VOCABULARY RELATED DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY ELE STUDENTS IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Sarjana Pendidikan

Rudolf Augusta
112014034

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER PROGRAM
FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND ARTS
UNIVERSITAS KRISTEN SATYA WACANA
SALATIGA
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VOCABULARY RELATED DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY ELE STUDENTS IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

This study aimed to find out the difficulties related to vocabulary during online communication faced by the students of Faculty of Language and Arts (FLA), Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana. Since Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) becomes a common practice in this globalized era, almost all students have access to interacting virtually with everyone around the globe. However, problems in communication also emerge. One of the problems is vocabulary. Without sufficient knowledge of vocabulary communication could be hindered. Thus, Word Knowledge becomes the theoretical framework for this study. The participants of this study were 10 English Language Education (ELE) junior year students of Faculty of Language and Arts (FLA). The data were collected using stimulated recall protocol (SRP) focused on pauses and revisions. Once the participants did a recorded online chat, a semi-structured interview was conducted. The data collected were analyzed using 4 categories of Word Knowledge. This study might give insights for teachers to help students with to overcome class that require online interaction or any conversational skill, as well as writing skill.

Keywords: computer mediated communication, vocabulary difficulties, stimulated recall protocol
Introduction

Nowadays, online communication is a common thing. Thanks to the rapid growth of internet, online communication becomes more favorable than ever. It is a fact that English is the main language that being used in online communication. However, not all the CMC users are the native speaker of English. This might cause problems for EFL students, either its grammatical or vocabulary (Canale & Swain, 1980). In this case, vocabulary also plays important role in the context of English as an L2 since Paul Nation (2001) suggested that knowing a large number of words could help L2 learners in the long run. For short, problems related to vocabulary could hinder communication.

Related study regarding difficulties in online discussion has been conducted. A previous study was conducted by Budiono (2015). His study aimed to find out the communication strategies (CSs) used by the EFL learners, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga, Indonesia, to deal with the vocabulary deficiencies as the communication problem faced during online chatting based on Dornyei’s taxonomy (1997). The study shows that there are 15 communication strategies (CSs) used by 10 participants from FLL students, batch 2011, Satya Wacana Christian University Salatiga, in facing the vocabulary deficiencies which is marked by the pauses and revisions made during the online chatting process.

CMC is also a common thing in FLA. It becomes an important part in the learning process. However, FLA students still have difficulties in online discussion. Therefore, this study wants to investigate what problems FLA students faced during online discussion, particularly in vocabulary. Hopefully, this study could reveal the problems FLA student’s encountered in online
discussion so teachers could help the students regarding their problems, and also contribute to help them overcome their problem in writing class.

Literature Review

CMC and Language Learning

Communication media has evolved throughout times and ages. Currently CMC is the most favorite media to interact. Moreover, CMC give great benefits for human civilization, one of them is in language learning. Warschauer (1997) stated that CMC has the potential for promoting collaborative language learning. Warschauer mention that CMC gives the opportunity for a group of people to develop their knowledge together, thus linking reflection and interaction. The perfect example of what Warschauer has stated lies within revision that people make during synchronous CMC. The revision is the proof that people reflect to what they have written during interaction. This reflection indicates that people can learn through CMC.

A study was conducted by Kroonenberg’s (1994). The study found that a computer-mediated synchronous chat mode can bring several benefits. First, it allowed students to practice rapid interaction. Second, CMC allowed students to pause and pay closer attention when needed, thus giving them chance for reflection in the middle of interaction. Third, students were more expressive while communicating in text based form rather than oral conversation which give the opportunity for shy students to participate. Satar & Özdener (2008) also mentioned CMC offers a test environment in which learners can try out, evaluate, and reflect on their performance through real interaction and authentic feedback.
Bubaš & Spitzberg (2008) figured out that several face to face communication skills are related to CMC. Bubaš & Spitzberg (2008) has the hypothesis that Both CMC and face to face communication skills are positively related to the frequency of use of the Internet for asynchronous (e-mail) and synchronous (chat, instant messaging) communication. Bubaš & Spitzberg also mentioned that Listening, Comforting, Conversation, Informative, Narrative, Regulative, and Expressive are skills that related in CMC and face to face interaction. This finding showed that we could possibly utilize CMC for language learning, especially to improve speaking and writing proficiency. For example, informative and narrative skill could affect people’s writing proficiency while their conversation and expressive skill could impact speaking ability.

