

**THE TREATMENT OF  
KEY VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES  
IN CURRENT ELT COURSEBOOKS:  
REPETITION, RESOURCE USE, RECORDING**

by

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## Abstract

A growing body of research evidence is showing the advantages of using certain skills and behaviors, called learning strategies, in the process of L2 vocabulary acquisition. This comes at a time when there is broad agreement about the crucial, perhaps even central role played by lexis in the task of foreign or second language learning. While there have been calls for some time to include training in the use of vocabulary learning strategies in language instruction, it is not clear whether or to what extent these have been heeded. This study attempts to gauge any inroads made in one area of endeavor in the field of ELT, that of commercial coursebooks. Based on a review of the relevant literature, a set of three 'key' strategies was identified and an analytic framework was devised. The framework was then applied to a small sample of best-selling, upper-level coursebooks. The results of the analysis are presented and discussed here. It was found that, while there was considerable variation in the amount of attention devoted to key strategies, overall the treatments in the sample were deemed unlikely to improve students' abilities with these important skills and techniques, with one possible exception.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Without grammar, very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, *nothing* can be conveyed (Wilkins 1972:111).

### 1.1 Hypothesis

It is widely accepted today that to learn English as a second or foreign language, one must systematically set oneself to the task of acquiring a significant portion of the lexicon. Evidence from psycholinguistic research has shown that lexis – particularly prefabricated “chunks” in the form of collocations and fixed phrases – is in large part the foundation of every native speaker’s fluency and idiomaticity (Pawley and Syder 1983), with clear implications for any learner who wishes to approach native-speaker norms in his or her ability. Additionally, studies in corpus linguistics indicate that much of language as it is actually used in speech and writing contains a high proportion of such prefabricated language; in other words, formulae account for more of the choices speakers and writers make than do novel constructions based on the application of grammatical rules (Sinclair 1991). For both receptive and productive purposes, therefore, foreign language learners must develop a good L2 vocabulary in order to make sense of what they hear and read, and to express themselves fluently and appropriately.

According to Laufer:

Vocabulary is no longer a victim of discrimination in second language learning research, nor in language teaching. After decades of neglect, lexis is now recognized as central to any language acquisition process, native or non-native. What many language teachers might have intuitively known for a long time, that a solid vocabulary is necessary in every stage of language learning, is now being openly stated by some second language acquisition (SLA) researchers” (1997:147).

Nowadays there is evidence of the change in many quarters of ELT. Lewis’s polemical calls for a lexical approach (1993; 1997) have been much discussed and debated. Arguments have been advanced in support of lexical syllabuses that would make the most common words of the language, in their typical contexts and patterns of use, the foundation for language

learning programs (Sinclair and Renouf 1988; Willis 1990). Coursebooks writers have become more selective and principled about what vocabulary they include (O'Dell 1997).

At the same time, a research base has been established and continues to grow which shows that certain skills and techniques, commonly referred to as learning strategies, are strongly linked to successful vocabulary learning. These include practices which will be familiar to most learners, such as consulting bilingual or multilingual dictionaries, recording new lexis in a notebook or on index cards, and revising previously learned items. Other strategies, whose effectiveness is documented but which remain unknown to mainstream ELT, include mnemonic devices like the keyword technique and distributed repetition. Studies show that there is great variation among learners as to which strategies they use and how effectively they use them. As will be shown, research validates the benefits of using many of these strategies according to a number of indices, including vocabulary size, retention, and overall language proficiency. Additionally, there is research evidence, as well as powerful common-sense arguments, supporting the notion of training learners in the use of such strategies to improve their vocabulary learning.

Given these facts – the broadly recognized need to focus on lexis in language learning, and the documented benefits of using learning strategies to acquire lexis – it seems logical to suppose that some attention should be paid to vocabulary learning strategies in any language-learning program. An argument to this effect is bolstered if one considers several additional factors:

- The classroom is unlikely to be able to provide all the lexis a learner will need (Willis 1990; Lewis 1993; Sokmen 1997).
- Lexical needs are largely unique to the individual, based in part on personal preference, professional and academic particularities, etc. (Rivers 1983; Nation 2001).
- Thanks to modern technology, opportunities exist outside the classroom as never before for finding potentially useful input for developing one's lexicon, in the form of the Internet, cable and satellite TV, film and television programs on digital video, etc.

Considering these factors, it can be argued that syllabus designers, coursebook writers and classroom teachers are not only justified but even duty-bound to devote some attention to vocabulary learning strategies. Indeed, calls have been made for some time to this effect but

it is an open question whether these have been heeded. What steps have been taken to incorporate vocabulary learning strategies into ELT, and how successful have these efforts been? This is the topic of the present investigation.

## 1.2 Study objectives

The purpose of this study is to consider how vocabulary learning strategies are treated in one area of endeavor in the field of ELT; namely, coursebooks. The goal is to determine to what degree, if any, current coursebooks contribute to the development of learners' skilled use of vocabulary learning strategies. Which strategies are in evidence in current coursebooks? Are they presented implicitly or explicitly? Are they integrated into language-learning activities, or treated in one-off supplementary sections? Are the steps involved in using the strategy spelled out for learners, or is a more general approach adopted? To answer these questions, a review of the literature of vocabulary learning strategies, as well as general learning strategies and learner training, was conducted and a subset of 'key' strategies was identified. Next, an analytic framework was developed on the basis of this review. Three popular upper-level commercial coursebooks were selected and analyzed according to this framework. The findings are presented here and their implications for teachers, materials writers and others involved in ELT are discussed.

## 1.3 Organization

The paper proceeds from this introductory chapter to Chapter Two, which constitutes a review of the relevant research. First, I will summarize a number of significant studies related to vocabulary learning strategies. This is followed by a comparison of various taxonomies of such strategies. One of these taxonomies is selected and from it three 'key' strategies are chosen. A rationale for identifying these as such is provided, after which I describe specific research related to them. Following this, I outline a few fundamental ideas from the literature on general learner training and present a set of guidelines for conducting such training which contributes to the analytic framework for this study.

Chapter Three describes the materials and methods used. I first provide a justification for choosing coursebooks as the focus of the investigation and then present the specific research questions. Next, there is a description of the research methodology, including the analytic

framework and rating scheme employed. Finally, I provide information about the specific books, proficiency level and coursebook components analyzed in the investigation.

In Chapter Four, the results of the analysis are presented and discussed. I start with a comparison of the various claims each book makes with regard to its treatment of lexis and learner training. Then, using excerpts, quotations and commentary, I describe the treatment of each key strategy in the books with reference to the analytic framework.

Chapter Five concludes the dissertation. I first offer a summary of the findings and then consider the limitations of the study. Following this, there is a discussion of the implications for teachers and teacher training, materials writers, researchers and others connected to ELT, and finally some concluding thoughts.

#### 1.4 Terminology

In this paper the terms *vocabulary* and *lexis* will be used interchangeably. I believe this usage is reflected in much of the published research that I will cite. Recently, writers in the fields of methodology (Lewis 1993) and syllabus design (Sinclair and Renouf 1988; Willis 1990) have used the words *lexis* and *lexical* in arguably unconventional ways to distinguish their proposals from others, but I do not intend any such specialist usage. By *lexis*, *vocabulary* or *lexical items* I mean simply to refer to words, collocations and the type of multi-word items that will be familiar to most teachers and learners today, e.g. social expressions, idioms, catchphrases and so on. In cases where I cite a study which focuses a particular type of lexical item, I shall acknowledge this.



