

**An investigation into Vocabulary Learning Strategies used by Fifth
semester English Department Students**

Ali AL- Bashir Almabrouk Algrai Dep. Of Eng. College of Education El-
دراسة حول استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات التي يستخدمها طلاب قسم اللغة
الإنجليزية في الفصل الدراسي الخامس
أ. علي البشير المبروك الجراي - كلية التربية العجيلات - جامعة الزاوية

المخلص :

يتناول هذا البحث دراسة استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات التي يستخدمها بعض متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في ليبيا. تم توزيع استبيان مسحي على 45 طالبا مسجلين في الفصل الدراسي الخامس بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية بالعجيلات. تشير نتائج هذا البحث إلى اختلاف في تواتر وأنواع استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات المستخدمة من قبل المشاركين. كما أنها تشير إلى عدم وعي الطلاب ببعض استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات المفيدة. يوصي الباحث المعلمين والطلاب بتطوير فهمهم لاستراتيجيات تعلم المفردات الأكثر فعالية، وهذا من شأنه أن يؤدي إلى تطوير كفاءة الطلاب اللغوية.

**An investigation into Vocabulary Learning Strategies used by Fifth
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Ali AL- Bashir Almabrouk Algrai Dep. Of Eng. College of Education El-
ejellat. University of Zawia.E.mail.a.algrai@zu.edu.ly

Abstract

This research paper investigates the vocabulary Learning strategies used by some Libyan EFL learners. A survey questionnaire was distributed among 45 students who were enrolled for the fifth semester in the English department in El-ejellat faculty of education.

The findings of this research indicate a version in the frequency and the types of the Vocabulary Learning Strategies used by the participants. They also indicate the students' lack of awareness of some useful Vocabulary Learning strategies.

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The researcher recommends the teachers and the students to develop their understanding of more effective vocabulary Learning Strategies at this will lead to the development of the students' language proficiency.

Background of the study:

Learning vocabulary is considered as an indispensable part of language learning and production as limited knowledge of vocabulary results in difficulties in production as well as in comprehension of language. Concerning the complexity of this issue, vocabulary learning strategies is considered as a part of language learning strategies seems to be very crucial for language learning. Therefore, the awareness of these strategies is important for both teachers and students. Fan, (2003) argues that vocabulary learning strategies consist of five steps: (1) encountering the new word, (2) getting a visual or auditory image of the word, (3) learning the meaning of the new word, (4) making a strong link between the form and the meaning of the word and, (5) using the word.

Although there is no taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies adopted by the most researchers in the field, they all highlight the importance of enhancing language learners' knowledge and understanding of these strategies and the ways of using them effectively.

Statement of the problem:

Learning from their experience as EFL learners in the context of this research, the researchers observed that students in their department use only a limited number of vocabulary learning strategies which negatively affects their production as well as their comprehension of language.

Aims of the research:

This research aims to:

Highlight the importance of enhancing EFL learners' awareness of vocabulary learning strategies.

Develop EFL teachers' and learners' understanding of the most effective vocabularies learning strategies and how they can be usefully employed for improving production and comprehension in language learning.

Research questions:

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Q1-What are the most commonly vocabulary learning strategies used by fifth semester students in the department of English?

Literature Review:

This chapter explains the research issues related to the investigation of the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL learners in el-ejellat, Libya. It introduces the main types of vocabularies learning strategies especially those that are popular among Libyan EFL learners.

Marian & Heshmatifar, (2013) refer to two kinds of vocabulary learning strategies classification which are discovery strategies and consolidation they are said "discovery strategies used to uncover the meaning of the words presented for the learner for the first time while consolidation strategies are applied to help the learners internalize the meaning when he\she encounters the word afterwards".

They said these strategies divided into five groups:

1-determination strategies: this strategy helps the learners to guess the meaning of new vocabulary by themselves rather than asking a teacher or a partner for help.

2-ocial strategies: this strategy depends on engaging learner with others for discussion and interaction.

