

# Metacognition and College English Vocabulary Teaching

Ying Zhang

Zhejiang Technical Institute of Economics, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 310018, China

**Keywords:** College English Vocabulary, Metacognition, Teaching Method

**Abstract:** Based on the analysis on the current situation of college students' English vocabulary learning and the related research results of college English vocabulary teaching, this paper points out the contradiction between college English vocabulary teaching and learning. Through the application of cognitive psychology and applied linguistics, this paper discusses the relationship between metacognition and vocabulary teaching, and puts forward the idea of introducing metacognitive strategy training into foreign language classroom vocabulary teaching, and discusses related training steps and contents.

## 1. Introduction

Since the American developmental psychologist proposed the concept of metacognition in the 1970s, researchers at home and abroad have studied the connotation, structure and essence of metacognition for more than 30 years, enriching and developing its theoretical framework. Exploring the guiding significance of metacognitive theory in practice, it gradually becomes one of the research hotspots in the fields of psychology, education and educational psychology, especially in the field of language teaching and foreign language learning. Numerous studies have confirmed the dominant position of metacognition in various cognitive processes and learning activities, especially in foreign language learning. We believe that metacognition has a positive impact on various foreign language learning activities. Domestic scholars' research on metacognition started late, but it has achieved fruitful research results both in breadth and depth. In order to enable researchers to more accurately grasp the current status of domestic metacognitive research, recent development trends, and future development directions, the author used the CNKI China Journal Full-text Database to search for foreign languages, education, and psychology from 1996 to 2007. The papers on metacognitive research in 18 Chinese core journals are selected to select articles related to college English teaching and foreign language learning. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, the basic trends, research contents and research methods of the research are reviewed. It summarizes the research overview in the past 12 years, and on this basis points out the problems in the research field and looks forward to the future development prospects.

## 2. Theoretical basis

Metacognition can be simply defined as cognition about cognition. It is a generalization of meta-memory, meta-understood, meta-learning, meta-attention, meta-language, etc. It is a high-level cognitive mode that plays a role in cognitive processes. According to Flavel (1979), metacognition can occur in the interaction of four phenomena: metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experience, goals (tasks), and behaviors (strategies). Metacognition includes metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive experience. Metacognitive knowledge refers to the knowledge stored by a person as a cognitive creature in his or her world, including multiple cognitive goals, behaviors, and experiences. Metacognitive experience is a conscious experience and experience in cognitive and emotional aspects. A metacognitive experience can be any emotional or cognitive experience associated with intellectual behavior. Metacognitive experience plays a very important role in people's daily cognitive activities. If a person can learn to respond correctly to their experience, their learning will be better.

There are three types of knowledge for learners: (1) Knowledge of the learner itself. For example,

learners know that they are more accustomed to remembering the spelling of words based on pronunciation, rather than spelling by letters. To sum it up and it is the understanding of the learner's or other people's interests, habits, attitudes, and so on. (2) Knowledge between learners, which refers to the comparison between learners. (3) General knowledge about learners. This is a general view of human cognition psychology acquired by people. For example, when a person grows up, he or she will gradually realize that short-term memory sometimes makes mistakes. Everyone will accumulate such phenomena and use them to deal with problems in their lives. Flavel believes that a clear understanding of these learner-related knowledge will help people better understand themselves and their world and effectively complete the work in the cognitive field. Knowledge of learning tasks includes the learner's knowledge of the nature of the learning tasks and how many treatments he or she has. Learners should give special attention and efforts to vocabulary learning, and understand the nature of vocabulary learning and the composition of words. The knowledge of learning strategies includes both cognitive strategies and knowledge of metacognitive strategies, as well as knowledge of when and where to adopt strategies. Cognitive strategies are used to help learners achieve a particular learning goal (such as understanding a word), while metacognitive strategies can guarantee the achievement of this goal (such as self-test to check their vocabulary abilities). Metacognitive experiences are usually reflected before or after metacognitive activities. To some extent, metacognitive strategies are skills used to plan, monitor, and evaluate learning activities. They are strategies for learning rather than learning strategies themselves (Cook, 1993). According to Omallehy and Chamot, the metacognitive strategies that can be applied to vocabulary learning are: planning and selection, monitoring, evaluation, and adjustment. These strategies are not done in a certain order, but are intertwined. If students understand how to use the dictionary more effectively, how to systematically learn vocabulary, how to evaluate their learning, how to adjust their learning strategies and psychology, they are gradually becoming an independent learner.

