



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**VOCABULARY LEARNING AND TEACHING THROUGH
STUDENTTEACHER
NEGOTIATIONS IN THE MALAYSIAN ESL CLASSROOM**

ROSLINA BINTI MOHD RASDI

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**VOCABULARY LEARNING AND TEACHING THROUGH STUDENT-
TEACHER NEGOTIATIONS IN THE MALAYSIAN ESL CLASSROOM**

By

ROSLINA BINTI MOHD RASDI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Science**

July 2009



DEDICATION

To

My Children

Mohammad Nor Shafiee

Mohammad Shaqeer

Mohammad Adib Haqiemi



Abstract of Thesis presented to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia in
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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July 2009

Chairman : Associate Professor Arshad Abd Samad, PhD

Faculty : Educational Studies

This study was conducted with the aim of investigating how vocabulary was taught and learned in three selected Malaysian schools. Specifically, it sought to explore the extent to which negotiation between students and teachers occurs in vocabulary learning and teaching. The study is delineated into by three research questions that are concerned with the strategies used by the upper secondary teachers and students in vocabulary learning and teaching respectively; the perception of upper secondary teachers' and students' on the use and importance of student-teacher negotiation in learning and teaching vocabulary; and how negotiation between upper secondary students and teachers takes place in vocabulary learning and teaching in the Malaysian second language classroom.

A basic or generic qualitative research methodology was employed to answer these three research questions. For the purpose of triangulation, data was collected through classroom observations, one-to-one semi-structured interview with the teachers, and



focus group discussion (FGD) with the students. Specifically, six classroom observations were conducted to elicit the natural negotiation process between students and teachers during vocabulary learning and teaching. The English teachers from the observed classes were then interviewed to corroborate the findings of the classroom observations. Lastly, students from each observed class were selected to participate in the focused-group discussion. All collected data were either video or audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and triangulated. Reliability and validity were further ascertained through member checks, peer examination and maintenance of audit trail. The findings showed that incidental vocabulary learning and teaching (VLT) was the primary approach used by students and teachers in learning and teaching vocabulary. The classroom observations revealed that six strategies were employed in incidental VLT, one of which is student-teacher negotiation. The semi-structured interview and FGD showed that, generally, teachers and students have positive and negative perceptions towards student-teacher negotiation in VLT. The findings also showed that negotiation between upper secondary students and teachers took place under four conditions: creating an enjoyable and safe learning environment, preparing activities which were able to gain or capture the students' interest to communicate, integrating negotiation with other vocabulary learning strategies, and placing the students with the same level of English in one class. An additional finding of the study was factors that promote or inhibit negotiation in the classroom. A conclusion of the study is that student-teacher negotiation seemed to be beneficial, but is not fully implemented by teachers and students. Theoretical and pedagogical implications are noted, and recommendations for further research are also suggested.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**PENGAJARAN DAN PEMBELAJARAN PERBENDAHARAAN KATA
MELALUI PERUNDINGAN (NEGOTIATIONS) ANTARA GURU DAN
PELAJAR DI DALAM KELAS “ESL” DI MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji bagaimana perbendaharaan kata diajar dan dipelajari di tiga buah sekolah di Malaysia. Khususnya, objektif kajian adalah untuk melihat sejauh mana perundingan antara guru dan murid di dilaksanakan semasa proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata bahasa Inggeris. Persoalan kajian dibahagikan kepada tiga, iaitu mengenai strategi yang digunakan oleh guru dan pelajar menengah atas semasa proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata; persepsi guru-guru dan pelajar-pelajar menengah atas terhadap kepentingan dan penggunaan perundingan antara guru dan pelajar di dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata Bahasa Ingeris; dan bagaimana perundingan antara guru-guru dan pelajar-pelajar menengah atas dilaksanakan semasa pengajaran dan pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata bahasa Inggeris.

Kaedah kajian kualitatif telah digunakan untuk menjawab ketiga-tiga persoalan kajian. Sebagai langkah triangulasi, data telah dikumpul melalui pemerhatian di dalam bilik darjah, temubual individu dengan guru-guru dan perbincangan berkumpulan dengan pelajar-pelajar. Secara khususnya, pencerapan telah di lakukan semasa enam guru yang terlibat mengajar Bahasa Inggeris di kelas masing-masing untuk mengesan proses perundingan antara guru dan pelajar semasa pengajaran dan pembelajaran perkataan Bahasa Inggeris. Keenam-enam guru tersebut kemudiannya telah ditemubual secara individu untuk memantapkan lagi dapatan kajian ini. Akhir sekali, enam orang pelajar daripada setiap kelas yang dicerap telah dipilih untuk ditemubual secara berkumpulan (Focus Group Discussion). Semua data yang dikutip telah di rakam dalam bentuk audio atau video, ditranskripsi satu persatu dan ditriangulasikan. Kebolehpercayaan dan keesahan kajian ini dimantapkan melalui pemeriksaan rakan sebaya, pemeriksaan semula oleh responden dan penyelenggaraan “audit trail”.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan pembelajaran dan pengajaran perkataan secara tersirat (incidental) adalah kaedah utama yang digunakan oleh guru-guru dan pelajar-pelajar di dalam kelas bahasa Inggeris. Pemerhatian di dalam kelas mendapati sebanyak enam strategi digunakan oleh guru-guru dan pelajar-pelajar menengah atas di dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran perkataan Bahasa Inggeris, di mana salah satunya ialah melalui perundingan antara guru dan pelajar. Temubual secara individu dengan guru-guru dan temubual di dalam kumpulan dengan pelajar-pelajar mendapati guru-guru dan pelajar-pelajar menengah atas mempunyai persepsi dan tanggapan yang positif dan negatif terhadap kaedah perundingan antara guru dan pelajar di dalam pengajaran

