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ARE MY WORDS GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT?: THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF SPECIALIZED VOCABULARY IN CULINARY STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a review on the teaching and learning of vocabulary in the ESL classroom, specifically the acquisition of specialized vocabulary in hospitality and tourism. Past researches have shown that the size and coverage of vocabulary plays an important role in vocabulary acquisition, and that vocabulary learning can benefit from both intentional and incidental means. Studies on specialized vocabulary in Malaysian institutions of higher education have been very limited and past researches have focused on the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for example business and medicine. There appears to be very few studies conducted within the culinary realm due to its infantile growth in Malaysia. The emergence of current interest into the hospitality and tourism related fields in the last few years in Malaysia provide promising future for both culinary students and educators. Thus, more research in culinary studies for L2 students are called for to further enhance its development for educational and commercial purposes in Malaysia.

Keywords: Teaching and learning of vocabulary; specialized vocabulary; culinary studies

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of vocabulary plays an important role in determining English language proficiency, especially in the L2 classroom environment. A non-native student with a very limited range of L2 vocabulary will undoubtedly face numerous difficulties in understanding materials in English, which will lead to problems in reading and writing. Thus, more emphasis should be made towards the teaching and learning of vocabulary in the L2 classroom. In the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) setting, similar emphasis should be put towards the acquisition of specialized or technical vocabulary. Since the main purpose of ESP courses is to equip students with the rhetoric discourse within a particular field, thus students should be well versed in the usage of the vocabulary within the field. Culinary art is one instance of a particular field with a distinct spoken and written discourse in a specific genre. In the Malaysian institution of higher education however, the teaching of ESP courses has focused on genres such as business and medicine. Only until recently, more interest has developed in the hospitality and tourism sector in Malaysia, particularly in culinary studies and gastronomy. Thus with the emergence of

culinary studies in the higher institutions, particularly in the ESP courses more research is needed in aiding students and educators in gaining proficiency in terms of academic literacy in culinary related fields.

RECENT TRENDS OF CULINARY ARTS IN MALAYSIA

The development of culinary arts has shown significantly with the rise of technology in Malaysia. With the convenience of the internet, the public can read about the best places to eat through food blogs, where the bloggers share their passion for food and their personal experiences at restaurants, cafes, or *mamak* stalls around Malaysia. The attractions of these blogs are the natural and informal language used by the bloggers and the unique and mouth-watering pictures of some of the delectable foods presented on the websites. Some of the most visited sites include masak-masak.blogspot.com, malaysiabest.net, makankings.blogspot.com, malaysianfoodreview.net, rasamalaysia.com, babeinthecitykl.blogspot.com, deliciousasianfood.com, fatboyrecipes.blogspot.com, malaysianfoodguide.com and bigboysoven.blogspot.com (Ultimate Malaysians food blog, 2007).

Other than the internet, more and more cooking shows and food related shows are emerging on the Malaysian television and cable network. Although Malaysians are familiar with international chefs and their shows such as Jamie Oliver from “The Naked Chef”, Nigella Lawson from “Nigella Bites”, Rachael Ray from “The Rachael Ray show” and Gordon Ramsey from “Hell’s Kitchen”, however more local chefs are being recognized. To name a few, from the Astro’s Asian Food Channel (AFC) “Great Dinner’s of the World” are four rising culinary maestro Malcolm Goh, Sho Naganuma, Johnny Fua and Sherson Lian. Malaysian favourite chef Datuk Redzuawan bin Ismail or better known as Chef Wan, has also made his mark for his original production “Best Wan!” on AFC. Chef Wan has also been acknowledged in the international arena through a number of television series such as “A Taste of Australia with Chef Wan” from The Australian ABC Network, “Flavours of Asia” from Singapore Prime 12, “Market Kitchen” from The UK Food Network, “Flavours of the World” from Sweden TV4, and “Chef Wan and Gino’s Specials” from Norway Orge TV (Wilson, 2010). Malaysia is also one of the countries which feature an internationally known cooking game show “MasterChef” and “Celebrity MasterChef” which introduces Malaysia’s top chefs for instance Moh Johari Edrus (Chef Jo), Adu Amran Hassan (Chef Adu) and Zubir Md Zain (Chef Zubir).

