

THE INVOLVEMENT OF BODY LANGUAGE TO HELP ALBANIAN STUDENTS UNDERSTAND, LEARN AND USE AMBIGUOUS WORDS CORRECTLY

Ermenita Çuka

Department of English Language “Fan S. Noli” University, Korçë, Albania, ermenitacuka@yahoo.com

Abstract: Vocabulary language acquisition in particular ambiguous vocabulary acquisition has always been an obstacle while learning a second language, which students try to surmount through different strategies and methods. This article aims to highlight the role played by the use of body language in the acquisition of vocabulary and the understanding of lexical ambiguous English words by Albanian students. As one of the first challenges that students encounter in learning a second language (L2) is vocabulary acquisition, especially polysemous words or ambiguous ones, it is very important to find ways that can help facilitate understanding and learning vocabulary in general and ambiguous words specifically. It has been proven by different scholars that body language, hand movements, joint attention, and the presence of multimodal signals, such as eye contact, affect the acquisition process of language and especially polisemous or ambiguous vocabulary (Grzyb & Vigliocco, 2020; Kreysa et al., 2018). Therefore, researchers have tried to find ways and effective methods that can help them avoid any kind of problems or obstacles regarding ambiguous vocabulary acquisition. As the acquisition of the foreign languages consists considerably on the appropriate learning of its vocabulary and the variety of meaning that each word carries, learning vocabulary without difficulty and longstanding needs various strategies. It is raised the hypothesis that the use of body language and gestures can facilitate ambiguous vocabulary acquisition and its proper use. This led us toward our research questions: Does body language and gestures affect the resolution of lexical ambiguity? Can the use of gestures and body language facilitate acquisition and the proper use of the ambiguous words? For this purpose, it is thought to imply in our research 50 Albanian students, who actually study at the secondary school and belong to the intermediate level of language acquisition. The students participating in this study were selected to belong to the same level of language acquisition and were randomly divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. In the experimental groups, the ambiguous vocabulary was learned by being reinforced through different body language actions, whereas in the control group the ambiguous vocabulary was taught in the traditional way. The outcomes provide fairly strong support for the gesture effect on vocabulary acquisition in general and the ambiguous one in particular. The results that came out from the study highlighted the importance of body language and gestures for facilitating the understanding of ambiguous words or ambiguous lexicon. It is concluded that the use of body language and gestures or facial expressions facilitates lexical retrieval because the position of the hands and the body not only shows more clearly the intended meaning of the ambiguous or polisemous words used by the interlocutors but also clarify their retrieval and the appropriate use. (Butcher and Goldin-Meadow 2000)

Keywords: Body language, gesture, lexical ambiguity, homonymy

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the first challenges that students encounter in learning a second language (L2) is vocabulary acquisition, especially polysemous words or ambiguous ones (Mitchell et al., 2019). Therefore, researchers have tried to find out methods or techniques that help them avoid possible difficulties and complexities of this aspect of SLL. Students, while acquiring the SL vocabulary, come across with difficulties regarding ambiguous words acquisition that means words that carry more than one meaning because they cause doubts among students in identifying the appropriate meaning of them. Petten (2006) believes that this kind of vocabulary not only put students in difficulty but also affect their understanding. As the acquisition of the foreign languages consists considerably on the appropriate learning of its vocabulary and the variety of meaning that each word carries, learning vocabulary without difficulty and longstanding needs various strategies (Petten 2006).

Ambiguity causes several problems in vocabulary learning such as hindering and bounding the process of memorizing the words. It also affects word choice and word processing which creates obstacles in acquiring, understanding and using the given ambiguous vocabulary. Furthermore, it creates problems in conveying ideas and understanding the discourse, and commonly influence the motivation of ESL and EFL learners (Kidd & Holler, 2009). Ambiguity limits vocabulary acquisition, thus, it is essential to choose the right way to improve second language learning.

Several studies have been conducted on the strategies and techniques for solving semantic ambiguity. Consequently, several models have been presented such as “the exhaustive access model, the ordered model, the contextual model, and the multiple access model”. (Harley, 2008; Petten, 2006).

As a matter of fact, different theories of language recognize and define language as social, embodied and multi modal (Barsalou, 2008; Coventry & Garrod, 2004; Pulvermüller et al., 2005), emphasizing how language is deeply embedded in a physical and communicative context (Murgiano et al., 2021). A prerequisite for understanding and developing a functional communicative context is the creation of a joint attention between communicators. This is usually achieved by using body language, gestures and eye gaze, cues that are considered fundamental to vocabulary processing and language learning by SLL (Goldin-Meadow, 2007; Tomasello et al., 2005).