**Vocabulary**

Vocabulary is an integral part of language learning. It is possibly the most important part in mastering a language. A long debate occurred about which one is the foundation of language learning, vocabulary or grammar. Schmitt (2000) stated that a word’s meaning must be learned before that word can be of any use. In addition, Schmitt (2000) mentioned that there is a practical matter of mastering either the spoken or the written form of the word before it can be used in communication. In other words, vocabulary is the most basic thing that people would learn in learning language, thus making it as the first priority.

In the light of understanding a word, Nation (2001) mentioned the types of world knowledge, which most of them are important in order to be able to use a word with wide variety
of context and situations. These types of word knowledge are the meanings of the word, the
written form of the word, the spoken form, of the word, the grammatical behavior of the word,
the collocations of the word, the register of the word, the associations of the word, and the
frequency of the words. Furthermore, Nation (2001) suggest that knowing a large number of
words could help L2 learners in the long run. As a fact, Nation & Waring (1997) suggested that
learning 3000 high frequency words is necessary. In short, it is important to not only know a
large number of vocabulary but also know the various way in using the word and to use it
frequently, since the proficiency could degrade if the word is never been used.

Vocabulary in CMC language learning

While the importance of vocabulary has been discussed previously, it turns out that CMC
and language learning are also related to vocabulary. Lacking in vocabulary could bring
disadvantage in face to face communication and CMC as well. This problem is known as
Vocabulary Deficiencies. Previous study conducted by Budiono (2015) described it as a
communication problem when the process of delivering ideas is unsuccessful due to a lack of
comprehension on four vocabulary knowledge dimensions. The dimensions mentioned are
vocabulary size (number of words that learners understand the meaning), depth of vocabulary
knowledge (lexical characteristics including register), lexical organization (storage, connection
and representation of words in mental state of a learner), and automaticity of receptive and
productive knowledge (Rashidi and Koshravi, 2010) based on Qian & Schedl (2004:30), as cited
by Budiono (2015). This is a proof that vocabulary could aslo hindered CMC language learning.
Not only disadvantage that can be brought by vocabulary in CMC language learning. A benefit can also be found through vocabulary in CMC language learning. Another previous study by Fuente (2009) tried to discover whether lexical L2 interlanguage development could be developed by CMC interaction or not. The participants of the study, whose native language was English, belonged to three classes of a second semester of Elementary Spanish, part of the Basic Language Program, and all had received approximately 65 hours of formal classroom exposure to the L2. They were randomly assigned to one of two experimental groups: Oral Interaction group (OIG), and Virtual Chat group (VCG). The study showed that students from second group (VCG) developed their written knowledge of L2 significantly despite the first group (OIG) outpowered them in several occasions. This is not a surprising thing, since the second group is only exposed to virtual chat which is in written form. Despite the minimal significant on lexical development this could be a concrete evidence that CMC could help and related to vocabulary learning.
The Study

Research Question

What are the difficulties faced by FLA students in online discussion?

Context

This study was conducted using qualitative approach. The qualitative approach was suitable for this study since it has the objective to reveal what were the difficulties encountered by students during online communication. This study analyzed cognitive process that occurred through the media of online interaction, in order to do so SRP was used.

Participants

The study took 10 FLA students as the participants. The students were in their junior year since this study would try to contribute in helping the faculty to understand what are the lacks and difficulties that new students has so course designer could make a suitable material for them.

Instruments of data collection

As mentioned before, SRP was applied in this study to analyze cognitive process in online interaction. After the participants were done with their chat session, they watched their writing process which was recorded by the software together with the researcher. They further were asked questions about what happened during the writing process, and what happened with the pauses and revisions they have made. As stated by Gass & Mackey (2000) SRP is used to explore speaker’s thought process (or strategies) at the time of an activity or task. This means
that we can explore people’s thought while they are interacting online, and we can analyze what problems they have during online interaction using SRP. Moreover, SRP can be utilized to determining English proficiency particularly in writing (Wenyu & Yang, 2008). In order to support the implementation of SRP this study will utilize two softwares.

The first software that was used is *Camtasia Studio 8* (version 2.7.2). All activities that occurred in the computer screen are recorded by this software and would become a video file as the output. From the video, the difficulties encountered by participants can be seen in the form of pauses and revisions they have made. This could help the researcher to analyze the difficulties. Another software that was used is *Actual Keylogger* (version 6.2.3.1112). It records every key typed by the participants during online interaction process. The output from this software is in a form of chat-logs. This chat-logs will provide more detailed activities that occurred in online communication process.