Although there is growing interest in the culinary arts, however this field has not been receiving much scholarly attention, particularly in Malaysia. Hegarthy (2005) explains that this is due to (1) the deficient theoretical foundations which are needed for it to be acknowledged as a discipline, (2) the disparity for the industry needs and academicians in the field, (3) the complexities to separate its transitory nature with the physical work, and (4) the scarcity of doctoral scholars within the discipline. Thus, in the efforts to promote culinary arts within the academia realm, courses should be offered in tandem with the needs of the industry. This is in line with the development of ESP courses which are based on the realization that students should be geared towards attaining academic literacy for their future profession. In the Malaysian

institution of higher education however, the teaching of ESP courses has focused on genres in relation to business. Only until recently, more interest has developed in the hospitality and tourism sector in Malaysia, particularly in culinary studies and gastronomy. In the efforts to keep with the pace with the recent development, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) has introduced a Masters course in Gastronomy Management. The occupation under the gastronomy industry extend from restaurant management, design and consultations for eateries, specialty entrepreneurs, food writers, food critics, academicians, food and beverage directors, food photographer and stylist, sales and marketing, dieticians, nutritionists and research and development team related to development of kitchen products. Mohd Salehuddin, Mohd Hairi, Muhammad Izzat, Salleh & Zulhan (2009) states that with the vast opportunities of the culinary and gastronomy industry, more institutions in Malaysia should offer courses within the field as it is beneficial for educational and commercial purposes.

VOCABULARY LEARNING AND CULINARY STUDIES

The issues behind vocabulary learning are far more complex and have been debated for more than a few decades ago. Some of these issues, for instance are the question of how to ascertain that students have learned the vocabulary and how we can measure the act of knowing a word? In answering these questions, Nation (1990) developed a Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) to examine the breadth of vocabulary knowledge; which is to test whether students are able to give the meaning of known words. Building on his work, Wesche and Paribakht (1996) designed a vocabulary knowledge scale (VKS) which tested the *breadth* and *depth* of learners' vocabulary knowledge. Through this test they are able to observe whether students are able to give the meaning of known words (breadth) as well as how well students are able to use them (depth).

Although the issues regarding vocabulary learning has been discussed for quite some time, however this does not apply to specialized vocabulary; where interests in specialized vocabulary only began quite recently. Nation defines specialized vocabulary as words that are "recognizably specific to a particular topic, field or discipline" (2001, p. 198). Culinary art is one example of a rhetoric discourse with specialized vocabulary familiar to the discourse community. Therefore, to be accepted within the culinary field, one should be well versed with the discourse used within the discipline. For L2 students, to achieve competencies in a particular discourse they should possess a large range of vocabulary. Thus, the teaching and learning of vocabulary should be given high importance. However, the teaching of vocabulary in the ESP classroom was not always well received by teachers and researchers since it was believed that vocabulary acquisition may occur by itself as students progress in their studies (Nation, 2001). Little attention was also given to specialized vocabulary as they make up only 5% of textbooks (Ryan, 2010). However, due to some discrepancies it has been argued that a higher number of specialized vocabularies have been found in academic texts (Inman, 1978; Farrell, 1990; Chung & Nation, 2003, 2004; and Fraser, 2005, 2006). This discovery proves that students have a higher chance in encountering specialized vocabulary through assigned readings in the classroom. Subsequently students will be able to acquire these words better through frequent exposures. Although the amount or "size" of specialized vocabulary is an important aspect in

vocabulary acquisition, the “coverage” or “the percentage of running words (tokens) necessary to ensure reasonable comprehension of a text” (Fraser, 2006, p. 124) is also equally important. The percentage of words students should be familiar with to understand a text ranges from 95% (Laufer, 1989), 98% (Nation, 2001) and the highest possible percentage (Schmitt, Jiang & Grabe, 2011). This basically informs us that in order to fully understand a text, a student must know nearly all the words in the text. In culinary studies or other genres within the ESP setting, this poses as a problem for L2 learners with limited range of vocabulary. This also informs the importance of the teaching of both specialized and non-specialized vocabulary in the ESP classroom.