3-memory strategies: which help learners to learn new words by establish a rapport between current of previous knowledge with the new word.

4-contative strategies: in this point the learners are not engaging in mental processing but they are engaging in mechanical processing.

5-metacontative strategies: it is about process like make decision, monitoring and evaluating learner's progress.

Non-Dictionary strategies for discovering the meaning of new words:

Discovering the meaning of new words refers to learners' strategies for arriving at meanings of unfamiliar items. This aspect is the first step in vocabulary learning and is regarded as the most important for learning new words, since how the learner learns a word depends on how he/she discovers its meaning: "all learners must get the meaning of words in some manner, or the words can never be considered truly learned"(Hatch &Brown,1995:385). To discover the meanings of new words, learners may refer to one or more

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sources and they may employ one strategy or several. This depends on various factors: perceived word difficulty, word importance, the source consulted the context where the word has been met, the learning environment (in class or out of class), the learners themselves (learning styles, motivation, and study habits).

Ahmed (1989) found that his subjects used the following strategies in addition to dictionary use to discover the meanings of new words: asking classmates, guessing, asking the teacher, enquiring about the meaning by asking for an English paraphrase or synonym, asking for the Arabic equivalent, asking for a sentence showing word usage, and group work. Moreover, Scholfield, (1997) claims that the meanings of words are not simply either known or not known by second language learners; he points out that there is sometimes an intermediate state where the students experience a lack of confidence in their understanding. In this case, the students may refer to sources other than those they usually consult.

Guessing, which have been widely referred to in most classification systems as a cognitive strategy (Rubin 1981) is one of the most important discovery strategies. Haastrup, (1987:197) defines guessing as a process that involves making informed guesses as to the meaning of an utterance in the light of all available linguistic cues in combination with the learner's general knowledge of the world, her awareness of the situation and her relevant linguistic knowledge. However, although guessing involves semantic treatment of the input, some researchers (Arnaud & Sauvignon 1997) consider it as a reading strategy rather than a vocabulary learning strategy. In this research, it has been decided to include it. Elshout-Moherand aalen-Kapteijns, (1987) investigated the mental process involved in the process of vocabulary learning through guessing, and claimed that the process of guessing word meanings is based on explicit mental operation with regular patterns and that the learner's existing knowledge plays a vital rule in the acquisition of new words.

Regarding asking others, students may differ in the types of question or information they look for. Some students may have an idea of the meaning of a given item, but they ask in order to confirm their knowledge or to get

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further information about the item so as to be confident when dealing with it in the future. Other second language researchers (Jacobs, Dufon & Hong, 1994) have investigated the use of glosses while reading as source of vocabulary learning.

Dictionary use:

Dictionary use is one type of strategy for using resources which is regarded as cognitive in most classification systems (O'Malley & Chamot 1990; Oxford 1990). Although dictionary use is considered to be one form of discovering the meaning of new words, in this research it has been dealt with as a separate category. Thus, students have been asked to report in detail how they use their dictionaries to learn Arabic vocabulary items, (see interview guide, Appendix 5).

Scholfield, (1997) argues that dictionary use deserves more attention from SLA researchers than it has so far received. Baxter, (1980:329) also maintains that dictionary use is an important factor in the shaping of students' vocabulary behavior, and can facilitate the learning of foreign vocabulary, (Lupescu 1993). Moreover, knowing more about process of how dictionaries are used can lead to more effective dictionary design (Schmitt & McCarthy 1997). In the TAFL context, not much is known about foreign students' use of Arabic dictionaries, and dictionary use skills have tended to be neglected. As a result, one of the aims of this research is to gain insights into the strategies associated with dictionary use employed by learners of Arabic.

It should be noted that using an Arabic dictionary is a more demanding activity than in the case of English, where all that is required to find any word is knowledge of the alphabet. Using Arabic dictionaries efficiently requires knowledge of morphology as well as of the alphabet, because the words in Arabic dictionaries are arranged in the alphabetical order of the roots from which they are derived. However, a description of the organizational principles of Arabic dictionaries is not within the scope of this investigation.