## Chapter 2: Literature review

### 2.1 A need to 'learn how to learn' vocabulary

Calls for helping learners improve the way they go about learning vocabulary have been made on a number of grounds. Rivers, for example, argues that the lexicon is a personal resource both in terms of its contents (and the way these fill an individual's professional, academic, interpersonal needs, etc.) and also in the way the lexicon is itself developed and organized. On this basis, she asserts that:

Vocabulary cannot be taught. It can be presented, explained, included in all kinds of activities, and experienced in all manner of associations ... but ultimately it is learned by the individual. As language teachers, we must arouse interest in words and a certain excitement in personal development in this area ... We can help our students by giving them ideas on how to learn, but each will finally learn a very personal selection of items organized into relationships in an individual way (1983:127).

Sokmen, in reviewing current trends in vocabulary teaching, argues for helping learners learn how to acquire vocabulary on their own, noting that it is “not possible for students to learn all the vocabulary they need in the classroom” (1997:225). Evaluating vocabulary's place in contemporary ELT syllabuses, O'Dell asserts that training learners to become more independent is “one of the most useful things which the teacher can do with students during the vocabulary component of a course”; she recommends that vocabulary be included not only at the beginning but repeatedly “as a side issue in many lessons” (1997:275). Independence in vocabulary learning is not only practical but also psychologically beneficial. Atkinson (1972) found that learners who could decide for themselves which new items to learn showed a 50 percent higher rate of recall than those using words chosen by someone else. Books on how to teach vocabulary stress the importance of developing autonomous learning skills in students, as do some materials for learners themselves (see, for example, Thornbury 2002 and Redman and Ellis 1989, respectively). Woolard, writing specifically about teaching collocation, says the role of the language teacher today is “moving more and more towards that of learning manager, and as such, a primary aim of teaching must be to raise the students' awareness of their increasing responsibility for, and power over, their own learning” (2000:46).

## 2.2 What are vocabulary learning strategies?

Vocabulary learning strategies can be considered a subset of general learning strategies in second language acquisition. Interest in learning strategies first developed in the 1970s with research to identify the characteristics of good language learners (e.g. Naiman, Frohlich et al. 1975, cited in O'Malley and Chamot 1990, and Rubin 1975). O'Malley and Chamot define learning strategies as “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information” (1990:1). This very broad definition is echoed by Schmitt in defining *vocabulary* learning strategies. Citing Rubin (1987), Schmitt says learning is “the process by which information is obtained, stored, retrieved and used’ ... Therefore vocabulary learning strategies could be any which affect this broadly defined process” (1997:203). This definition leaves open to question whether vocabulary learning is incidental or deliberate, a factor which has been much debated in the literature. In his definition Nation makes clear the intentional character of vocabulary learning and, interestingly, bases his description on the qualities a strategy must possess in order to warrant attention from a teacher. According to Nation, a strategy must:

1. involve choice, that is, there are several strategies to choose from
2. be complex, that is, there are several steps to learn
3. require knowledge and benefit from training
4. increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and vocabulary use (2001:217).

Because of this paper’s focus on classroom-based training in the use of vocabulary learning strategies, Nation’s is the definition which shall be adopted.

## 2.3 How do learners use vocabulary learning strategies?

A number of significant research studies have investigated how learners use vocabulary learning strategies. Some of these have attempted to determine which strategies learners use (or claim to use) and which they consider helpful. Others have focused on relationships between strategy use and success in language learning according to various measures. There have also been attempts to develop taxonomies of vocabulary learning strategies on the basis of empirical research. Several of those studies are summarized here. As will be seen, many of the authors refer in some way to the need to address strategy training in the language classroom.

Ahmed (1989) studied the use of vocabulary learning strategies among university students of English in the Sudan using a structured interview and observation during think-aloud tasks. On the basis of school records and the subjective evaluations of school officials, he divided the learners up into several groups of ‘good’ students and ‘underachievers’. Ahmed found that, in general, among learners in the three clusters of high-achieving students, strategy use was more evident. These learners were aware of their learning, recognized the benefits of studying vocabulary in context, and were conscious of links between new and previously learned items. In contrast, learners in the two underachieving groups exhibited little use of strategies and showed little awareness of the need to integrate new and existing knowledge. The study also found that the most commonly used strategy by all respondents was note-taking, while dictionary use was also prevalent. However, there was significant variation in the effectiveness with which good and underachieving learners made use of these strategies. This was one of the first studies to look at vocabulary learning strategies as a group and to try to correlate clusters of strategies (as opposed to individual ones) with success in learning.

Gu and Johnson (1996) used a lengthy questionnaire to determine which strategies Chinese university students used to learn English vocabulary and then correlated the findings with measures of vocabulary size and language proficiency. They found that use of strategies for retention correlated with higher vocabulary size but not language proficiency. Also, belying stereotypes about the popularity of rote learning among Asians, the respondents downplayed memorization and instead indicated a strong belief that vocabulary should be “carefully studied and put to use” (1996:652). The researchers also found that strategies tended to cluster together in certain combinations, which seemed to constitute a more important factor in learning than did strategies operating individually. On the basis of these combinations, the researchers grouped the respondents into types representing five different approaches to vocabulary learning. The most successful group, named “Readers”, was the smallest; these learners tended to acquire most of their vocabulary from reading in English, and held strong beliefs about the importance of learning words in context and the ineffectiveness of memorization. The second best group, called “Active Strategy Users”, was notable for the wide variety of strategies they employed and for the “self-initiation and high flexibility” they displayed in using them (1996:664). These two groups combined accounted for only 11 per cent of the respondents; the great majority fell into the next two groups in order of proficiency. The “non-encoders” and “encoders” (distinguished primarily in that the latter

used more deliberate memorization strategies) accounted for 87 percent of the group, and according to the researchers made only average use of strategies.

In a follow-up study again focusing on Chinese university students, Gu (2002) found gender to be a “potent variable” in determining both use of vocabulary learning strategies and EFL outcomes. Female participants significantly outperformed their male counterparts in both vocabulary size and general proficiency, while also reporting much greater use of almost all the strategies found to correlate with successful learning in the original study.

In a report summarizing three longitudinal studies, Sananoui (1995) found that adult learners of L2 vocabulary tended to fall into two categories: those who employed a structured approach to their learning and those who did not. Characteristics of the structured approach included: the extent to which learners engaged in independent study; the range of self-initiated learning activities in which they engaged; and the extent to which they recorded the lexical items they were learning, reviewed such records, and practiced using vocabulary items outside the classroom. Sananoui concluded that the “unstructured” learners, who relied heavily on classroom instruction for development of their lexical knowledge, “would benefit most from instructors’ guidance in developing effective approaches to vocabulary study” (1995:25).

Lawson and Hogben (1996), using a think-aloud procedure, investigated which strategies a group of 15 Australian learners used in learning 12 new words in Italian. They found that the learners who recalled more of the learned words later had used a greater range of learning strategies, and used them more often, than their poorer performing counterparts. However, the learners in this study tended to favor simple repetition strategies over more complex elaboration strategies, despite the fact that the latter are associated with higher recall. The researchers concluded that “... if students are not aware of the advantages of these procedures for some vocabulary acquisition situations, there is a need to press this point more directly during language teaching” (1996:129).