Thus, the question that arises would be what categorizes as specialized and non-specialized vocabulary? Nation (2001) also contends that there are varying degrees of what is considered specialized. Therefore, in the attempt to simplify the classifications of specialized vocabulary, Chung (2003) had developed a four-step rating scale. Although this scale was initially used for anatomy, however it can be applied to any discipline, topic or field. The words are categorized as follows:

- Step 1: words completely autonomous from the subject matter (eg.: function words).
- Step 2: words moderately related to the field of anatomy (eg.: position and movements of the body).
- Step 3: words mildly related to the anatomy discipline but also used in general and applicable to other fields.
- Step 4: words specific to the field and have clear restrictions of usage and are not used in general language.

From this rating scale, specialized vocabularies are classified under Step 3 and Step 4. With this breakthrough research, it has helped tremendously in identifying specialized vocabulary. It is also helpful in assisting the teaching of vocabulary in the ESP classroom. Nation (2001, 2008) proposed that it is important to highlight specialized vocabulary as words from Step 4 from Chung’s (2003) scale cannot be taught in isolation as the words can only be recalled as students gain knowledge from the specific field. Nevertheless, words from Step 3 can be taught in the classroom for instance, by informing students words with different meanings may also have similar underlying meanings.

In regards to the best method in teaching vocabulary, there has been a dispute between whether implicit (unintentional) or explicit (intentional) instructions will provide better vocabulary gain. However, there is no way to ascertain which approach is better than the other, thus Schmitt (2000) suggests that a combination of both approaches to be employed. Merging the two types of learning will provide L2 learners more effective ways to learning vocabulary since certain vocabulary knowledge is best learned through specific types of learning (Schmitt, 2000; Nation, 2001). For instance, through implicit learning students would be able to notice the word form and numerous encounters will allow better learning of the vocabulary item. But, to learn the word meaning, explicit instructions which require depth of processing (Craik & Lockhart, 1972)

are needed. Such instructions may include the use of images and elaborations which focus on meaning. In regard to productive use of words, both implicit and explicit approach should be utilized; where explicit guidance and also feedback can lead to more effective acquisition of the word knowledge (Nation, 2001). These implications provide some basis in the teaching of vocabulary in culinary studies, where some words can be picked-up easily through extensive readings such as the lexicon or names of food; for instance peanut butter or “nutella”. However, the nomenclature; for instance milkshake or frappé, and the morphology or the ways the food are prepared; such as steamed, poached or deep-fried (Bloom, 2008, p. 346-347) are words which are best taught through intentional instructions.

The teaching of specialized vocabulary has followed the trend of ESP development, where the focus has been on the business, medicine or pharmaceutical field. However, very little attention has been given to culinary art or other related fields. Providing that culinary studies are still in the infantile stages in the academic realm, many more studies are warranted in the learning of specialized vocabulary in the field. As stressed by Ryan (2010) very little is known about specialized vocabulary, where the importance of specialized vocabulary is only made aware recently from studies which have prompted the teaching of specialized vocabulary in the ESP classroom.

CONCLUSION

Culinary arts have been stirring interests among commercial entrepreneurs and also academicians within the tourism and hospitality sector. In Malaysia more local chefs are being recognized worldwide through the convenience of the internet as well as the media. Culinary arts programs have also began to emerge in the Malaysian institutions of higher education. However, due to its recent development very little studies have been conducted within the field, which makes it difficult for educators and students alike in the learning of culinary related discipline. This predicament applies particularly in the ESP classroom, where language proficiency is compulsory in attaining the acceptance of fellow discourse community in a specific genre, such as that of culinary arts. Following the acceptance in the teaching of specialized vocabulary in the classroom, more research is called for in producing a more standardized and established method in aiding specialized vocabulary acquisition.

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