In the TESOL context, publishers have developed monolingual dictionaries for L2 students which give details guidance on grammar, pronunciation, and

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usage; they also provide definition written in controlled, simplified vocabulary, as well as specific examples of words in context (Carter,1987). The monolingual dictionary designed for non-native speakers does not seem to be common in TAFL, let alone bilingualized dictionaries which contain both the monolingual information about a word and its translation into the learner's mother tongue (Laufer &Kimmel 1997). According to Sieny and Kashu (1995), there are 324 dictionaries for non-native speakers of Arabic, most of which are bilingual dictionaries. There are only two monolingual Arabic dictionaries that are intended for non-native speakers, and one of these is designed for both native and non-native Arabic speakers. It should be noted that the availability of a dictionary may affect its use.

Note-taking:

Note-taking, which is the third category in the present classification of vocabulary learning strategies, is a cognitive strategy which is not generally considered to be as central to vocabulary learning as, say, dictionary use or memorization techniques. But it has been found to be among the cognitive strategies most frequently used by second language learners. For example, in a study of high school ESL students carried out by O'Malley et al (1985), note-taking was one of the most frequent cognitive strategies used by ESL learners. With specific reference to vocabulary strategy research, Kojic-Sabo and Lightbown found that that the note-take strategy was used very frequently, and some students kept elaborate written records of new words as to review them more easily, while others took notes to aid memorization. Al-Qarni also found that his subjects used the note-taking strategy frequently, recording new items in a vocabulary note book or in the margins of the textbook. As a result, taking notes of a new vocabulary items seems to be "quite an important part of language learning for many students"(McCarthy 1990:127). Furthermore, understanding how foreign language learners organize their notes is one way of understanding how they group words.

According to White (1996), there are three views regarding the effects of note-taking on learning. According the first view, note-taking is seen as effective independent of review since it increases attention and helps with

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the encoding of materials. The second view is that students' notes serve principally as a means of recording information for later review. The third view holds that note-taking is a generative activity that encourages students to build connections between what is presented and what they know. In this research note-taking is seen to be used for all three purposes: students may record new items to help them encode the words, to use their notes for reviewing, and to build connections between new words and previously learnt words.

Memorization:

Memorization means any technique used by the learner to commit words to memory in order to be able to retrieve them when needed, regardless of whether this technique is linked to mental manipulation. The storage and retrieval of new words is very important aspect of vocabulary learning. Memorization techniques help learners store in their memory the lexical items they learn; thus enlarging their vocabulary knowledge. These techniques also enable learners to retrieve words from memory when they need to use them for comprehension or production.

There is considerable amount of research on how students retain L2 vocabulary by using certain strategies, in recognition of the fact that the long-term retention of new words is one of words is essential to the expansion of one's vocabulary size. Cohen (1987) lists various ways of attempting to commit new vocabulary to memory including rote repetition, noting structure (analyzing the word according to its root, affixes and inflections as a way to understand its meaning), semantic strategies (thinking of synonyms so as to build a network of inter-linking concepts, clustering words by topic group or type of verb, or linking the word to the sentence in which it was found or to another sentence), and the use of mnemonic device. Stoller and Grabe, (1993) also review several powerful memory techniques, including semantic feature analysis, semantic mapping, and keyword method.

Moreover, considerable work has been done on mnemonic techniques as memorization strategies. The term mnemonic means "aiding the memory" (Higbee,1979). According to Levin, (1981:65), mnemonic techniques

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"involve physically transforming to be learned materials into a form that makes them easier to learn' 'Cohen, (1987) claims that mnemonic aids are most beneficial in successfully guiding students to remember L2 vocabulary. In his review of mnemonic techniques, Thompson, (1987:54) concludes that"(w) hat is needed today is line of research which involves naturalistic observations in real environments where learners use spontaneously generated memorization strategies". This is what have been done in this research of vocabulary learning strategies, which has documented the memorization strategies reported by AFL learners.

