Vocabulary Learning Strategies
Theory and Practice

17th October 2015
Alpen-Adria Universität
Klagenfurt
Austria
"Too often our focus has been on what students *should be doing*; we must begin by asking what students *are doing.*"

(Hosenfeld, 1976, S. 128)
Introduction

Learning vocab like this?

This does not work!!
Research focus
Vocabulary learning

5 essential steps für learning new words (Hatch & Brown, 1995: 372ff.):

- encountering new words
- getting the word form
- getting the word meaning
- consolidating word form and meaning in memory
- using the word

Explicit vocabulary learning

Incidental vocabulary learning

Introduction of new lexical items

Encountering lexical items in meaningful interaction

Vocabulary "cramming"

Repetitive encounter

Using the new vocabulary in context
Purpose of the study

Gaining differentiated insights into individual learning processes during vocabulary learning at home (main focus: consolidation of vocabulary for EFL)

Conclusions for research on learning strategies and FL methodology
Definition

Learning strategies – not actions but patterns which the learner follows in order to cope with learning demands. They are used flexibly according to the learner's prior knowledge, the demands put on him and his aims and are hardly tangible. They can, however, be inferred by the actions and learning techniques employed by the learner which the learner uses to achieve a certain learning goal (Haudeck, 1996; Nold, Haudeck & Schnaitmann, 1997).
Strategies for vocab consolidation

Metacognitive strategies:
- planning
- monitoring
- evaluating

Cognitive strategies:
- repetition
- structuring, grouping
- elaboration

(Haudeck 2008:31)
Results of a previous study on vocabulary learning strategies

Pupils (n = 142, grade 8, RS) answer questions on their general vocabulary learning in written form.

Metacognitive learning strategies
- Surface level memory processing
- Repetition
- Structuring, grouping
- (Elaboration)

Cognitive learning strategies

Desiderata of research
- Approaching the learning process (time + space)
- Oral data collection
- Learner portraits / case studies
- Consideration of test formats at school
Research project

Foreign language vocabulary learning outside the classroom: A qualitative study of learning strategies and learning techniques in grades 5 and 8.
Research design

Foreign language vocabulary learning outside the classroom: A qualitative study of learning strategies and learning techniques in grades 5 and 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 12)</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Analysis of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 5</strong></td>
<td>Before beginning of school year: Semi-structured interviews with - pupils - their mothers</td>
<td>Observation of vocabulary learning activity at home (4 x each participant between Sept. – Jan.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina (RS)</td>
<td>Interview with pupil after first week of English at school</td>
<td>Interview immediately after observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas (RS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andreas (Gym)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kai (Gym) ◊</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa (Gym)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 8</strong></td>
<td>Audio-Diaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabi (RS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna (RS) ∞</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armin (Gym) ∞</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark (Gym)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susanne (Gym) ◊</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Jele (Gym) ●</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nele (Gym) ●</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis of Data**
- Transcription of audio-data
- Qualitative Content Analysis according to Mayring, using the computer programme ATLAS.ti
  1. Cross-case analysis of audio-diaries:
     - inductive development of categories for vocab consolidation
     - theory based summary
     - subjective assessment of the learnability of lexical items
  2. Selected pupil portraits (incl. learning biography, attitudes, interests, achievement tests etc.)
The Audio-Diary Guideline

Advance organizers
1. Recap of previous lesson
2. Homework
3. Time needed
4. Emotional reaction to activity

Vocab consolidation
5. Workload
6. Learning activity as a whole
7. 2 lexical items chosen by the learner
8. Aspects that facilitate learning
9. Negotiating difficulties

Leisure time contact with English (10 + 11)
6. Wie hast du die Wörter gelernt? Beschreibe bitte, was du ganz genau gemacht hast.
[How did you learn the words? Explain exactly what you did!]

7. Wähle aus den Wörtern, die du heute gelernt hast, zwei aus und beschreibe, wie du versucht hast, sie dir einzuprägen.
[Choose two of them and describe how you tried to keep them in mind.]
The Audio-Diary
Analysis results across all cases

**Question 6**

Vocabulary learning activity as a whole
- General description
  - "classic" techniques of surface level memory processing, e.g. reading, writing and "covering" (partly repeated)

**Questions 7 und 8**

- Individual lexical item
  - specific processing of lexical item according to its formal/semantic characteristics
  - manifold "deep" interconnection with
    - linguistic prior knowledge (mental lexicon of the learner)
    - the world knowledge of the learner
The Audio-Diary
Analysis results across all cases