Despite how several language teaching strategies are used to teach vocabulary, a number of recommendations have been given in order to assist students improve their acquisition of ambiguous words. It has been proven that body language, joint attention and the presence of multimodal signals, such as eye contact, affect the processing of language and especially that of polisemous or ambiguous vocabulary (Grzyb & Vigliocco, 2020; Kreysa et al., 2018). Since learning vocabulary and ambiguous words has always been a challenge for foreign language teaching, language learning scholars and researchers have often been focused on finding methods to facilitate and help students in learning, understanding and using vocabulary appropriately.

It is stated that body language expressions facilitate semantic ambiguity resolution, in addition, the position of the hands and the body more clearly shows what the speaker intent to convey by the ambiguous words (Holler and Beattie 2005). Furthermore, researchers in this field assert that the addition of gestures in speech gives students additional abilities to convey and understand the appropriate meaning by means of body language during conversations which consist of ambiguous words. Body language boosts students' attention and awareness during the acquisition of the meaning of the ambiguous words (Kidd & Holler, 2009). It helps avoid ambiguities by alleviating the process of memorizing the vocabulary (Alibali, Kita & Young, 2000; It stimulates the speech of younger students and helps them understand better the discourse (Göksun, Hirsh & Gollinkoff, 2009).

It is emphasized that when interlocutors use body language they can convey some further aspect of their ideas during their discourse that cannot be observed in their communication without it (Broaders et al., 2007; Kidd and Holler 2009). According to other researchers, body language expressions can be useful to elicit different range of notions when involved appropriately (Alibali et al., 2000; Göksun, et al., 2009; Kelly et al., 2008; Studdert-Kennedy, 1993). It is asserted that students, during language learning, might benefit from body language to express meanings that they cannot fully explain in words (Iverson and Goldin-Meadow 2005). So body language expressions assist students to understand better the meanings of the ambiguous word that cause doubts and misunderstanding. It's also an additional reinforcement means that students might use to recall the right meaning (Asher, 1966; Göksun, et al., 2009; Iverson & Goldin-Meadow, 2005).

Scholars, who have been focused on dealing with this issue, state that body language can be used even as a communicative strategy that helps understand ambiguous words meaning (Ibraheem and Khan (2012). Studies dealing with this field confirm the positive effect of body language on student's ability to recall the appropriate meaning when encounter polisemous words (Assher, 1966; Göksun, et al. 2009; Macedonia & Von Kriegstein, 2012; Tellier, 2008; Tellier, 2009).

So, the scholars confirm that body language facilitates the understanding and the appropriate use of ambiguous vocabulary (Holler and Beattie 2005). In addition, when the communication consists of ambiguous words, it is recommended to be accompanied by the postures of the body as this way can be revealed more clearly the intentions of the interlocutors (Blott et al. 2022). Moreover, it is stated that the addition of the body language provides students with an additional communicative skill that facilitate their word processing and meaning retrieval with just simple movements (Butcher and Goldin-Meadow 2000).

It is obvious that studies have asserted that body language boosts students' awareness and attention so that they will acquire more easily and correctly the appropriate meaning of the words (Kidd & Holler, 2009). The ability to establish joint attention in students by using and following eye gaze and pointing gestures is a crucial step in their language acquisition (Goldin-Meadow, 2007; Tomasello et al., 2005). Such "deictic cues" have been hypothesized to promote learning by enhancing the students' attention to the referent and by enhancing their understanding of the speaker's intentions (Booth et al., 2008). Çetinçelik et al. (2021) support the notion that eye gaze plays a greater role than simply acting as a mere deictic pointer, such as arrows. In a systematic review, they argue that it facilitates students' learning by enhancing their alertness, memory, and attentional capacities, which potentially benefit the encoding process during word learning in a unique way. So ambiguities are avoided by facilitating the retrieval of the appropriate meaning that the word convey through involving body language expression in explanation and vocabulary acquisition process (Alibali, Kita & Young, 2000).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The research rises the hypothesis whether the use of body language and gestures can facilitate ambiguous vocabulary acquisition and its proper use. This led us toward our research questions: Does body language and

gestures affect the resolution of lexical ambiguity? Can the use of gestures and body language facilitate acquisition and the proper use of the ambiguous words?