Use of context:

From using the context, we can guess the meaning of new vocabulary, Lawson J & Hogbrn, D (1996:105) "writers such as Moulton (1966), Twaddle, (2980), Schoutenvan Parreren (cited in Mondrian & Wit-De-Boer,1991), (Sternberg, (1987, and Krrashen, (1989) have placed considerable emphasis on the value of reading and the importance of context in the learning of word meanings. However, in discussion of vocabulary learning and the value of context, it is not always clear how the discussion conceptualized the influence of the context surrounding the unknown word. This lack of clarity arises because writers do not always clearly draw the distinction between comprehension of word meaning in context and the acquisition of word meaning from context".

Practice:

Practice is widely recognized as an essential condition for developing skills in a foreign language:

Practice that involves dealing with information in a consistent manner (and not mere repetition) has been demonstrated to be a major factor in determining the development of high levels of skill, because it is just such extensive consistent practice that leads to automatization (Segalowitz,1991:61).

The importance of practice, especially in vocabulary learning, is well established and the ability to make use of newly learnt words is a vital requirement of full vocabulary knowledge. McCarthy, (1990:43) argues that "if a language learner cannot actively use a particular word when it is

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needed, then we might feel that we are dealing with an incomplete knowledge of the word". In addition, vocabulary practice appears to provide a mild guarantee that words and their meanings will not fade from memory once they are learnt and it is also a form of hypothesis testing (Hatech & Brown 1995:390).

Bialystok (1981) has distinguished between two types of practice: formal practice and functional practice. The aim of the former is to improve formal language skills in a context devised specially for second language practice. On the other hand, functional practice consists in finding opportunities to use the language in communicative situations. In this research, the researcher means by practice any activity students engage in (in or out of class) to use new lexical items, which involves both formal and functional practice of words.

Students always need opportunities to use newly acquired vocabulary, but in the Libyan context there are few opportunities for natural interaction with proficient Arabic users since most people speak Colloquial Arabic, which is different from standard Arabic, the variety that students are learning. Arab foreign language learners, therefore, have more restricted language experiences in the L2: they depend almost exclusively on the L2 input and therefore encounter words in less diverse situations than ESL learners.

Metacognitive Strategies:

The term of metacognitive was coined by Flavell (1979), who defined it as knowledge about one's own cognitive processes and the control, over these processes. Thus, metacognitive strategies are higher order executive skills which involve the steps taken by learners to manage or regulate their learning such as planning and arranging for learning tasks, setting goals and objectives, monitoring the learning process for errors, and evaluating progress.

Metacognitive strategies have been categorized as a fundamental group of strategies in many taxonomies of learning strategies. They are essential for successful language learning. A research has identified learners' metacognitive knowledge as a major influence on the way they use learning strategies to develop second language competence (Wenden,1987).

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Metacognitive strategies also "contribute heavily to the ability to be an autonomous learner" (McDonough,1999:13). Ellis, (1994:268) states emphatically that "metacognitively sophisticated language learners excel". It has also been claimed that the difference between good and poor learners lies in their use of metacognitive strategies (Chamot & O'Malley,1994). Furthermore, (Vann and Abraham, 1990) suggest that successful learners lack certain metacognitive skills which would enable them to asses a task and then apply an appropriate strategy.

Students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction or opportunity to plan their learning monitor their progress, or review their accomplishments and future learning directions (O'Malley & Chamot,1990:8).

Methodology:

Introduction:

This chapter explains the research methodology of this study. It is introduced the participants, the method of research, the process of data collection and the data analysis.

The participants:

The sample of this research consists of 45 university students. They all were studying their fifth semester in El-ejellat college of Education, English Department. Thirty of them were females and fifteen students were males.

The research method:

Research method refers to the tools used by the researcher for data collection. The literature about research methodology reports different methods of research including questionnaires (close-ended & open-ended), Interviews (structured, semi-structured and unstructured), Observation (focused- unstructured). Each of these has certain advantages and limitations. The close-ended questionnaire was found appropriate for collecting the data necessary for answering the research question of this research.

