

# **Integrating Vocabulary Memory Strategies into the Design of Effective Vocabulary Tests**

**Luo Qian**

*Institute of Public Foreign Languages, China & West Normal University, China*

## **Abstract**

According to China's Standards of English Language Ability (2018), the English vocabulary proficiency in China, just like language proficiency, is divided into three stages, namely proficiency stage, improvement stage and foundational stage, and nine levels. Each level provides some specific instructions of learners' vocabulary understanding and application abilities. Thus, vocabulary learning plays an essential role in learners' linguistic competence. In fact, vocabulary acquisition is a foundational part of cognitive development, cultural understanding and communication skills. As Hamer (1990) stated that "If the structure of a language is likened to its skeleton, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and flesh." Wilkins (1972, p.111) claimed that "without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" and Folse (2004, p.25) argued that "without vocabulary, no communication is possible." In English education, investing in vocabulary learning enables learners to get great enhancement in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Besides, successful learning strategies can not only promote deeper understanding of language but also foster learners' problem-solving and critical thinking abilities. According to Oxford (1990, p.1), "learning strategies are steps taken by learners to enhance their own learning, they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence". She also classified learning strategies into direct and indirect strategies. Among direct strategies, which include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, memory strategy accounts for large proportions in English vocabulary teaching. For one thing, the memory strategy can help learners encode and reorganize information. For another thing, it also consolidates vocabulary retention and reduces learners' cognitive load. Vocabulary testing is a key component in assessing learners or learners' language level.

Firstly, vocabulary tests help teachers know about learners' merits and drawbacks in vocabulary learning and adjust their teaching strategies for it. Secondly, learners'

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growth of vocabulary can be measured and observed. Lastly, as Paul Nation and David Beglar (2007) stated that vocabulary tests allow scholars to compare non-native speakers with native speaker about the speed of vocabulary acquisition. When we assess vocabulary, the following factors should be considered: Purpose of assessment: whether the purpose is aligned with the teaching goal? Is it formative or summative. Validity and reliability: the assessment is expected to test relevant knowledge that learners learned before and have experience on it. Additionally, the test result should be beneficial for reflecting learners' study and the testing process should be fair and transparent. Word type and frequency: vocabulary can be divided into receptive words, productive words, discrete words, embedded words and so on. As Read (2000) argued that "the discrete testing of vocabulary assesses a word as an independent construct. Testing vocabulary in an embedded way looks at vocabulary as part of a larger construct. More specifically, discrete vocabulary testing looks at assessing a student's knowledge at the word level whereas embedded vocabulary testing looks at the learners' use of vocabulary as it pertains to a text that the student has produced such as a written essay or spoken text."

The present paper aims to explore more practical and beneficial vocabulary testing types by integrating vocabulary memory strategies and then provide a more comprehensive assessment of learners' vocabulary level and abilities. Integrating vocabulary memory strategies into the design of effective vocabulary tests improves the validity and reliability. Furthermore, it enables learners to get long-term vocabulary retention and promote their deeper learning. Most importantly, this paper is based on the application of Gestalt Psychology and Dual Coding Theory. There are some scholars also study vocabulary tests but few of them explore it by incorporating with other theories or learning strategies. Thus, this paper will show more effective and innovative design of vocabulary tests. From this paper, educators are able to get detailed feedback from test results and enhance their abilities of designing lesson plan. Apart from that, learners are supposed to reflect on their learning strategies and measure whether they have achieved their learning goals.

**Keywords:** Memory strategies, Vocabulary tests, Vocabulary, Assessment