For meeting the aims of this research, it was thought to imply in our research 50 Albanian students who actually study at the secondary school and belong to the intermediate level of language acquisition. The students participating in this study were selected to belong to the same level of language acquisition and were randomly divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. In the experimental group, the vocabulary of ambiguities was learned by being reinforced through different body language actions, while in the students of the control group, the ambiguous words were taught through the traditional methods. They were given a Diagnostic English Test so that the English language level of participants of both groups to be similar at start of the study. The ages of the participants ranged from 14 to 18. In order to fulfil the aim of this research, there were carried out the following tests to students of both groups: Diagnostic Test for balancing students based on their overall knowledge of English before the experiment. (2) Quizzes which consist on exercises referring some knowledge acquired during the experiment (3) Achievement test in order to measure the achievements of both groups of students, experimental group and the control group in the end of the experiment. The diagnostic test consists of general exercises that reveal the general level of test takes in English.

The researcher herself participated in the evaluation of the test together with one of her colleagues. Taking into consideration the goal of the research, there were used 10 exercises of 5 items each of them which consisted on ambiguous word acquisition and the language of the test was at the students' ability level. After balancing the 50 students via the Diagnostic Test, they were randomly assigned 25 students to an experimental group and 25 ones in the control group. The students of the experimental group were taught the ambiguous words along with body language, pointing, eye movements and other gestures while in the control group polisemous and ambiguous word were taught just in the traditional way. The lessons were held by the researcher to limit the impact of teacher changeability during the 12 classes that took place for a month (three sessions a week).

First, to teach ambiguous words in both groups the experimental and control ones, the researcher explained the ambiguous words by writing them on the board and then by giving their definitions in as understandable as possible way to the students. In the experiment group, the researchers explained the ambiguous accompanied by body language like pointing to, eye movements and other gestures. So, for example while explaining the different meanings of the ambiguous word "rock" researcher while explaining the definition he also pointed to the "stone" to give one of the meaning of the word "rock" and then he used body language to explain the other meaning of the word "rock"- "sway". He repeated the procedure even for other words such as "bark"- the cover of the tree" and "the noise of the dog"; for the word "bow" -"archery equipment" and "bend at the waist" etc. While in the control group, the researcher used just in the traditional method such as through repeating them several times, matching them with the right picture etc.

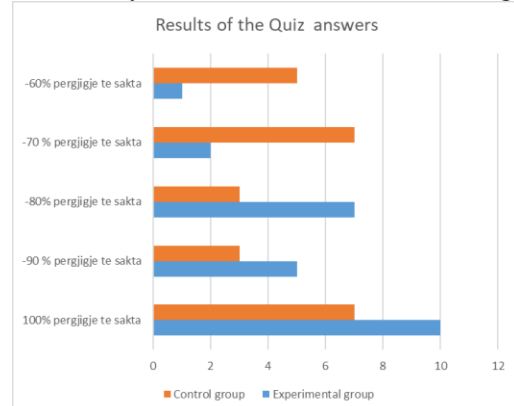
The researcher added to each body gesture meaning of the ambiguous words in the experimental groups during the second phase of learning ambiguous vocabulary, to ensure that the members used the body language and mimic to assist students acquisition. This part was motivating for students because it offered an attractive and entertaining tone that was presumed to improve ambiguous vocabulary acquisition. In this phase, the gesture-speech strategy was used to reinforce understanding of the ambiguous words. While in the third session of learning the researcher involved students into some quizzes and a final achievement test in order to see the progress of the ambiguous words learning. The results of the tests of the students of both experimental and control group were analyzed and from them there were drawn conclusions.

3. RESULTS

From the analysis of data from quiz and the achievement test that was given to both groups of students, to the experimental group as well as to the control group, it is evident that Albanian students of the experimental group, in which it was involved body language and gestures in teaching the ambiguous words, performed better at the quizzes and in the achievement test than those of the control group who learned the ambiguous words in the traditional way. As it is clearly displayed in the chart, in the experimental group 10 students out of 25, or 40% of all students, completed the quizzes up to 100% correctly; 5 students out of 25, or 20%, completed the quiz at the score of up to 90% correctly; 7 students out of 25, or 28%, scored up to 80% correctly; 2 students out of 25 scored up to 70% correctly and only 1 student scored up to 60 % correctly. Regarding the control group, the performance of the students in both the quiz and Assessment test was noticeably lower than that of the students of the experimental group. So, in the control group 7 students out of 25, or 28% of all students, completed the quizzes up to 100% correctly; 3 students out of 25, or 12%, completed the quiz at the score of up to 90% correctly; 3 students out of 25, or 12%, scored up to 80% correctly; 7 students out of 25 scored up to 70% correctly and 5 student scored up to 60 % correctly. As far as the assessment test is concerned, in the experimental group 9 students out of 25 completed the

