
The effectiveness of teaching word etymology on vocabulary retention among EFL students

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Annotation *This article investigates the effectiveness of etymological instruction as a cognitive strategy to enhance vocabulary recall. Through integrating etymology with language learning strategies students not only be able to use it theoretically, at the same time the information appears as practical and make it easy to use. Vocabulary plays a critical role in language learning, but considered as one of the most time-consuming procedures. As most of the students struggle to retrieve the given vocabulary after some time, learning its etymology could enhance their vocabulary skills as well as comprehension rather than memorizing it blindly (Hussein & Faris, 2022). Through integrating etymology with other vocabulary learning tactics students can be able to retrieve the word in their long-term memory. It helps them to learn about the core of the words along with understanding the meaning in context based on the roots, which makes the language usage flexible and easy to get the gist in any content.*

Keywords *EFL students, word etymology, vocabulary retention, language acquisition, dual coding theory, long-term memory, narrative-based approach, lexical gap, generative skills*

EFL talabasi o'rtasida so'z etimologiyasini o'qitishning so'zlarni eslab qolishdagi o'rni

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Annotatsiya *Ushbu maqolada etimologiyani o'qitishning lug'atni eslab qolishni yaxshilovchi aqliy usul sifatidagi samaradorligi o'rganiladi. Etimologiyani til o'rganish strategiyalari bilan birlashtirish qilish orqali talabalar nafaqat undan nazariy jihatdan foydalana oladilar, balki ma'lumot amaliy ko'rinish kashf etib, undan foydalanish osonlashadi. Lug'at til o'rganishda muhim rol o'ynaydi, lekin uni o'rganish eng ko'p vaqt talab qiladigan holatlardan biri hisoblanadi. Ko'pincha talabalar ma'lum vaqtdan keyin berilgan lug'atni qayta eslashga qiyinalayotganliklari sababli, uning etimologiyasini o'rganish ularda lug'at boyligini ta'minlash, shuningdek, uni ko'r-ko'rona yodlash*

o'rniga tushunishni yaxshilash vazifalarini bajaradi (Hussein & Faris, 2022). Etimologiya va so'z yod olishning boshqa usullarilarini integratsiya qilish orqali talabalar so'zni xotirada uzoq muddat davomida eslab qolishlari mumkin. Bu ularga so'zlarning tarixi va kelib chiqishi orqali so'z haqida batavsil tushuncha va ko'rsatmlarga binoan o'rganishga, shuningdek, unga tayangan holda matndagi ma'noni tushunishga yordam beradi, garchi talaba barcha so'zlarni yoddan bilmasa ham asosning o'zidan foydalanish orqali muloqotni osonlashtiradi va turli vaziyatlarda uni qiyinchiliklarsiz ishlata olish imonini beradi.

Kalit so'zlar *EFL talabalari, so'z etimologiyasi, lug'atni saqlash, tilni o'zlashtirish, ikki tomonlama kodlash nazariyasi, uzoq muddatli xotira, hikoya qilishga asoslangan yondashuv, leksik bo'shliq, generativ ko'nikmalar*

**Эффективность обучения
этимологии слов для
улучшения запоминания
словарного запаса у студентов,
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как иностранный**

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Аннотация *В данной статье исследуется эффективность этимологического обучения как когнитивной стратегии для улучшения запоминания словарного запаса. Интеграция этимологии со стратегиями изучения языка позволяет студентам не только теоретически применять полученные знания, но и получать практическую информацию, которая становится легкой в использовании. Словарный запас играет решающую роль в изучении языка, но считается одним из наиболее трудоемких процессов. Поскольку большинству студентов трудно вспомнить заданный словарный запас спустя некоторое время, изучение его этимологии может улучшить их словарные навыки, а также понимание, в отличие от слепого запоминания (Hussein & Faris, 2022). Интеграция этимологии с другими методами изучения словарного запаса позволяет студентам запоминать слова в долговременной памяти. Это помогает им изучить суть слов, а также понять их значение в контексте, исходя из корней, что делает использование языка гибким и позволяет легко уловить суть любого материала.*