dan pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata bahasa Inggeris. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan perundingan antara guru dan pelajar menengah atas berlaku di dalam empat keadaan: mewujudkan suasana pembelajaran yang selamat dan menyeronokkan, menyediakan aktiviti-aktiviti yang boleh meningkatkan minat pelajar untuk berkomunikasi, mengintegrasikan penrundingan bersama dengan strategi pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata yang lain dan meletakkan pelajar-pelajar yang mempunyai tahap kemahiran bahasa Inggeris yang sama di dalam satu kelas. Selain itu, faktor-faktor yang menggalakkan dan menghalang berlakunya perundingan guru dan pelajar juga telah ditemui secara tidak langsung daripada kajian ini. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini mendapati perundingan guru dan pelajar di dalam pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata adalah penting dan bermanfaat tetapi tidak dilaksanakan dengan secara menyeluruh dan berkesan. Implikasi terhadap teori dan pedagogi juga dinyatakan serta cadangan untuk penyelidikan pada masa akan datang juga disyorkan.

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“Words, Either Spoken or Written Can Make Us Laugh, Cry, Go to War or even Fall in Love”

Mark Twain

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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 27 July 2009 to conduct the final examination of Roslina binti Mohd Rasdi on his Master of Science thesis entitled “Vocabulary Learning and Teaching Through Student-Teacher Negotiations in the Malaysian ESL Classroom” in accordance with Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The committee recommends the candidate be awarded the Master of Science.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia and other institutions.

ROSLINA BINTI MOHD RASDI

DATE: 5 May 2009



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

VLT	Vocabulary Learning and Teaching
STN	Student-teacher Negotiation
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education)
PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah (Lower Certificate of Education)
UPSR	Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (Primary School Evaluation Test)
KBSM	Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Menengah (New Secondary School Curriculum)
SMK	Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan
L2	Second Language
L1	First Language
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
NS	Native Speaker
NNS	Non-native Speaker
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
ESL	English as a Second Language
HEP	High English Proficiency
LEP	Low English Proficiency



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning is one of the elements that are important in the teaching and learning of a second language in the classroom. Apart from mastering the sentences and grammar structure, learner's vocabulary knowledge is a central and a very important component in acquiring a second language. Lewis (1993) advocates that acquisition of vocabulary plays a central role in learning a second language. A study by Horwitz (1988) also found that a substantial number of English as a Second Language's (ESL) students either agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that the most essential element of learning a foreign language is learning the vocabulary. There are various strategies and approaches which learners and teachers can employ to learn and teach vocabulary respectively. This study investigates one of the many approaches in vocabulary learning and teaching, which is teaching and learning vocabulary via negotiation between students and teacher.

This chapter presents several aspects pertaining to this study. It will first present the background of the study. Then, the needs and necessities for a research regarding vocabulary learning and teaching as well as the use of negotiation as one of the possible strategies will be highlighted in the statement of the problem. Apart from the aims and objectives of the study, some insights on the significance of the study and limitations that were encountered in this study are discussed. Lastly, the important



research terms; negotiation, comprehensible input and, vocabulary learning and teaching strategies are explained.

Background of the Study

The ability to use language fluently and grammatically correct is dependent on knowledge at the level of individual as well as on the combination of words that is built up over time based on large amounts of language exposure (Barcroft, 2004). Learners with large vocabulary knowledge are more proficient in a wide range of language skills than learners with limited vocabulary because vocabulary competency contributes greatly to second language (L2) proficiency (Meara, 1996). Moreover, it is believed that prior to teaching texts, teachers are encouraged to stimulate learners' background knowledge by providing them with appropriate vocabulary, as comprehension will take place when the right schema for a given language text is activated (Carrel & Eisterhold, 1983). Therefore, the role of vocabulary knowledge in second language learning is essential.

Besides that, in reading comprehension, an adequate and wide vocabulary is essential as it is believed that a learner needs to have a threshold of vocabulary knowledge of approximately 95 percent of the words in a given text in order to comprehend what is read satisfactorily (Liu & Nation, 1985). This implies that it is essential for readers to know at least 19 out of every 20 words that they encounter in a given text for basic comprehension in reading. In other words, it is easier to establish the meaning of



unknown and unfamiliar words from the context if approximately 95 percent of the words in a text are known. Hu & Nation (2000) suggested it should be 98% which is even higher and more stringent. According to the summary report of the National Reading Panel (2000) which was set up in Washington D.C, “Reading comprehension is a cognitive process that integrates complex skills and cannot be understood without examining the critical role of vocabulary learning and instruction in its development” (p: 13). Related research and present educational practices have shown that there is a positive relationship between students’ knowledge of words and their reading comprehension (Gersten & Geva, 2003).