Moir (1996) , cited in Nation (2001), investigated the vocabulary learning strategies of a group of 10 adult learners of English. All were committed, conscientious and hardworking, but one who was more effective than the rest showed a high level of responsibility for his learning and an awareness of what was involved in vocabulary learning. The less effective

learners, Moir concluded, had limited control of language learning strategies and were too strongly influenced in their approach by weekly tests and the perceived expectations of teachers. Learners, Moir asserts, “need a strong metacognitive understanding of the nature and purpose of the learning task, an awareness of a range of appropriate strategies and a clear understanding of their own needs” (Nation 2001:229).

Schmitt (1997) investigated the vocabulary learning strategies of 600 Japanese learners in four different age groups, using a questionnaire to determine which strategies they saw as helpful and which they actually used. The results showed a trend away from form-based strategies and towards meaning-based strategies as learners got older. One striking finding was a strong preference for bilingual dictionaries, which was the most commonly used strategy and also considered the most helpful. In several other cases, however, a strategy which a majority of learners perceived as helpful was actually used by less than half the sample, leading Schmitt to conclude that “learners may be willing to try new strategies if they are introduced to them and instructed in them” (1997:221).

Summarizing the research in this area, Nation asserts that:

Most vocabulary learning strategies can be applied to a wide range of vocabulary and are useful at all stages of vocabulary learning. They also allow learners to take control of learning away from the teacher and allow the teacher to concentrate on other things. Research shows that learners differ greatly in the skill with which they use strategies. For these reasons, it is important to make training in strategy use a planned part of a vocabulary development program (2001:222).

## 2.4 Taxonomies of vocabulary learning strategies

If one decides to include training in the use of vocabulary learning strategies in a curriculum, a taxonomy will be helpful. It can make clear which strategies are available for attention and thus allow for sufficient coverage, while also permitting prioritization. A taxonomy can also allow one to find areas of overlap and redundancy to make training more efficient. A small number of taxonomies have been proposed for vocabulary learning strategies, usually as part of research projects like those described above. Important issues in devising such taxonomies are how the individual strategies are selected and how they are categorized.

Gu and Johnson (1996) created a taxonomy on the basis of the responses to their self-reporting questionnaire. The researchers identified six types of strategy – guessing, dictionary, note-taking, rehearsal, encoding, and activation – and included two other factors as well: beliefs about vocabulary learning and metacognitive regulation.

Schmitt, lamenting the lack of a comprehensive list of vocabulary learning strategies, collected 58 of them from a variety of sources, including student questionnaires, literature reviews of vocabulary references and textbooks, and introspection. He then organized these using categories inspired by Oxford’s inventory of general language learning strategies (1990), with some modifications. The results were five types of strategy: determination, social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive (Schmitt 1997:207-8).

For the purposes of the present study, the taxonomy proposed by Nation (2001) was deemed most suitable. It divides strategies into three general classes: planning, sources, and processes (see Figure 2 below). The rationale behind this division is to separate the aspects of vocabulary knowledge (i.e. knowledge about words) from the sources of vocabulary knowledge and from learning processes. Although not comprehensive like Schmitt’s, Nation’s taxonomy has the advantage of being organized around less abstract categories, making it more practical for analyzing a program of learner training. It also lends itself to the selection of a subset of ‘key’ strategies upon which this study is based, and which will be described in the next section.

General class of strategies	Types of strategies
Planning: choosing what to focus on and when to focus on it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Choosing words</li> <li>▪ Choosing the aspects of word knowledge</li> <li>▪ Choosing strategies</li> <li>▪ Planning repetition</li> </ul>
Sources: finding information about words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Analyzing the word</li> <li>▪ Using context</li> <li>▪ Consulting a reference source in L1 and L2</li> <li>▪ Using parallels in L1 and L2</li> </ul>
Processes: establishing knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Noticing</li> <li>▪ Retrieving</li> <li>▪ Generating</li> </ul>

**Figure 2: Nation’s taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies (2001:218).**

## 2. 5 'Key' strategies

Because of the large and potentially indeterminate number of vocabulary learning strategies, it will clearly be impossible to attempt an investigation of how they are all treated in a language-learning program. This necessitates the selection of a subset of strategies which will provide a practical basis for research while also being theoretically defensible. With this in mind, the following were chosen from Nation's taxonomy and designated 'key' strategies.

1. **Repetition** (or review) from the class of planning strategies;
2. **Resource use**, in particular using a bilingual or monolingual dictionary, from the class of strategies related to sources; and
3. **Recording** (or note-taking), which Nation says is one of the primary skills related to noticing in the class of processes-related strategies (2001:221).

The justification for this selection is fourfold. First, these strategies represent each of the three main classes in Nation's list and thus exemplify three important components of vocabulary learning. Secondly, they will be easily recognizable to learners and teachers; most students will have used a dictionary, taken some form of notes, and reviewed for an examination; and many teachers will likely have encouraged these practices. Yet at the same time, as will be shown, they are not used universally and when they are used there is evidence that many learners use them poorly or ineffectively, which is the third point. The final justification is that use of these three can involve other lesser known strategies, as will be shown in the next section. Thus they are key in that they also have the potential to serve as valuable starting points in a learner-training program.

In the next section, research related to these three key strategies will be reviewed and some guidelines for including them in a program of learner training will be considered.

### 2.5.1 Planning repetition

The first major strategy where learner training can assist is in planning repetition. Hulstijn notes that "several decades of psycholinguistic research have made it clear that lexical information simply must be reactivated regularly" not only for it to be retained in memory but also to ensure that it can be fluently accessed in real-time communication (2001:286). Additionally, repetition is essential because there is so much to know about each word (e.g. syntactic, pragmatic, phonological, derivational, morphological, stylistic features, etc.) that "one meeting with it is not sufficient to gain this knowledge" (Nation 2001:75). Many

learners seem to equate reviewing with pre-test cramming. In cases where they do indicate elective use of review for vocabulary learning purposes, their approach is usually simplistic and ineffective; for example, trying to review as much or as often as possible. Fortunately, research from psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology offers clear guidance in this regard.

Many studies have reported the superiority of distributed repetition (breaking up reviews over time) over massed repetition (reviewing items intensively in a single sitting) (see Bloom and Shuell 1981; Bahrick 1984; Bahrick and Phelps 1987; Dempster 1987; Baddeley 1990).

Nation gives the example of a schedule of five three-minute review sessions spread over a period of ten days resulting in much better retention than a single fifteen-minute review session (2001:76). Baddeley postulates the cause of this phenomenon may be that time is required for certain neurochemicals in the brain to regenerate, although research is needed to verify this (1990).

An additional principle is that most forgetting tends to occur soon after initial learning, so the first reviews should take place very early, with inter-review intervals increasing in length as the item develops a firmer footing in memory. For example, Pimsleur (1967), in a much-cited article, proposed a schedule in which intervals between successive reviews were successively increased by a factor of two. Hulstijn says self-testing of items can be used to determine the length of time between repetitions; intervals should be longer after easy retrievals and shorter after difficult or incorrect attempts (2001). There are now computer applications to help learners perform such self-testing and to schedule repetitions at optimal intervals (for example, Wozniak 2002).

Clearly, any schedule for repetition will only be approximate. Some words, due to intralexical factors, are harder to learn than others (Laufer 1997), and individual differences in memory-related abilities will also affect outcomes (Skehan 1989). However, the basic principles are straightforward and amenable to training: 1) use distributed rather than massed repetition; 2) increase the intervals between repetitions as the items become more fixed in memory; 3) and give more attention to difficult-to-learn items. Considering the views of educationalists like Thornbury, who says a great deal of what is involved in acquiring a functioning lexicon is “simply a memory task” (2002:145), it seems important not to underestimate the threat that forgetting poses to language learning. Helping learners to improve the quality and efficiency of their repetition is not only pedagogically defensible but warranted.