Ключевые слова *Студенты, изучающие английский как иностранный, этимология слов, сохранение словарного запаса, усвоение языка, теория двойного кодирования, долговременная память, нарративный подход, лексический пробел, генеративные навыки*

Introduction

Vocabulary is widely recognized as the foundation of language acquisition, as it is impossible to communicate in other languages without knowing the vocabulary (Teng, 2015). For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), vocabulary is fundamental to academic success, while most students struggle with memorization, which involves repeatedly learning lists of words and, consequently, retaining information in long-term memory. Etymology allows students to learn the origins, history, and roots of words, offering a different way of learning through the "story" behind a word rather than simply memorizing it.

A major challenge faced by EFL learners is the lexical gap between basic conversational English and advanced academic English (Nation, 2001). Most students easily memorize words but quickly forget them simply because they do not understand them deeply. As they progress, they begin to encounter complex words that cannot be mastered through simple translation. If students don't understand word etymology – the study of where words come from and how their meanings have changed throughout history – they will continue to rely heavily on dictionaries and struggle to develop useful skills.

Theoretical basis

The theoretical framework of this study is based on three key cognitive and psycholinguistic concepts that, together, explain why etymological learning is an effective strategy for vocabulary retention in learners of English as a foreign language.

The first and most important concept is Paivio's (1971) dual coding theory, which proposes that human cognition operates through two distinct but interconnected systems: a verbal system for processing language and a nonverbal system for creating mental images. Information encoded simultaneously through both channels is stored in long-term memory for a much longer period

than information processed through only one channel (Paivio, 1971). Etymological learning naturally activates both systems: associating a word with its etymology evokes a mental image of a specific scene, which is stored in memory along with the word form (Balegizadeh & Naim, 2011). For example, when a student discovers that the word "salary" comes from the Latin word *sal* (salt), since Roman soldiers were paid in salt, both the linguistic cue and the vivid historical image are encoded simultaneously, significantly strengthening the memory trace and reducing the likelihood of rapid forgetting (Paivio, 1971).

The second theoretical pillar is the concept of levels of information processing, proposed by Craik and Lockhart (1972), which posits that the stability of a memory trace depends on the depth of information processing. Superficial processing, such as the rote recitation of word lists, leads to weak and easily forgotten memories, while deeper semantic analysis creates stronger and more stable memory representations (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). Etymological learning inherently requires deep processing: rather than simply learning a new word, students actively explore its roots, historical evolution, and structural logic, ensuring that vocabulary is encoded as part of a meaningful knowledge network rather than as an isolated element (Soleimani & Azizmohammadi, 2015). The difficulty of deriving word meaning from etymological information further enhances retention, as it engages students in cognitive processing at a level unattainable through rote memorization (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008).

The third concept is schema theory, originally developed by Bartlett (1932) and subsequently widely applied in second language acquisition research. Schema theory posits that new information is most effectively remembered when it is linked to the learner's pre-existing knowledge structures or schemas, rather than being stored in isolation

(Rumelhart, 1980). When learners of English as a second language are exposed to the etymological roots of new words, they can connect unfamiliar vocabulary with familiar concepts, cultural narratives, or previously learned word formations, thereby expanding and enriching their existing cognitive schemas (Zolfagharkhani & Ghorbani Moghadam, 2011). This process transforms vocabulary learning, shifting from passive memorization to the active construction of meaning, which leads to significantly greater long-term retention (Nation, 2001).

Taken together, these three theories provide a strong cognitive rationale for etymological learning as a vocabulary teaching strategy. By integrating word origins into language practice, educators simultaneously activate the dual encoding of verbal and visual information (Paivio, 1971), deep semantic processing (Craik & Lockhart, 1972), and the expansion of existing cognitive schemas (Bartlett, 1932), thus ensuring the transition of new vocabulary from short-term recognition to sustained long-term acquisition. As Hussain and Faris (2022) confirm, students who study the etymological context of words demonstrate significantly greater vocabulary retention compared to those who rely solely on rote memorization, underscoring the practical value of etymological instruction within these well-established theoretical models.