**Data collection procedure**

In order to collect the data, there were several steps that has been done. The first is chat session. In this session participants were conducting online chat. The online chat was recorded using the *Camtasia Studio 8* software and *Actual Keylogger*. The chat session approximately lasted for 15 minutes. After the participants done with the chat session they were asked some questions regarding the pauses and revisions they have made during online chat process. This session approximately took 20-30 minutes.
Data analysis procedure

After the data has been collected, it was analyzed and discussed based on the Paul Nation’s (2001) framework of the types of world knowledge. There are eight types of knowledge that someone should possess in order to be able to use or produce a word, but this interview only used four categories/types. The interview’s result was analyzed using the framework to show which type of knowledge that participants lack of. However, since the difficulties faced by them were recorded in videos which cannot be presented in this written report, the result of the analysis was shown on the chat-logs recorded by the keystroke-logging software.

Figure 1. The example of chat-log marked with pauses and revisions.

In figure 1, it is shown that pauses and revisions are marked as (Pxx) and (Rxx). P is a mark for pauses that were made and R is a mark for revisions. The number after the mark P and R is a chronological order for pauses and revisions that occurred during chat activity. Pause is a state where the participants take a long interval to type down something, while revision occurred when participants replace or delete the word that had already been typed. Revisions usually marked as backspaces in the chat-log.
Finding and Discussion

In this section, all difficulties related to vocabulary were revealed. There are originally three difficulties; vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics which total were 84 revisions. However, there were only 34 revisions for vocabulary difficulties. There were four categories of difficulties that were encountered by the participants. Those difficulties were analyzed based on the pauses and revisions that occurred as the indication of vocabulary related difficulties in CMC. The difficulties analyzed were the one which revealed through interview. Those difficulties were analyzed using several types of world knowledge by Nation (1990).

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<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Summary of findings on vocabulary difficulties
The table above shows that the most difficulties faced by the participants came from word associations with total of 14 pauses and revisions made. The second most difficulties faced is word meaning with total of 10 pauses and revisions made, followed by collocations with total 6 pauses and revisions. The least difficult one is the written form with total of only 3 pauses and revisions. The table clearly indicated that word associations are the most problematic vocabulary knowledge for the participants.

**Word Association**

Word association is one of the eight aspects of world knowledge that was developed by Nation (1990). Word association means that all words are connected to the other words. For example, when certain word is given like “red”, people would connect or associate it with another word like “roses”, “car”, or “house”. According to Meara (1990) word association is classified as passive vocabulary knowledge. Meara also stated that words are linked like network through nodes which in reality is not really linear. This means that the association of one person might be different from others.

In this study, there are 2 pauses and 12 revisions regarding word association which are encountered by 7 out of 10 participants. From those 7 participants it was participant number 8 that having the most error on word association with total of 4 errors

![Figure 2.1. An excerpt of chat-log from participant 8 regarding word associations](#)
In figure above we can see that participant number 8 revised the word because he wanted to write “…truly like that” which indicate that he associate the word ‘truly’ with ‘like’. Although he could simply just typed the words ‘like that’ without have to put ‘truly’ before it which would not change the meaning of the sentence. On the interview he said “menurut saya kalau truly digabungkan like akan lebih cocok” (putting ‘truly’ before ‘like’ and combining it to become ‘truly like that’ just sounds more right for me).

Another example from participant 8 is when he replaced the incomplete word of ‘ha’ into ‘thanks’ which was located after he typed goodbye. It is the evidence that he associated goodbye and thanks as one network. While in general when taking leaves people would consider “goodbye and see you” or “goodbye and have a nice day” as the common expression rather than “goodbye and thanks” which on the interview he also said “kalau selamat tinggal biasanya saya bilang terima kasih juga” (I always say thank you whenever I left).

This is an evident for what have been promoted by Meara (1990) that words are connected asymmetrically. The nodes of words are not linear but branching since people could come up with their own word association. Moreover, Meara claims that the network or nodes in word association could only be accessed with the availability of external support. It means that learners might already have some words on their network but it is still a passive vocabulary so they could not use it yet. Similarly, Rothman (2009) agreed on how the brain stored vocabulary...
regarding word association is also from connection between words. Interestingly, Rothman
question how one network or connection is stronger than others. Therefore, further investigation
through test is required to discover how the connection could work significantly.

**Word Meaning**

Vocabulary is very important in language learning. Even some scholars are divided into
two beliefs. The one that claim grammar is more important and the one who believe that
vocabulary is the more important one. It is a fact that sentence could not be fully understood
without proper grammar. However, the communication still can be conducted even only using
core words. Furthermore, Schmitt (2000) suggested that everyone should realize that a word’s
meaning must be learned before that word can be of any use. This implies that knowing the
meaning of core words is important in language learning and could be beneficial for interaction.