## Tie-ins to other strategies

As a key strategy, planning repetition also entails opportunities to train learners in other lesser-known strategies from Nation's list. The most obvious is *retrieval*, which is what happens when a word-meaning pairing that has been noticed or comprehended is later met again and the word form or meaning is produced, voluntarily or involuntarily, from memory. Retrieval is important for vocabulary learning because the act of retrieving a word strengthens the paths linking the form and meaning in memory, making subsequent retrievals easier (Baddeley 1990). Learners should be made aware of the benefits of using retrieval when reviewing, rather than simply rereading their notes (Nation 2001). Landauer and Bjork (1978) combined retrieval with distributed practice in devising the mnemonic device known as the "expanding rehearsal procedure". This procedure, as noted above, has been incorporated into some software programs and is also the idea behind the word card strategy, which we will consider in Section 2.5.3.

### 2.5.2 Resource use: dictionaries

The second key strategy is dictionary use, which falls under Nation's category of sources of vocabulary information. Carter and McCarthy note that dictionaries "have a good image. Almost every learner of English as a second or foreign language owns one; and it is probably one of the few books retained after following [sic] a language course" (1988:52). They are a primary source of lexical information for most learners and fulfill a variety of functions: decoding for comprehension (while reading or listening); encoding for production (in writing, speaking or translating); and also for intentional learning of new vocabulary (Scholfield 1997). The growing availability of learners' dictionaries on CD-ROM and the Internet, which offer greater storage and unique features such as links to word processing programs and audio pronunciation models (Tribble 2003), as well as the possibility of online phraseological dictionaries (McAlpine and Myles 2003), suggest that the popularity of dictionaries will increase.

However, dictionary use is complex (Scholfield 1982) and while many students may indeed use dictionaries, they do not always do so efficiently. Studies show that many learners overuse them for comprehension purposes: even students with good inferring abilities may turn to dictionaries too frequently to confirm guesses, which slows the reading process (Hulstijn 1993; Knight 1994). Also, learners do not always make full use of the information

they find in dictionary entries while encoding, in particular grammatical or other usage information provided by means of special codes (Bejoint 1981). Additionally, learners need guidance in choosing the appropriate type of dictionary for their level and purposes. Various studies show a strong preference for bilingual dictionaries (Schmitt 1997; Baxter 1980), even though these are generally considered, by students and teachers alike, to be poor substitutes for monolingual learners' dictionaries. Thompson (1987) argues, however, that bilingual dictionaries have unique advantages, such as allowing for more efficient decoding.

Learner training should therefore acquaint learners with the strengths and weaknesses of different dictionary types for different language-learning tasks. Such training could focus on efficient use of bilingual dictionaries in lower levels and gradually introduce monolingual dictionaries as learning progresses, but it should also emphasize how they can be used to complement each other (Nation 2001). Training should also make learners aware of the full range of information that dictionary entries contain and the need to acquaint oneself with the varying formats and coding systems used in different dictionaries. It should also include step-by-step guidance for using dictionaries to encode and decode in order to avoid overuse or ineffective use (see below). A very helpful useful resource in this regard is Wright's compilation of dictionary-training tasks (1998).

### **Tie-ins to other strategies**

As a key strategy, dictionary training entails the potential to involve other strategies as well, namely choosing aspects of word knowledge and guessing from context (see Figure 2 above). With reference to the former, learners often equate knowing a lexical item simply with knowing its referential meaning. While this is often a primary concern, the ability to use a lexical item appropriately in speech or writing will require other types of knowledge, e.g. pragmatics, common collocates, syntactical patterns, stylistic or register constraints, etc. (Richards 1976; Laufer 1997). Good dictionaries will contain some or all of this information, so there is an obvious link to be exploited in addressing these strategies in training. Regarding the use of context, a number of studies have shown the potential benefits to L2 vocabulary growth involved in guessing from context, particularly during reading. Increasing the volume of reading an L2 learner does has been found to produce significant gains in vocabulary knowledge as well as other aspects of linguistic proficiency (Nagy 1997). Guessing from

context involves a multi-step process, which Clarke and Nation (1980), cited in Nation (2001:257), outline as follows:

- Step 1. Decide on the part of speech of the unknown word.
- Step 2. Look at the immediate context of the word, simplifying it grammatically if necessary.
- Step 3. Look at the wider context of the word, that is, the relationship with adjoining sentences and clauses.
- Step 4. Guess.
- Step 5. Check the guess.
  - Is the guess the same part of speech as the unknown word? Substitute the guess for the unknown word. Does it fit comfortably into the context?
  - Break the unknown word into parts. Does the meaning of the parts support the guess?
  - Look up the word in the dictionary.

As noted, learners tend to overuse dictionaries for decoding in particular, by looking up words unnecessarily. Appropriate strategy training can help establish clear guidelines for when dictionaries should be used during reading and when they should not.

### **2.5.3 Recording**

Recording strategies, such as keeping vocabulary notebooks and using words cards, are one form of “noticing” in Nation’s general category of strategies related to processes of vocabulary learning. Nation defines noticing simply as “giving attention to an item” (2001:63). Noticing occurs when a learner focuses on a word or expression and recognizes it as something useful to learn. Such recognition is clearly manifested in the process of recording an item on notebook paper, index card or in a personal vocabulary database stored on computer.

Vocabulary notebooks are probably the most common form of written student record but tend to vary greatly in format and quality of organization (McCarthy 1990). Many methodologists advocate the use of vocabulary notebooks, as well as training to help learners improve their effectiveness (Allen 1983; Redman and Ellis 1989; Schmitt and Schmitt 1995; Lewis 1997; Woolard 2000; Fowle 2002). Several have noted the opportunities such training presents for raising awareness about general principles of memory and language learning, and for

fostering learner autonomy. Fowle (2002), for example, emphasizes the role notebooks played in developing metacognitive knowledge about vocabulary learning among the teenage learners in his classroom-based research project in Thailand. Learner training can also make notebook-keeping more interesting and motivating for learners, and research has shown that interest and motivation are linked to success in vocabulary learning (Laufer and Hulstijn 2001).

By far the most detailed advice regarding notebooks comes from Schmitt and Schmitt (1995). They show how, by expanding on the traditional format of notebooks, teachers can foster autonomous vocabulary learning and integrate a variety of different vocabulary learning strategies into notebook use. Training can start with simple recording of L1-L2 word pairs of the type most learners are familiar with, and then move on to include other aspects of word knowledge, such as pronunciation, collocates, roots and derivatives, frequency information, etc. Schmitt and Schmitt advocate the use of loose-leaf binders or index cards to allow flexibility and incremental learning as more information is added to entries over time. Illustrations, semantic mapping and expanding rehearsal are also proposed to aid recall. The authors provide a detailed plan for implementing classroom-based training in the use of notebooks and advocate their frequent integration into other language-learning activities to keep them relevant.

Another potentially effective form of recording strategy is the use of word cards (Nation 2001; Hulstijn 2001; Mondria and Mondria-de Vries 1994). With word cards, the learner writes a second or foreign language word on one side of an index card and its meaning and other information (e.g. an L1 translation, L2 definition, a typical example, pronunciation, common collocates, an illustration, etc.) on the back. The learner then goes through the cards trying to retrieve the meaning, word form or other information from memory. An advantage of word cards over vocabulary notebooks is that the cards can be used more flexibly in conjunction with expanding rehearsal and retrieval (see Section 2.5.1). Hulstijn suggests that the “ideal software program” would combine the database features of a notebook and the drilling potential of word cards, while allowing multiple orderings of entries and the establishment of inter-entry linkages (2001:277).