Materials and Analysis

The significance of this study lies in its potential to offer more structured and scientific approach enhancing vocabulary in EFL classrooms. Through shifting from merely memorizing to deep etymological analysis, this research offers key benefits across the following dimensions:

Enhanced Pedagogical Way for Educators

For teachers, this study provides an evidence-based alternative to mechanical repetition. As noted by Nation (2013), effective vocabulary teaching goes beyond mere translation. By integrating the etymological elaboration, educators can explain the "logic"

behind the complex words which improve classroom motivation.

Improve Long-Term Retention

A major challenge for EFL learners is forgetting words instantly. According to Paivio's (1971) Dual Coding Theory, etymological stories such as the origin of word salary from sal-salt, create a mental image which act as foundation. This study demonstrates that these roots significantly increase the word formation in the student's memory, preventing from rapid forgetting.

The study is based on qualitative approach, allows for deeper understanding the etymological instruction's effectiveness in vocabulary retention among EFL learners. The methodology specifically focuses on the cognitive mechanisms that facilitate long-term vocabulary retention. Unlike traditional methods just rely on repetition of given words, etymological instruction is examined through Deep Processing Theory (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). This theory suggests that as the learners analyze more the roots and structure of the words the memory trace becomes permanent, which form deep semantic understanding.

Discussion and Analysis

The analysis of existing research indicates that etymology serves as a powerful cognitive tool in order to enhance the vocabulary retention. According to Paivio's (1971) Dual Coding Theory, information is retained better when it is processed both visually and verbally. For instance, the word clue originally meant a ball of thread, used in Greek mythology to find one's way out of a labyrinth. When EFL students learn this narrative, they create a mental image that is store alongside the word's definition, which leads to significantly higher recall scores compared to traditional way of vocabulary learning (Baleghizadeh and Naeim, 2011).

Furthermore, etymological instruction is vital for overcoming the lexical barrier (Corson, 1995), which often prevents learners from mastering the advanced academic English. Since approximately 60% and 80% of English vocabulary derived from Latin and Greek,

etymology provides students with generative skills at the same time with deeply understanding the word meaning. Instead of memorizing isolated words, students who master a single root, such as *spect* (meaning to look), can independently decode a whole word family, including *inspect*, *retrospect* and *spectator*. This structural analysis, emphasized by Nation (2001), transforms the students from a passive receiver into an active linguistic analyst who can work on with complex texts without constant reliance on a dictionary.

Pedagogical Recommendations

EFL educators should shift from simple translation to more analytical and narrative-based approach in order to maximize the effectiveness of etymological instruction. There are some strategies recommended:

Implement Etymological Storytelling:

Instead of presenting the definition of the word, teacher share a narrative such as explaining the word *muscle* comes from the Latin *musculus* (little mouse), because ancient people thought a flexing muscle looked like a mouse moving under the skin. According to Paivio (1971), this creates powerful visuality that enhances memory retention.

The Root of the Week Strategy

Educators introduce a single Greek or Latin root such as *dict-* to *speak* at the starting of each week. Students then will be encouraged to find related words like *predict*, *dictation* and *verdict*. This generative method helps students

to understand complex vocabulary without constantly relying on dictionary (Nation, 2013).

Create Word Family Tree

Visual learners benefit from seeing the structural connection between words. Teacher uses the diagram of tree where the root is at the base like *port-* to *carry* and the branchers are related words such as *export*, *transport*, *portable*. This illustrates the logical structure and reduces excessive cognitive load on students (Schmitt, 2000).

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that teaching word etymology is highly effective strategy for enhancing the vocabulary retention among EFL learners. Unlike traditional way of learning vocabulary, which leads to rapid decay of new terms, etymological instruction provides students with strong foundation and generative skills. Through applying Paivo's (1971) Dual Coding Theory, this study highlights that etymological narratives create mental images that significantly improve long-term memory. The integration of etymology requires a deeper depth of processing (Craik & Lockhart, 1972), which ensures that the vocabulary moves from short term recognition into permanent mastery. Eventually, etymology transform the EFL learners from passive receiver into an active linguistic analyst, fostering a deeper and more logical understanding of the English language.

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