### **3. Training methods**

This step is designed to make students clear their tasks, make plans self-awareness. Students should first be clear about their understanding of vocabulary learning and the gap between their own vocabulary and requirements; learn what a word includes, etc. Teachers can clarify some vague and wrong ideas in the minds of students through questionnaires and lectures, and then let students tell what they think through interviews or discussions. This will make the mind clearer after you recognize yourself. Establishing the goal after recognizing the self, the student establishes the direction. Next, teachers should help them establish their long-term and short-term vocabulary learning goals. It is important to note that goals must be achievable, measurable, and consistent with other purposes. After clarifying the vocabulary levels needed to achieve a certain language ability, teachers need to guide students to establish their vocabulary goals. This will help them to look forward to their own language learning prospects and generate momentum in the long run. Help students establish short-term goals, such as: Mastering a certain amount of vocabulary in a week or a month. The more clearly the goal is set, the better it is for the learner to measure his/her progress. Through the planning and establishment of self-awareness and participation goals, students begin to think consciously about their vocabulary learning, know what they need to do and how they plan to do it. This provides a psychological platform for self-management. It should be noted that the stimulation of consciousness is not just a one-time pre-school education. This step needs to be strengthened for every new starting point.

After establishing their respective goals, vocabulary learning strategies are taught in a timely manner, such as word formation, anti/synonym, context, taxonomy. Studies have shown that when students actively participate in vocabulary learning at different levels of mental activities, the results are optimal. Learners are able to apply specific strategies for specific goals and specific tasks, that is, learners can think consciously and make decisions about the learning process. Therefore, teachers should not only teach students cognitive strategies about vocabulary learning, but also let them understand the importance of correct choice of strategies. (1) Introduce students to vocabulary

learning methods through lectures, etc. Use questionnaires to let them reflect on themselves: What strategies am I using? Which strategies are new to me? Which ones are most effective? (2) Design some exercises for students to practice, then discuss: What strategies are more effective for memorizing one or more words? Their progress needs to be monitored and guided. During the training process, they will encounter certain problems, such as the choice of different strategies for different vocabularies, how to make the plan more appropriate and effective, how to treat forgetting, how to do it, and so on. The process of solving these problems is also the process of metacognition, the process of metacognitive experience and monitoring.

(1) Self-reporting. Let students write what they think when applying strategies. This method is also called introspection report, and it is a textual expression of a person's stream of consciousness.

(2) Write a diary or take notes. Provide students with the opportunity to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning and find solutions to problems.

(3) Assessment Report. Students are encouraged to put their vocabulary learning expectations on the paper at the beginning of each semester, and then evaluate their learning outcomes at the end of the semester. This type of exercise is designed to help students incorporate vocabulary learning into their vision and effectively manage their own learning.

Students are actively engaged in metacognitive activities when trying to assess whether their practices are effective. Others have shown that learners at all levels of competence can learn to evaluate their behavior more appropriately. And this is a very important metacognitive skill. Teachers can help students realize that they have many strategies to apply, when is a certain strategy ineffective, how to continue to choose another, how to treat anxiety, and so on. (1) Use questionnaires and discussions. Let the students seriously think and answer the following questions: What goals am I trying to achieve? What strategy am I using? How do I use it? What else can I do? Answering these four questions is a synthesis and reflection of the entire metacognitive activity. (2) Strengthen communication between teachers and students and cooperation among learners. Communication between teachers and students as well as among students themselves can help them correctly evaluate their strategic choices learning outcomes, find problems, and alleviate anxiety. The above vocabulary metacognition does not occur sequentially, but interacts and can occur simultaneously. Metacognitive training is not a single act, but part of the entire teaching process, and should be infiltrated into every aspect of teaching.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In the process of college English teaching, Teachers should pay full attention to and strengthen students' cognition of metacognitive strategies, and fundamentally solve the problem of how to teach students. English teachers should apply metacognitive strategies to the process of college English vocabulary teaching in a timely manner, guiding students to learn vocabulary scientifically and effectively, and improve the efficiency of English vocabulary teaching and learning efficiency.

#### **References**

- [1] Liu Baining, Zhang Bingke. On Reading Comprehension Monitoring and College English Metacognitive Teaching Model[J]. Journal of Yan'an Education College, 2008(2): 59-61.
- [2] Feng Yufang. Advocating learning strategies cultivating independent learning ability [J]. Journal of Yangzhou University: Higher Education Research Edition, 2004, 8 (3): 84-86.
- [3] Xia Xiaowei, Zhang Zhixiang. The Application of Metacognitive Strategies in Foreign Language Writing Teaching [J]. Journal of Yangzhou College of Education, 2007(2):86-88.
- [4] Dai Yuxia. A Comparative Analysis of the Status Quo of Successful and Freshmen's English Learning [J]. Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities: Philosophy and Social Sciences, 2003(z2): 245-248.
- [5] Qin Limin, Wan Hua. Analysis of Main Factors Affecting Autonomous Learning and Model Conception[J]. Journal of South China University of Tropical Agriculture, 2004, 10(2): 41-45.