## **Tie-ins to other strategies**

Several specific strategies have already been mentioned above in conjunction with recording. Assuming an incremental approach such as that advocated by Schmitt and Schmitt, one can discern links between recording and Nation's general category of "generating" strategies (2001:68). The term generative processing originates with Wittrock (1974; 1992) and refers to the use of previously-learned vocabulary in novel ways and new contexts. Such strategies are based on the cognitive principle of *elaboration*, which Hulstijn says is the basic proposition that it is the nature of information processing, rather than intention to learn or some other factor, which primarily determines retention (2001). Learners should know that the more operations they perform with new lexis, and the more they attempt to integrate it with known material, the better the chances of retention and fluent access. Sokmen says that in general the principle is to get learners to "manipulate words, relate them to other words and to their own experiences, and then to justify their choices" (1997:242).

## **2.6 Training in the use of vocabulary learning strategies**

### **2.6.1 Does training work?**

We have noted how the use of strategies is strongly associated with successful vocabulary learning, and that strategy use varies among learners. The question arises: can less successful learners be trained to use strategies? The research appears to be inconclusive. Schmitt and McCarthy (1997) cite conflicting findings, such as McDonough's (1995) conclusion, based on a review of research into general learning-strategy studies, that improvements from training are weak, culturally dependent, and show up only in certain measures. On the other hand, they note Stoffer's (1995) claim that strategy instruction was the single best predictor of use of vocabulary learning strategies. Hulstijn (1997) cites numerous studies showing gains in successful use of one particular mnemonic strategy, the keyword technique, following strategy training. Nation (2001) summarizes similar findings for the strategy of guessing from context. What is certain is that more research is needed in this area.

### **2.6.2 Training variables**

A number of factors are thought to be connected to success or failure in strategy training. Several researchers have noted the importance of the students' level of L2 proficiency (Cohen and Aphek 1980; Kern 1989), which could affect their ability to understand metacognitive explanations for how and why to use strategies. The particulars of the learning

context must be also considered. Politzer and McGroarty (1985), Porte (1988), and Rees-Miller (1993), among others, note how learners' cultural backgrounds, previous educational experiences, learning styles, etc. can affect perceptions of the value of learner training and in some cases even lead to resistance to training. Additionally, the question of who is conducting the training is important. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) assert that strategy training is a complex undertaking which requires committed, informed teachers working with learners over an extended period of time. They note that much of the training referred to in previous studies has been conducted by researchers working under experimental conditions rather than by teachers operating in classrooms.

## 2.7 Guidelines for training learners to use strategies

Several writers have proposed guidelines for designing strategy training, both for the general field of learning strategies (O'Malley and Chamot 1990; Wenden 1987; Ellis and Sinclair 1989; Sinclair and Ellis 1992; Oxford 1990), and with specific regard to vocabulary strategies (Nation 2001). A review of their recommendations was conducted for this study and from it common themes were extracted. These were used to generate the following four principles, which constitute part of the analytic framework used in the materials analysis.

**Explicit focus on learning processes:** (O'Malley and Chamot 1990) distinguish between “direct” instruction, where students are informed of the value and purpose of strategy training, and “embedded” instruction, where students are given materials and activities eliciting the use of strategies without drawing attention to them as such. They cite research showing that an explicit focus on metacognitive knowledge about learning processes – in other words, “learning how to learn” – is necessary if learners are to be able to transfer use of the strategy in question to new learning tasks.

**Appropriate practice in sufficient amounts:** Learners need to develop confidence and skill in using learning strategies, which implies provision of sufficient amounts of practice that becomes increasingly independent over time, to the point of including tasks outside the classroom (Nation 2001). Strategy practice should also be integrated with regular language learning tasks so learners see it as relevant and not time taken away from normal learning (Wenden 1987). Practice should also include sufficient opportunities for learners to reflect on, and get feedback on, the successes and difficulties they encounter (Oxford 1990).

**A balance of cognitive and metacognitive strategy training:** Cognitive strategies are those skills or behaviors employed directly in specific learning tasks (such as looking up a word in a dictionary) while metacognitive strategies are higher-order skills through which learners “manage, direct, regulate [and] guide their learning” (Wenden 1998:519). Metacognitive and cognitive strategies must be paired appropriately in training or else learners will be “without direction or opportunity to plan their learning, monitor their progress, or review their accomplishments and future learning directions” (O'Malley and Chamot 1990:8). Training must therefore include opportunities for learners to monitor and evaluate their use of learning strategies (Sinclair and Ellis 1992).

**A motivational framework:** As noted, learners may be indifferent or even resistant to strategy training because of their previous learning experience, educational or cultural background, learning style or other factors. Therefore training should help learners understand the goals of strategy instruction and include opportunities to reflect on and discuss their feelings about such instruction (Wenden 1987; O'Malley and Chamot 1990).

Having reviewed the relevant research, we can now proceed to the next chapter in which the materials and methods employed in the study are described.

## Chapter 3: Materials and methods

### 3.1 Why coursebooks?

In reviewing the current status of vocabulary learning strategies in ELT, Schmitt says that insights from research and scholarly discussion have been “filtering down” into recently published vocabulary-learning materials (1997:203). Meanwhile, in separate survey reviews, Sinclair and Ellis (1992) and Lake (1997) note the increasing emphasis being given to general language-learning strategies in commercial coursebooks (although they criticize the varying degrees of success with which this is done). The present study is designed in part to consider any links between the two areas: that is, to see how the vocabulary learning strategies I have identified here as ‘key’ are treated in current general, main coursebooks, if at all. This is an especially relevant question if one considers the view, shared by many in the field of ELT materials development, that coursebooks today are more complex, more widely used, and more influential than ever before in terms of the extent to which they structure what happens in language classrooms (Littlejohn 1992; 1998).

While this study may superficially resemble what is commonly referred to as a materials *evaluation*, I believe the term *analysis* is more appropriate. In the main, materials evaluations are global assessments, employing wide-ranging criteria, usually with the goal of either 1) choosing the most appropriate materials for a particular course of study; or 2) compiling information in a survey of different materials for others making such a choice, as can be seen in the reviews columns of *ELT Journal* or similar periodicals (Sheldon 1988). In the present case, however, the goal is more theoretical and the criteria more particular; we want to see how the materials chosen perform in relation to a relatively narrow set of parameters. The outcome of this study, therefore, will not be a determination of which coursebook is more ‘appropriate’ than any other, but rather an analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each with regard to instruction in vocabulary learning strategies. From this we can consider the implications for teachers, materials writers, and others involved in the field of ELT.

### 3.2 Aims

The present study attempts to answer three questions:

1. Which, if any, of the three key vocabulary learning strategies are addressed, either implicitly or explicitly, in a sample of current commercial coursebooks?



2. With regard to those strategies that are treated, how does this treatment compare to the recommendations and guidelines suggested in the related strategy research?
3. Do the materials appear to facilitate successful adoption and continued independent use of any of the strategies by means of appropriate learner training?