One of the contents in the English syllabus of the New Secondary School Curriculum (*Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah- KBSM*) is the use of language for aesthetic and intrapersonal purposes. This includes the ability to use the language when interacting with others, to express ideas, thoughts, beliefs and feelings creatively and imaginatively. In order to achieve these objectives, students need vocabulary knowledge. This idea is supported by Meara (1996) who stated that “lexical competence is at the heart of communicative competence” (p:35) Furthermore, it is also stated in the Form Five English Language Curriculum Specifications (2003) that the maximum number of words that should be exposed to both Form 4 and 5 learners are 1600 words and 1800 words respectively. Teachers, however, should not be restricted to this list as they can add other words to ensure that the topic assigned is dealt with effectively. Students are also encouraged to extend their vocabulary to the highest level possible on their own initiative (Ministry of Education, 2003). It is the



National Education Philosophy's aspiration to generate autonomous and holistic learners in the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aspects. Students should acknowledge this and see the value of reading as well as understand the importance of vocabulary learning in order to master the target language.

One way to facilitate vocabulary learning is through the use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS). Commonly used VLS are simple memorization, repetition, and taking notes (Schmitt, 2000). One can also ask teachers and students for the meaning of new words and they can respond in many ways (synonyms, translation, etc) (Schmitt, 2000). When learners ask for the meaning of new words or to resolve what ever that they do not understand in the teacher's input, they may engage in a simple sequence of moves comprising the utterance that triggered the difficulty, the utterance that signalled the incomprehension, and the utterance that responds to this signal (Bitchener, 2004). In other words, they are involved in negotiation of meaning, the process whereby speakers work with each other's messages to achieve understanding, and which is regarded as an essential element in second language development (Brooks, 1992).

In the negotiated sequence, the interlocutors are made aware of the gap between each other's utterances and, therefore make use of the modified feedback in the reformulated utterance (Long, 1996). According to Hwang (2002), negotiated interaction provides an environment that encourages the use of target words, which enables learners to retain the words longer in memory. Hwang (2002) also claimed

that negotiation of meaning plays a more vital role than simplified or modified input in the learning of a second language. When teachers engage learners in the negotiation of meaning by using various discursive moves, they are at the same time promoting learners' active mental participation, which has a role in second language (L2) learning (Anton, 1999). Through interaction, dialogue or negotiation, teachers can provide learners with effective assistance that enable them to excel more than they would otherwise (Anton, 1999).

Statement of the Problem

The importance of vocabulary acquisition in second language learning has posed some challenges to the classroom teacher on how best to assist learners in storing and retrieving words in the second language (Sokmen, 1997). Students who have learned or are being taught vocabulary items for some time, still have difficulties in recalling them when needed (Wallace, 1982). Due to this, they face problems in communicating effectively, in conveying their actual meaning and, therefore, they resort to finding other means to convey their messages (Wallace, 1982). This is because vocabulary is basic to communication (Shameem & Wong, 2004, p: 588) and it is also very important for understanding the meaning of any language (McCarthy, 2001). However, "vocabulary is often viewed as the greatest source of problems by second and foreign language learners particularly among young adults" (Shameem & Wong, 2004, p: 588, McCarthy, 2001). The mistakes in the use of vocabulary may lead to miscommunication, whereas the errors in grammar may not necessarily hamper the meaning of the messages (Lewis, 1997). Furthermore, vocabulary is the building



blocks of a language (Brown, 2001) and if they are unable to expand their vocabulary growth, consequently, they will lose interest in learning the second language (Yang, 2000).

Comprehensible input is essential for L2 vocabulary acquisition (Krashen, 1985) and one of the meaningful ways in making input comprehensible is to negotiate meaning through interaction (Long, 1983). The interaction hypothesis which was proposed by Long (1983, 1996) claimed that the opportunities to attend to linguistic form during negotiated interaction may facilitate the second language (L2) acquisition process. The value of negotiation is related to the generative use of words in new contexts which stimulate a deeper understanding of their meaning (Nation, 2006). Despite the apparent contributions of negotiation in L2 learning, many teachers, educational practitioners and learners are not taking greater advantage of it (Pica, 1994a). Long (1987) stated that a second language teaching classroom offers only few opportunities for students to communicate in the target language or to hear it used for communicative purposes by others. In other words, the lack of negotiation or interaction in the target language between students and the teacher or between student and student in the classroom is likely to make L2 input difficult to comprehend, thus impeding L2 acquisition.

While there is a variety of communicative activities prepared for the students in the textbooks, little investigation has been done to explore what happens when learners of L2 are in the classroom and are actually participating in these activities (Brooks,