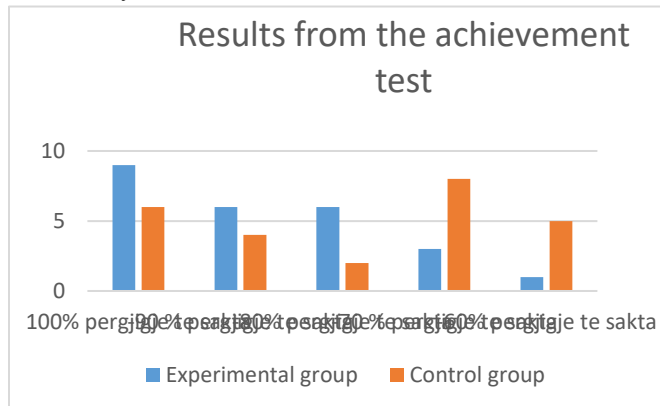
assessment test up to 100% correctly compared 6 out of 25 in the control group; 6 students out of 25 completed the assessment test at the score of up to 90% correctly compared to 4 out of 25 in the control group; 6 students out of 25, scored up to 80% correctly in the experimental group compared to 2 out of 25 in the control group ; 3 students out of 25 of the experimental group scored up to 70% correctly in the assessment test compared to 8 students in the control group and only 1 student in the experimental group scored up to 60 % correctly compared to 5 of the control group. Obviously, it is illustrated on the table1 the outcomes of the achievements of the students on the quiz and on the table 2 the results of the scores that the students reached on the achievement test. The results obviously confirm the fact that students scored and performed better in the ambiguous word acquisition if the explanation and the teaching process of the ambiguous words were accompanied by gestures and body language expression.

Table1 % of the student's correct answers in Quiz



Source: Results from quiz conducted by E.Cuka

Table2 % of the student's correct answers in Test Assessment



Source: Results from the achievement test conducted by E.Cuka

4. DISCUSSIONS

The study highlighted that the use of body language when teaching ambiguous words facilitate the understanding the meaning of them and help students recall and use them appropriately. Alibali et al., 2000; Göksun, et al., 2009; Kelly et al., 2008; Studdert-Kennedy, 1993). Furthermore, body language notably helps conveying the right meaning when the ambiguous words are part of the conversation or certain discourse. During the vocabulary learning process, students can benefit from body language expressions to convey the meanings they are unable to express in words (Iverson and Goldin-Meadow 2005). Next, taking into consideration the idea that body language expressions assist students convey the meanings that are difficult to express orally, emphasize the assumption that body language acts as facilitator of learning, additional and a reinforcement support for students (Asher, 1966; Göksun, et al., 2009; Iverson & Goldin-Meadow, 2005).

It is asserted that body language can be used as a speech technique which help to complete the intended meaning. Several scholars and researchers confirm the positive effect of body language on vocabulary acquisition (Asher, 1966; Göksun, et al. 2009; Macedonia & Von Kriegstein, 2012). Some researchers believe that by the use of body language brings benefits to the students' ability to memorize and acquire the new vocabulary.

Furthermore, considering the results of the research on the Albanian students and the analyses of the data from the tests and quizzes, it is clear the fact that body language, gestures and eye movement affect students acquisition of the ambiguous words.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study confirmed the hypothesis that body language and gestures facilitate lexical retrieval of the ambiguous words. In addition, speaking with the posture of the hands and the body language expressions display more clearly what the participants of a conversation or discourse intent. It is claimed that the addition of body language in conversation or speech offers students additional ways of interaction

that helps them convey their meaning with just simple body movements (Butcher and Goldin-Meadow 2000). Gestures even boost students' awareness and attention so that they will acquire the correct content and meaning of the words. Establishing joint attention in students by using the eye gaze, body language expressions and pointing gestures is a crucial step toward students' language acquisition (Goldin-Meadow, 2007; Tomasello et al., 2005). Such findings can help to promote learning by enhancing the student's attention to the referent and by enhancing the child's understanding of the speaker's intentions (Booth et al., 2008). Çetincelik et al. (2021) support the notion that

eye gaze plays a greater role than simply acting as a mere deictic pointer. In a systematic review, they argue that it facilitates students' learning by enhancing their alertness, memory, and attentional capacities, which potentially benefit the encoding process during word learning in a unique way. It helps considerably to resolve lexical ambiguities by facilitating getting the right lexical recall of the ambiguous words by Albanian students of English as SLL.

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