### 3.3 Research methodology

The complex nature of teaching materials, and the wide variety of ways in which learning strategies might be addressed in them, imposed certain constraints on the choice of research methodology in this investigation. Initially, several attempts were made to quantify the amount of material devoted to the strategies in question, but this was soon abandoned. It became clear that where the books did address a particular strategy, there were such great differences in the manner of these treatments as to render a quantitative approach meaningless. It was decided to pursue instead a qualitative line of inquiry which, although it has obvious implications for the validity and generalizability of the findings, was nevertheless likely to yield more illuminating results.

In line with this thinking, an analytic framework was devised based on the literature review described in Chapter Two, and this framework was applied to a sampling of coursebooks. The framework consisted of two parts: first, the recommendations suggested in the research into key strategies described in Sections 2.5.1, 2.5.2 and 2.5.3; and secondly, the guidelines for conducting learner training outlined in Section 2.7.

The analysis proceeded in two parts. First, the materials were scrutinized for any claims made by the authors regarding 1) their approach to vocabulary or lexis; and 2) their approach to learner training (or 'learning strategies,' 'learning habits,' etc.). Afterward, the materials were examined page by page in their entirety, with reference to the aforementioned analytic framework and authors' claims. Any section which appeared to address a key strategy in any way was identified, analyzed, and described in detailed notes. Finally, the notes for each strategy were collected and considered in total, and a rating was assigned to each book's treatment.

### 3.4 The rating scheme

A subjective five-point rating scheme was employed in the analysis. My purpose in using it was to provide the reader with a mental framework to facilitate easier comparisons between the coursebooks in this study. As will be seen in the next chapter, I report my findings for each strategy starting with the ratings and then, by means of commentary, quotations and excerpts from the materials, provide a rationale for each rating.

The rating scheme is designated as follows:

0 = Strategy not addressed, or mentioned only in passing

\* = Minimal attention given, or treatment at variance with recommendations in related research

\*\* = Moderate attention given, more or less appropriately

\*\*\* = Substantial attention given, more or less appropriately

\*\*\*\* = Thorough attention given, more or less appropriately

As mentioned above, both the specific recommendations for each key strategy and the general guidelines for learner-training are used to determine a rating. For example, a book which repeatedly asks learners to use dictionaries to look up new words but which makes no other mention of dictionary use might be awarded a “\*” rating. A book which only occasionally asks learners to use a dictionary as part of language-learning tasks, but which also includes a supplementary worksheet designed to help them use English-English dictionaries more effectively to access different types of word knowledge, might receive a rating of “\*\*”. A coursebook which consistently requires learners to consult dictionaries for a variety of purposes as part of normal language-learning tasks; which gives them guidance on how to exploit dictionary information effectively; which contrasts the advantages and disadvantages of monolingual versus bilingual dictionaries; and also asks students to reflect on, discuss and evaluate the way they use dictionaries in their own learning, would yield a “\*\*\*\*” rating.

It was decided that for a book to receive a “\*\*\*\*” rating, it had to address a strategy as such by focusing explicitly on the learning process. This is because, as noted earlier, embedded learner training is less likely to result in successful maintenance and transfer of strategies to other language-learning tasks.

### 3.5 Coursebooks used in the study

Because of the in-depth nature of the investigation and the length of the study, only three books were analyzed. Four criteria were used in selecting them. The books had to:

- have been published in the last five years;
- have appeared on at least one UK bestsellers list for ELT materials;
- be aimed at adults or young adults studying at the upper-intermediate level; and
- be general, main coursebooks produced by publishing houses catering to the international ELT market.

General information about the books finally chosen is provided below.

Series	<i>Cutting Edge</i>	<i>New Headway</i>	<i>Innovations</i>
Publisher	Longman	Oxford University Press	Language Teaching Publications
Year published	1999	1998	2000
Target audience	Young adults at upper-intermediate level	Adults and young adults at upper-intermediate level	Intermediate and upper-intermediate level learners
Type	General, main course	General, main course	General, main course
Accompanying materials	Class cassettes, students' cassette	Class cassettes, workbook cassette, supplementary video and pronunciation courses	Class cassettes
Pages	Students' book: 176 Teacher's book: 176 Workbook: 80	Students' book: 160 Teacher's book: 176 Workbook: 104	Students' book: 194 Teacher's book: 92 Workbook: 80
Number of course hours suggested	120	120	Not mentioned

Figure 3: Coursebooks chosen for the study

### 3.6 Why upper-intermediate?

While previous surveys of the treatment of learner training in ELT coursebooks (Sinclair and Ellis 1992; Lake 1997) considered books across a range of levels, it was felt that, due to the fairly discrete collection of strategies being examined here, a 'deep' rather than 'broad' approach was likely to yield more revealing findings. Hence the focus on a single level of proficiency. The upper-intermediate level was chosen on the basis of three considerations: First, higher-level learners will need to concentrate on lexis in order to progress in their language learning, since a relatively large lexicon, flexibly and appropriately used, is a necessary attribute of an advanced-level learner (Lewis 1993; Howarth 1998; Nesselhauf

2003). Secondly, some of the strategies mentioned in Chapter Two will only be available to higher-level learners who have the linguistic proficiency to take advantage of them; e.g. using monolingual dictionaries or making use of word-parts knowledge (Nation 2001). Finally, higher-level learners will more easily be able to engage in the meta-level discussions about learning and strategy use that are required for the development of metacognitive knowledge and as psychological preparation for independent learning (O'Malley and Chamot 1990).

### 3.7 Materials analyzed

From the total set of materials for each coursebook series, three components were consulted in the study: the students' book, the teacher's book, and the workbook. While workbooks are often considered non-vital supplementary material, they were included here because they usually contain vocabulary sections and are also meant to be used by students independently of the teacher and classroom, with natural implications for potential use of learning strategies. Although, as mentioned, each book was examined in its entirety, primary attention was given to any sections signposted as 'vocabulary', 'lexis', or 'learner training'. After that, sections focusing on functional language or discourse features, where a set of words, phrases or collocations are presented, received the most attention, followed by reading- and listening-skills development exercises which included a vocabulary component. Additionally, any sections labeled as 'grammar' but devoted to colligational features of particular lexical items, such as bound prepositions presented in 'verb patterns' (e.g. *recommend that sby do sth*), were also included in the analysis.

Having considered the materials and methods, we now move on to the next chapter in which I present and discuss the findings of the analysis.

## Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

### 4.1 Organization

The results shall be organized as follows: First, I will present any claims regarding the approach to vocabulary or learner training made by the authors of the coursebooks in the study. Then, I will present and discuss my findings regarding the treatment of each of the three key strategies with reference to these claims and to the aforementioned analytic framework. To save space while clearly identifying which book a citation or excerpt comes from, the following codes are used: *SB* = students' book, *TB* = teacher's book, and *WB* = workbook. Hence, "*Headway* (WB57)" indicates page 57 in the *Headway* Workbook.

### 4.2 Authors' claims

The following table summarizes the claims made in the selected coursebooks with regard to vocabulary and learner training.