In this study, there are 10 errors regarding word meaning which are encountered by 5
participants. Among those five the most error was made by participant 8 with total 3 errors.

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Figure 2.3. An excerpt of chat-log from participant 3 regarding word meaning

Figure above is the example from participant 3. After typing the word “and” she did a
brief pause. In the interview it was revealed that she actually had something in her mind to reply
the chat but she did not know the meaning of the word that she was going to use, hence she
cannot express the word. The interview revealed that she said:

“Aku aslinya mau nulis dia kalau ngasih waktu submit selalu cepat, tapi aku lupa
artinya apa” (I originally want to typed she always gives us tight deadline for the
assignment, but I forgot what is the meaning).
Since participant 3 could not recall the word of deadline she instead typed “she always gives short time for us to finish her assignment.” After digging more about it, turns out she forgot the meaning of “deadline” in English. She forgot that “deadline” means due date.

Another example from participant 3 is when she did the fourth revision while conducting CMC. She typed “we have to repeat our draft 3 times…” though originally she intended to type “she makes us to revise our draft 3 times…” and the reason is the same as above. She cannot express the word meaning of “revision” in English, she then substitute the word “revision” into “repeat”.

From two examples above we could imply that the participant still has not yet mastering the knowledge of word meaning. On two occasions she forgot the meaning of the core words that she is supposed to use. This could be a daunting task to do since in order to master the knowledge learners should increase their vocabulary size. Approximately 3000 words should be learned immediately (Nation & Waring, 1997). Even though it could be difficult, Ellis (1995) claimed that connecting word meaning and its form could be beneficial.

Another case that prompted up from the findings above is the word meaning problems regarding translation. In the interview participant 3 stated that she is rarely if not never doing an online communication using English. She had to translate all the words from her L1 (Indonesian) to L2 (English), and reflecting from the discussion above it would be difficult for her to
communicate if she did not possess the recommended vocabulary size. However, another interesting part could be highlighted here. Her strategy to compensate the lack of word meaning should not be neglected. The strategy is called reciprocal words which believe that most languages will also have sets of words which are the reciprocal of one another making the words ‘give’ and ‘receive’ have a reciprocal relationship to one another (Shamam, 2012). For the example, “we have to repeat our draft three times because of her” and “she makes us to revise the draft three times” has the same meaning. The fact that she also use synonym to solve her vocabulary problem by changing ‘revision’ into ‘repeat’ is also should be appreciated.

**Collocation**

Collocation has a tight relation with word association. Both collocation and word association revolve around how the word can be used. However, Nation (2001) distinguished between the use of collocation and word association by separating the two according to the nature of the productive knowledge on both sides respectively. Word association deals with what other words could be used instead of one, while collocation put more emphasis on what words must be used with another. For example “blond” is a color that collocates with “hair”. We can say “blond hair” but not “blond shirt” because it is uncommon and unnatural in English.

There are total of 6 errors regarding collocation that are suffered by 5 out of 10 participants.

![Figure 2.5: An excerpt of chat-log from participant 6 regarding collocation](image-url)

The figure above is an example of the revisions that occurred in participant 6’s chat session. There was hesitation in her mind when she typed the words. She originally wanted to
type ‘taste’ but she changed it into ‘feel’ and the final complete sentence is “You have to feel the sensation”. At first she thought that ‘feel’ and ‘taste’ have the same meaning which is true if it was translated into Indonesian. She already deleted several letters in ‘feel’ and planned to type ‘taste’ instead. But she realized the context of the meaning and immediately changed it again into ‘feel’. On the interview she said “Awalnya kan mau pakai ‘taste’ tapi kan menurutku salah karena ‘feel’ lebih cocok.” (I am actually wanted to use ‘taste’, but I realized ‘feel’ is sounds more natural)

Another example above from participant 9 shows us another error caused by collocation. She did a pause after typing “people in flanture is…” because she had a hesitation in her mind since there are two words that she is going to use. Originally, her complete sentence should be “people in flanture is enjoyable” but changed to “people in flanture is fun” instead. She feels that to describe the word ‘people’ is more suitable to use ‘fun’ rather than ‘enjoyable’. On the interview she said “‘enjoyable’ lebih tepat buat menggambarkan aktivitas” (‘enjoyable’ should refer to some kind of activities).

