Chapter 6
A New Era of Applying CALL to Enhance EFL Learners’ Lexical Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an overview of several software programs, which can be used to teach and acquire lexical knowledge. First, GSL Builder is aimed directly at supporting the acquisition of high frequency words. AWL Builder is generally used to develop knowledge of academic words. Shanbei provides opportunities for learning low-frequency words. Word Engine is specifically for learning the words needed for passing the TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC, SAT, and GRE tests. CAVOCA takes learners through different stages of vocabulary development: deduction, consolidation, and long-term retention. V-admin enables teachers to keep track of their students’ vocabulary development. The integration of these tools can facilitate EFL learners’ vocabulary learning. Teacher beliefs concerning the role of technology for teaching vocabulary are important. Teachers should explore how to effectively integrate vocabulary building technology into their teaching practice. In the future, more effort needs to be made to creating a clearer conceptualization of computer-assisted vocabulary learning (CAVL).

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INTRODUCTION

There is a consensus that a significant amount of vocabulary is essential for adequate language comprehension. For example, Nation (2006) proposed that understanding 6,000-7000 different word families is necessary for adequately comprehending spoken English and understanding 8,000-9,000 different word families is needed for adequately comprehending written texts. In developing learners’ vocabulary, some previous studies focused on intentional learning, which is any learning activity that a learner undertakes with the intention of committing words into memory (Hu & Nation, 2000; Moskovsky, Jiang, Libert, & Fagan, 2015). However, the amount of class time available to learn every word explicitly is limited. In addition, native English speakers understand an average of 22,000 to 32,000 vocabulary words. Advanced English learners have an average receptive vocabulary knowledge of 11,000 words (Nation, 2013). One must bear in mind that words in such large quantities cannot be learned solely by explicit vocabulary instruction.

Many words may have been picked up incidentally in an incremental way because the language learner may come across them frequently in a wide range of contexts. This may form learners’ lexical repertoire, which helps them acquire other new words. Accordingly, researchers have resorted to incidental vocabulary acquisition, which refers to the acquisition of a word without the conscious intention to commit the word to memory (Hulstijn, 2013). However, the new words that can be incidentally acquired by students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is limited (Schmitt, 2010). Consequently, some researchers (e.g., Pellicer-Sanchez & Schmitt, 2010; Teng & He, 2015) have recommended a learning method that combines incidental learning and explicit vocabulary exercises. They argue that, although reading does contribute to the incidental learning of vocabulary, a supplementary regime with explicit vocabulary-enhancing exercises yields more vocabulary gains. However, in a recent study conducted by Teng (2015a), combining incidental learning and explicit vocabulary exercises only led to partial word knowledge. In order to resolve this problem, researchers and teachers have increasingly invested more efforts in applying technology for teaching and learning vocabulary both inside and outside the classroom.

There are several reasons for this. First, some important low-frequency words occur rarely in authentic L2 input. This indicates that most learners will not have enough repetition from which they can acquire their word knowledge from context using an incremental learning process. Second, the immediate context of unknown words often does not contain the clues to its meaning. However, EFL learners seldom ascertain the wider contexts that cumulatively illustrate its semantic properties. Third, some authentic texts contains too many unknown words. Learners may encounter a lexical constraint in making contextual deduction of the word’s mean-
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