Series	<i>Cutting Edge</i>	<i>New Headway</i>	<i>Innovations</i>
Vocabulary or lexis-related claims	<p>"New lexis is introduced at every stage in the Students' Book and recycled wherever possible. We have paid particular attention to the selection of useful, high-frequency lexis" (TB5).</p> <p>Various types of "prefabricated chunks" of language, including, collocations and fixed and semi-fixed expressions are "incorporated in a number of different ways" (TB5).</p> <p>The book allows for "personalized input" through a task-based approach. Also, an accompanying "Mini-dictionary" includes references and examples for words and phrases students are unlikely to know" (TB5).</p>	<p>Provides a "strong lexical syllabus" featuring "at least one vocabulary input per unit in the Student's Book, and two more in the Workbook. Many of the vocabulary exercises have a pronunciation focus" (TB5).</p> <p>Vocabulary input includes "lexical sets, such as adjectives that describe character or consumer durables" as well as "work on the systems of vocabulary, such as compounds, phrasal verbs, prefixes and suffixes, homonyms, synonyms, antonyms and collocation" (TB5).</p>	<p>"A strongly lexical syllabus, presenting and practicing hundreds of natural expressions which you will find immediately useful" (SB, back cover).</p> <p>"To help students get off the intermediate plateau, <i>Innovations</i> provides a massive amount of lexis in all its shapes and forms" (TB4).</p>
Learner training claims	<p>The book "develops learning skills in a number of ways: ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The task-based approach encourages learners to take a pro-active role in their learning.</li><li>▪ looking up words and phrases in the Mini-dictionary gives students constant practice of dictionary skills.</li><li>▪ the Resource bank [in the Teacher's Book] contains five learner-training worksheets to develop students' awareness of the importance of taking an active role in the learning process" (TB6).</li></ul>	<p>"We encourage good vocabulary learning habits, such as using a dictionary, keeping records, guessing meaning, and reading" (TB5).</p>	<p>"Learning advice pages occur throughout the book" (TB7).</p>

Figure 4: Coursebook claims regarding approach to vocabulary and learner training

Two initial observations can be made about the vocabulary-related claims. First, there appears to be a division into two groups regarding the main emphasis. Two of the books, *Cutting Edge* and *Innovations*, claim to adopt a more item-based approach to lexical development, while the other, *Headway*, emphasizes generalizable vocabulary systems, presumably on the basis that this will be a cost-effective strategy. [This is in addition to *Headway*'s other stated focus on teaching lexical sets – a practice which, while still common in many teaching materials, has been shown to present the potential for interference between formally or semantically similar items (Higa 1963; Laufer 1997; Tinkham 1997; Waring 1997; Nation 2000).] Secondly, it will be noted that only *Cutting Edge* makes any claim to help learners (through its task-based approach) with personally relevant vocabulary. As mentioned, higher-level learners' lexical needs tend to diverge into areas related to the individual's occupation, academic specialty, personal interests, etc.

With regard to learning training, *Cutting Edge* is the most explicit in its claims, making the development of "learning skills" a stated goal and referring to specific support provided in the methodology and materials. *Headway* and *Innovations* appear to be more modest in this regard, mentioning encouragement and "advice" rather than training. However, it should not be supposed that a book which lacks an overtly stated learner-training program has nothing to offer. As noted in Section 2.7, there can be both implicit and explicit approaches to learner training – implicit in cases where learners are engaged via an exercise or activity in using a strategy although they might not be aware of it as such. Indeed, in their survey review of learner training in coursebooks, Sinclair and Ellis (1992) provided high scores for some books which made no specific claims to provide such training. Certainly explicit learner training is likely to be more effective, for reasons cited earlier, but a book without an explicit learner-training agenda may nevertheless provide some support in its general approach to vocabulary instruction. Whether this in fact is the case with the coursebooks in this study is a question which will now be addressed.

#### 4.3 Key strategy #1: Planning repetition

<i>Cutting Edge</i>	<i>New Headway</i>	<i>Innovations</i>
*	0	*

It will be remembered that research clearly shows the benefits (to retention, recall and fluent access) of revisiting previously studied material in a distributed fashion, with the first reviews coming soon after initial learning and subsequent reviews spaced at increasingly longer intervals. The modest ratings for the coursebooks in this category can be explained by the general lack of attention they give to the need for learners to plan repetition systematically, or even to revise independently at all.

To be sure, the books do include features obviously meant to provide further exposure to learned vocabulary. For example, each shows evidence of the authors' intention to recycle previously studied language by including it in later reading or listening texts, language-learning exercises and even task rubrics. *Headway* and *Cutting Edge* also contain progress tests incorporating learned vocabulary, which can be photocopied and administered to students. Additionally, some workbook exercises in *Innovations* and *Cutting Edge* provide further consolidation and development of the lexis presented in the students' book. However, it must be said that tests, recycling and workbook exercises are generally not amenable to planning on the part of the learner, who is clearly placed in a dependent position to the teacher in relation to these features. The books mention the benefits of planning repetition in passing, if at all, and usually in the context of advice given to the teacher with regard to managing classroom activities, rather than directly to learners. There is no specific mention of the idea of distributed practice. The closest any book comes is *Cutting Edge* when it advises students to "draw up a revision schedule and stick to it" (SB64). This advice, however, is contained in a reading-development text on the topic of preparing for exams, is not signposted as language learning advice, and is not elaborated upon.

If one thinks in terms of embedded learner training, *Cutting Edge* merits some consideration, in part because the students' book contains a review section at the end of every unit (or "module" as they are called), in which learners complete short, usually simple exercises requiring them to recall language points they have studied in the preceding module. The review exercises focusing on lexis usually require learners to retrieve the meaning from the word form or the word form from the meaning (which as noted in Section 2.5.1 constitutes a potential tie-in to the strategy of retrieval). An example is provided in Appendix A. The regular provision of these review opportunities, plus longer review sections called

“consolidation modules” at the end of every fourth unit in the students book, do suggest a sort of schedule and may implicitly impress upon learners the benefits of some type of regular review, though this obviously falls short of the notion of distributed repetition or expanding rehearsal. The teacher’s notes for these sections contain answers to the exercises but no commentary on the rationale behind them or how to use them.

Like *Cutting Edge*, *Innovations* also provides regular review sections revisiting previously studied lexis. *Innovations* is distinguished from *Cutting Edge* in that the former follows a regular format of similar close-ended gap-fills, matching, ordering and discrimination exercises, while the latter offers some variety and includes open-ended activities which may require more cognitive engagement on the part of the learner (see Section 2.5.3 on ‘generating’). However, the principle of retrieval is still incorporated, as can be seen in Appendix B. *Innovations* includes its review sections at the end of every second unit of the students’ book, which means that, assuming each unit takes one week to complete and no other review is performed, repetitions will occur at two-week intervals. This seems rather long, considering that the research suggests scheduling the first repetition soon after initial learning when most forgetting is likely to occur. As with *Cutting Edge*, the *Innovations* teacher’s book contains only answers to the review exercises and no commentary or other guidance.

Elsewhere in the *Innovations* teacher’s book, one finds occasional notes regarding repetition included in procedural instructions for certain activities. These seem to provide hints at the benefits of planning repetition. For example, in the notes for a task where learners have to match parts of a dialog containing linking expressions, the authors advise:

When they have finished the exercise, get them to cover a-h. Read 1 and see if they can remember how it ends. Let them look when they need to. Do the same with 2-8. Then, do the same thing in pairs. Begin the next class by repeating the task (TB44).

This approach, while nicely illustrating the retrieval strategy, also suggests a pattern for repetition wherein a first review immediately follows initial learning and is in turn followed by another review soon after. This corresponds closely to the schedule suggested by Hulstijn and others in Section 2.5.1. Later in the book, another set of instructions for leading into a lexis-related activity advises: “If you practiced the linking expressions on page 77 in the previous lesson, ask students to do the practice again before beginning this unit. Remember



that repeating an activity helps to fix the language in students' long-term memories" (TB45). Such suggestions, while instructive and well-founded, are nevertheless few in number and appear to be provided only for the teacher's benefit.

