a teaching tool. This study would also offer a useful insight to students of Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University to enhance their language proficiency in academic and sociocultural contexts. Last but not least, it is hoped that this study will draw the attention of curriculum designers, academics and researchers in the field of EFL, particularly in vocabulary learning, to try out this VAM and apply the vocabulary learning strategies discussed in this study.

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