The questionnaire:

This questionnaire is the widely used method of research especially when the sample involves a big number of people (Cohen, et al.2000). It saves

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time, requires less effort and easy to be administered. However, the results of survey questionnaire are often having issues related to validity and reliability (ibid). The questionnaire consists of 17 statements describing different vocabulary learning strategies. Four options were labelled on the Likert Scale including (always, sometimes, rarely and never) referring to the frequency of using each strategy by the participants.

Data collection:

The researcher distributed the questionnaire among the participants and clarified the purpose of the questionnaire to all samples. Forty-five copies were distributed and were received back as the data was collected on site at the same time.

Data analysis:

This section presents the quantitative data on 17 statements in the table showing the percentages of the participants' responds to the statements of the questionnaire.

Statement	always		sometimes		rarely		Never	
I repeat the new words	6	12%	38	76%	4	8%	2	4%
I use one dictionary/definition of a word	15	30%	18	36%	13	26%	4	8%
I skip or pass a new word	10	20%	22	44%	12	24%	6	12%
I use English- English dictionary	15	30%	29	58%	5	10%	3	6%
I use English Arabic dictionary	25	50%	17	34%	4	8%	2	4%
I try to guess the meaning from the context	23	46%	18	36%	6	12%	3	6%
I make a list of words and memorize them	10	20%	20	40%	12	24%	8	16%
I connect the words to the synonym/antonyms	6	12%	24	48%	12	24%	8	16%
I ask my classmates for meaning	11	22%	22	44%	12	24%	5	10%
I ask the teacher for making a sentence	11	22%	18	36%	11	22%	10	20%
I ask the teacher for L1(1 st)	6	12%	29	58	10	20%	5	10%

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language translation)								
I try to memorize words by say or write them	27	54%	16	32%	4	8%	2	4%
I record the words or phrases	17	34%	16	32%	5	10%	12	24%
I ask a native or fluent speakers to record target words	4	8%	27	54%	10	20%	9	18%
I try to write a story that includes all the words I have learned	15	30%	12	24%	14	28%	9	18%
I read books at particular vocabulary levels	12	24%	16	32%	17	34%	5	10%
I try to combine the target word with similar-sounding English words to form a picture	8	16%	23	46%	14	28%	5	10%

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction:

This chapter discusses the main findings of this research. The researcher offered interpretations and explanations about the most commonly used strategies as well those which were not popular among the participants.

Discussion:

Most Commonly Used Strategies:

The questionnaire analysis revealed that (88%) of participants use English-English dictionary, (84%) use English-Arabic dictionary, (88%), repeat the new words and (64%), Skip or pass new words. This comes accordance with (Brown,1995), (Ahmed,1989), (Scholfield,1997), (O'Malley & Chamot,1990), (Barter,1980), (Schmitt and McCarthy,1997), (Laufer & Kimmel,1997) and (Carter,1987) study findings that the students have to use a dictionary to discover the meanings of new words, Students may refer to one or more sources and they may employ one strategy or several. (82%) of participants try to guess the meaning from the context, (60%) making a list of words and memorizing them, (60%) connecting words with synonyms-antonyms, (66%) asking classmate for meaning, (70%) asking teacher for

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L1 translation, (86%) trying to memorize words by writing or saying them, (62%) asking a native or fluent speaker to record target words, (62%) trying to combine the target word with similar-sounding English words to form a picture. In addition, these findings are in line with the findings of Ahmed, (1989-3.3.4) who found that his subjects used the following strategies in addition to dictionary use to discover the meanings of new words: asking classmates, guessing, asking the teacher, enquiring about the meaning by asking for an English paraphrase, or synonym, asking for the Arabic equivalent, asking for a sentence showing word usage, and group work. It is also seemed to agree with Haastrup, (1987:197) defines guessing as a process that involves making informed guesses as to the meaning of an utterance in the light of all available linguistic cues in combination with the learner's general knowledge of the world.