**Macro-perspective**

Vocabulary learning activity as a whole

→ General description

→ "classic" techniques of surface level memory processing, e.g. reading, writing and "covering" (partly repeated)

**Micro-perspective**

Individual lexical item

→ specific processing of lexical item according to its formal/semantic characteristics

→ manifold "deep" interconnection with

→ linguistic prior knowledge (mental lexicon of the learner) and

→ the world knowledge of the learner
The Audio-Diary
Sample quotations

Jele (grade 8, 7.12.):

Frage 6:
Also ich hab' die Wörter heut' nicht geschrieben, weil es mir heute einfach gestunken hat. Ich werde die dann nachholen, aber heute ganz gewiss nicht. Dann hab' ich die linke Seite zugedeckt und hab' mir das Deutsche anguguckt und hab' mir überlegt, was das jetzt im Englischen heißt. Und das hab' ich dann andersherum gemacht, ich hab' mir das Englische anguguckt und mir überlegt, was das im Deutschen heißt. (11:51-52)

Frage 7:
Also settler das heißt Siedler, Siedlerin: Da hab' ich mir so eine lange Eselsbrücke gemacht: settler hört sich an wie Sattel, und einen Sattel, das haben die Menschen benutzt und vor allem die Siedler sind früher, so weit ich weiß, halt oft mit dem Pferd rumgeritten und ja daraus wurde halt settler, Sattler und dann Siedler. (11:105)
The Audio-Diary
Sample quotations

Kai (grade 5, 18.11.)
Beim *number* da weiß ich auch, weil die schreibt man ja /ˈnʌmbər/ und dann denk ich gleich immer an *Nummer*. (4:24)

Lisa (grade 5, 16.11.):  
Also a *hundred* /ˈhʌndrəd/ and two hab' ich mir schwer merken können, dann hab' ich einfach gesagt: Du Lisa, jetzt machst du das einfach mal so, du merkst dir (buchstabiert) H - U - N - D - *Hund* und dann kannst du (buchstabiert) R - E - D - *rot der Hund ist rot - ein Hund rot und zwei*. Also a *hundred* /ˈhʌndrəd/ and two, a *hundred and two* hab' ich mir dann auch besser merken können. (5:21)
The Audio-Diary

Results of cross-case analysis

Comparing FL beginners (grade 5) with advanced FL learners (grade 8):

- 8th graders give differentiated descriptions of their vocab learning activities.

- 5th graders: Interlingual transfer German – English

  8th graders: Use of manifold grouping strategies based on their (bi/tri-)lingual pre-knowledge → inter- + intralingual transfer (e.g. application of word formation rules, morphological, syntactical and contrastive analyses).
The Audio-Diary
Results of cross-case analysis

Comparing FL beginners (grade 5) with advanced learners (grade 8):

- 5th graders: focus mainly on formal aspects (esp. correct spelling).
  
  8th graders: use semantic networks in their mental lexicon.

- 5th graders: Their learning activities are influenced more strongly by the emotions resulting from the degree of their self-esteem and their teacher's feedback.
Evaluation of the audio-diary

- Qualitative data collection tool, complementary to observation and interview
- Getting closer to the everyday life of children and adolescents (use of oral language only)
- Less mental and physical effort for the participants compared with open, written questions
- More scope for individual variation in task approach and self-monitoring
- Enhancing (self-)awareness
Case analyses / Learner portraits
Supplementation and differentiation of cross-case results

- Embedding learning activities in individual situation (school + family)
- Interdependency between (a) learning strategies and learner characteristics and (b) experiences and demands in school and extra-school contexts
- Explorative basis for generating hypotheses
Andreas, Gym., gr. 5
Interview and observation data

- follows teacher instructions (what learning techniques to be used) precisely
- inconsistencies with school book are corrected
- influence of test formats
Andreas, Gym., gr. 5
Interview and observation data

Influence of the test formats
Conclusions

For learning strategies research:

- Consideration of both the macro- and the micro-perspective during data collection

- Use of audio-diaries as reasonable alternative to learning journals in written form (personal and content-appropriate method of enquiry)

- Case-studies and learner portraits complement and differentiate results of cross-case analyses
Conclusions

For FL methodology:

- Traditional and handed down conventions about how to learn vocabulary in and outside the classroom have to be critically reflected.

- Providing rich target language input and appropriate incubation periods for specific lexical items promotes incidental vocabulary acquisition.

- Approaches towards longer-term development of vocab learning strategies
References

Thank you for your attention!

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