From those examples above we could see clearly the difference between word association and collocation like what Nation (2001) had already suggest above on how the word be used. From the examples we could imply that the participants are mainly concerned about the naturalness of the sentence. Participants 6 understand that in Indonesian “feel” and “taste” could have the same meaning, but when she use the word and put it into a sentence in English it become unsuitable and sounds weird. Participant 6 knows that “taste” collocates with food and “feel” should collocate with “sensation”. According to Bahns (1993) this could happened
because such collocation is related to the participant’s L1 background knowledge. In other word, the participant already knows the equivalent collocation of the L1 and the English.

There is another thing that we could get from the findings above regarding the relation of collocation and word meaning. Though collocation and word association could be very similar, we could see another revelation that collocation and word meaning are related. Brown (1974) stated that every useful collocation is could become a step towards understanding the concept of a word. Brown adds that the way that words are woven together, the context, can be such that it has defining power which student can infer the meaning from context.

**Written Form**

According to the classification of word knowledge by Nation (2001), written form is about what the word looks like and how the word is written or spelled. Laufer (2005) suggested that written form is associated with active vocabulary knowledge since in order to write proper word is considered as a productive skill. It is important to understand the written form since it is included in the types of word knowledge which means knowledge that a person must master in order to know a word (Nation, 1990).

In this study, there are only three errors regarding written form which 3 out of 10 participants suffered from. This means there is only one error for one participant. This error is also the least encountered error among 4 categories.

Figure 2.7. An excerpt of chat-log from participant 1 regarding written form
Example above is from participant 1. Marked as the first revision, she was about typing the word ‘deadline’. It is shown in the chat-log that she deleted the word ‘deadline’ even when it still incomplete which still typed as “dead..”. It is revealed in the interview, that she said

“aku hapus soalnya bingung antara ‘deadline’, ‘dead line’, apa ‘dateline’. (I deleted the word because the confusion between ‘deadline’, ‘dead line’, and ‘dateline’).

She understood the meaning and the context of the word she was going to use but she was not sure about the written form of it. Finally, she revised it and chose to use ‘deadline’ instead of ‘dead line’ or ‘dateline’ and complete the sentence of “when the deadline is coming”.

The figure above is another simple example from participant 7 regarding written form. She wanted to type ‘Alzheimer’ but not sure how it is correctly spelled. At first, she did type ‘Alzheiemer’ but then revised it by deleting the one character ‘e’ after an ‘i’. Actually she knows the meaning of the word and how it is pronounced, but she forgot the spelling or the written form of that particular word.

There is a possibility that vocabulary size served as one of the factors that contribute in the errors above. It is already mentioned above by Nation & Waring (1997) that a learner should at least know 3000 words of target language. Similarly, Laufer & Nation (1995) added that vocabulary size is a major determinant on how the written form can be produced by writer.
From these findings above it is clear that most of participants are struggling with word association. Not only because it is appeared as the reason why all the errors were made, but also because almost all participants are suffering from word association. From 10 participants only 3 of them that did not suffer from this error category. Despite the number, this error is not really that fatal compared to collocation.

Furthermore, collocation appeared as the third most error faced and seems to be less harmful compared to word association and meaning. However, there is something that we could learn after digging more about this particular error. This error was considered as an underdog among other errors. With only total of 6 occurrences, collocation is actually a little bit tricky to resolve. For example, the use between ‘taste’ and ‘feel’. To cope with collocation, participants should understand the context that is being used during the communication.

Conclusion

The objective of this study is to classifying the vocabulary difficulties faced by freshmen students during online computer mediated communication and discusses them in-depth. This study used 4 categories to classify the difficulties based on Nation’s (2001) world knowledge. Those categories are word association, word meaning, collocation, and written form. This study has succeeded in revealing the problems that were encountered by the participants. The most problematic difficulty revealed by this study is word association. This shows that the freshmen students are still need to learn more about word association. However, the freshmen also still need to learn the other three categories especially collocation since it is a tricky one to resolve as
previously discussed. If those categories could be mastered well by students, it would likely to enhance their writing skill which also could help them in their writing classes.

This study also served as the further stage of Budiono’s (2015) study regarding communication strategies in dealing with vocabulary deficiencies. This study could act as a new taxonomy in understanding vocabulary difficulties in CMC. Thus, this study combined together with Budiono’s could answer the question of what are the vocabulary difficulties in CMC and what are the strategies to cope with those difficulties.

Despite the success, however, this study still only discussed small parts of vocabulary difficulties in CMC. Since this study only use 4 out of 8 types of Word Knowledge to classify the difficulties. Therefore, a richer discussion could be achieved if all aspects of Word Knowledge are applied. Another way to get a broader result that maybe in the future should be considered is to include senior participants in this study as well.
References


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