Most of the participants in our research use these strategies that could be because they may find them helpful and simple to work with words and understand how to deal with them. Learning becomes easy and successful when they follow these strategies. Students think that when they repeat a word many times they can learn the spelling and pronunciation. For example, some other students do not care about the new words as they just skip or pass them. This may be attributed to their belief that learning new words need an effort and much time to find out the meaning and the right pronunciation. They may also think that it is not important to give attention to learn more VLS. Some students like using English-English dictionary because they think that they can learn the meaning of one word by learning other related words from the English-English dictionary. Other students like trying to guess the meaning from the context. They believe that understand the context in which the word occurs helps in guessing its meaning. Some students prefer working with group of words and they think this can simplify the task of learning the vocabulary. Listing words with similar pronunciation or which have the same rhyme making them easy to remember.

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Less Commonly Strategies:

Use one dictionary definition of a word (rarely never=34%), asking teacher for making a sentence (rarely+never=42%), recording words or phrases (rarely never=34%), trying to write a story that includes all the words you have learned (rarely+never=46%), reading books at particular vocabulary levels (rarely+never=44%) This aligns with (Hatch & Brown,1995) discovering the meanings of new words refer to students' strategies for arriving at the meaning of unfamiliar items. This aspect is regarded as the most important for learning new vocabularies, since how the learner learns a word depends on how he/she discovers the meaning: "all learners must get the meaning of words in some manner, or the words can never be considered truly learned.

The previous strategies represent the less commonly used ones by the students. This could be because students may find these strategies complicated, not appropriate or boring for them. In addition, these strategies may be perceived by some students as of little importance; so they ignore using them. For example, using one dictionary definition gives little information about the word so it will not be useful for them. Moreover, most of the students seem to be interested in writing stories or reading books which requires long time. Some students may have not the ability to write, and some others may not have the desire for reading. Because of these reasons, many students either rarely or never use these strategies.

Conclusion:

The main conclusions have been drawn from analyzing and discussing the findings of this research:

__The fifth semester students of the English department in El-ejellat college of Education use only a limited number of vocabulary learning strategies. They tend use those strategies which provide them with translation or direct meaning in their first language. They encounter difficulties in choosing more effective and successful strategies.

__Teachers of reading classes do not give attention to enhancing students' awareness and understanding of many effective strategies for learning vocabulary.

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Recommendation:

To the teacher:

__Promote students' awareness and understanding of more effective Vocabulary Learning Strategies.

__Encourage students to use strategies which are compatible with their learning style.

__Enhance students' use of cognitive strategies as this will lead to develop their critical thinking.

__Give more attention to enhancing students' awareness of the many different Vocabulary Learning Strategy.

To the student:

__Give more attention to vocabulary learning as this will positively develop your language proficiency and communication skills.

__Use a variety of vocabulary learning strategies as this will maintain your interest and enjoyment of reading.

__Use those strategies with less dependence on teachers as this will help in developing their autonomy and increasing the chances for your learning.

__Learning vocabulary can develop your language proficiency.

__Seek out more vocabulary learning strategies that are compatible with your learning style.

Appendixes:

Students' questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered to 45 students. They were 15 males and 30 female students. All students were Libyans. The questionnaire was intended to elicit as much information as possible about the Vocabulary Learnings Strategies. The statements are:

Statement: Always - sometimes - rarely - never

1-I repeat the new words

2-I use one dictionary definition of a word

3-I skip or pass the new word

4-I use English-English dictionary

5-I use English- Arabic dictionary

6-I try to guess the meaning from the context

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- 7-I make a list words and memorize them
- 8-I connect the words to the synonym/antonyms
- 9-I ask my classmates for the meaning
- 10-I ask a teacher for making a sentence
- 11-I ask a teacher for L1(first language translation)
- 12-I try to memorize words by saying or writing them
- 13-I record the words or phrases
- 14-I ask a native or fluent speaker to record target words
- 15-I try to write a story that includes all the words I have learned
- 16-I read books at particular vocabulary levels
- 17-I try to combine the target word with similar sounding English words to form a picture

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