*Headway*, as already noted, contains tests in the teacher's book which incorporate some learned vocabulary but the students' book does not include any material devoted to revision. The lexis addressed in the workbook is generally new, rather than consolidation of material from the students' book. There is no explicit mention in any of the *Headway* materials about the need for repetition. It might be supposed that this is a reflection of the authors' stated intention to focus on generalizable vocabulary systems rather than specific lexical items.

In conclusion, it appears there is little likelihood of learners developing the helpful strategy of planning repetition on the basis of the materials in this study. As already mentioned, most learners are probably already aware of the benefits of repetition at some level, as evidenced by the universal practice of cramming before exams. What they need, however, is to understand how much they stand to gain from systematic repetition. The coursebooks analyzed here, by virtue of their lack of substantial implicit – much less explicit – training in the strategy of repetition, offer little assistance in this regard. As a result, it is not possible to comment on how they performed in relation to the other general training principles of balancing metacognitive and cognitive strategies, supplying appropriate practice in sufficient amounts, or incorporating a motivational framework for training.

#### 4.4 Key strategy #2: Dictionary use

<i>Cutting Edge</i>	<i>New Headway</i>	<i>Innovations</i>
* * *	*	0

It was noted in the literature review that, generally speaking, learners do not have to be prompted to use dictionaries; dictionary use is widespread. It is the quality of that use that is the problem. Learners by many accounts have strong preferences for bilingual dictionaries regardless of the purposes to which these are put or the learner's proficiency level. Learners also tend to overuse dictionaries for some purposes, particularly decoding during reading; and underuse them for production or learning new lexis. Many learners fail to fully exploit the

full range of information in modern learners' dictionaries because of a lack of familiarity with formats and codes.

Of the books in this sample, *Cutting Edge* gives the most attention to resource use, devoting a significant amount of material to explicit learner training in the use of dictionaries (albeit only monolingual ones), which accounts for the book's high rating in this category. Two features in particular underscore the authors' emphasis on dictionary skills. First, learners are supplied with a "mini-dictionary" in a sleeve at the back of the students' book. This 64-page document is similar in format to the dictionaries produced by the Longman publishing house, but the headwords consist only of items appearing somewhere in either the students' book or the class cassette. The mini-dictionary spares learners the burden of carrying a full-sized monolingual dictionary to every lesson; the smaller size and restricted selection may also be less intimidating and easier to use for learners unfamiliar with monolingual dictionaries, making it ideal for learner training. An entire page of the teacher's book (TB12) is devoted to suggestions for exploiting the mini-dictionary, including warnings against letting learners overuse them during class as well as methods for varying the approach so learners do not tire of it. The suggestions include having learners assess the state of their own vocabulary knowledge and base decisions on consulting a dictionary on that knowledge, thus constituting an attempt to balance metacognitive and cognitive strategies, which as mentioned earlier will likely increase the chances of strategy maintenance and transfer.

The other outstanding feature of *Cutting Edge's* approach is a pair of learner-training worksheets meant to be photocopied from the teacher's book. The first one, titled "Using the mini-dictionary" (Appendix C), appears designed to acquaint learners with the broad range of information to be found in modern monolingual learners dictionaries. The treatment begins with an exercise prompting learners to guess the meaning of bold-faced words in context, and then confirm their guesses in the mini-dictionary. Next is an exercise where three words are provided without any context; learners have to look them up and decide which helped them more to understand the meaning: the definition, the example sentences or both. Following this are exercises addressing style (e.g. formal and informal), multiple meanings, and the grammatical coding system employed. Finally, there are exercises on pronunciation (both phonemes and word stress), variety, pragmatics and semantic relationships like antonymy. The treatment constitutes a natural tie-in to the strategy of using word knowledge (Section 2.5.2).

The second worksheet is titled “Using a monolingual dictionary with reading texts” (Appendix D). It again draws learners’ attention to the variety of information available in a monolingual learner’s dictionary, in this case the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, which learners are asked to consult in working through the exercises. (The teacher’s notes advise using this worksheet when learners have become accustomed to the mini-dictionary and “need to consolidate / extend their monolingual dictionary skills” TB96). Learners are given a reading passage with ten words and phrases marked in bold, which they are instructed to read. A gist reading task is provided along with instructions not to look up any words yet. Then learners are told to go back and look up the items in bold in order to answer a collection of questions focusing on various aspects of word knowledge, e.g. “What is the pronunciation of *cue*? What is the American equivalent of this word?”

This material is certainly instructive insofar as it further consolidates understanding of the range of information available in monolingual dictionaries. However, an important point is that learners tend to overuse dictionaries while reading, in particular by looking up word meanings that they are already fairly certain of by guessing from context. It was noted that learners need help to establish guidelines or principles about when to use dictionaries during reading and when not to do so. A step-by-step approach like that detailed in Section 2.5.2 could be of use here.

In addition to the mini-dictionary and learner-training worksheets, *Cutting Edge* offers opportunities for extension and development of dictionary skills by way of frequent provision of tasks requiring dictionary use in every module of the students’ book. Most involve only checking denotational meaning, but in some cases learners are asked to check pronunciation or the word forms for other members of word families (e.g. SB21). The workbook also contains two exercises in which learners exploit dictionary entries for collocation information (WB31; 49) and a similar one focusing on verb and noun patterns used in a writing exercise (WB69). In this way the book fulfills in some measure the learner-training criterion regarding provision of frequent and appropriate practice in strategy use.

This is a fairly thorough and informed treatment of dictionary skills in relation to our criteria. Only a few factors keep *Cutting Edge* from obtaining the highest possible rating in this category. First, as noted, is the need for narrower guidelines about when and how to use dictionaries while reading. Secondly, there is bias detectable in the teacher’s notes when the

authors note that the mini-dictionary is “designed to help students make the transition from bilingual to monolingual dictionaries” (TB12). As mentioned, the point is not to have learners discard bilingual dictionaries but to show them when and how to use them most effectively. Finally, according to our criteria, some additional general learner-training features are needed to increase the chances of learners adopting and mastering dictionary skills; namely, the provision of opportunities for learners to discuss dictionary use in the context of their own learning, to react to the training they are receiving, and to assess and evaluate the progress they have made in their use of and knowledge about dictionaries, particularly at the end of the course.

In contrast, *Headway* is much more modest in the amount of attention it devotes to training in resource use. There are only two activities which could be said to constitute implicit dictionary-skills training. The most thorough is to be found in the workbook (Appendix E) and focuses on the colligation of verb patterns. Learners are asked to use the entry for the word *stop* to check whether the patterns in a list of sentences provided are correct. In follow-up exercises, learners are told to use their dictionaries to check usage of other verbs. A later activity (WB51) similarly focuses on adjective and noun patterns but it is not made clear to learners that this information may also be contained in dictionaries; perhaps it is assumed this will be known from the preceding exercises. The other activity is a section on time expressions (SB114) in which learners are asked to look up the meanings of a set of idioms, such as *time to kill* and *hit the jackpot*. The teacher’s notes (TB112) say the exercise is designed in part “to practice the dictionary skills of identifying key words in idioms to help look them up successfully”. The only guidance provided, however, is an instruction to the teacher to tell learners to look for the key word, which is “the most important word” (op cit.).

Like *Cutting Edge*, *Headway* requires dictionary usage in some language-learning exercises, usually asking learners to look up word meanings or in some cases the derivatives or pronunciations of new words. It is notable, however, how often learners are *not* asked to consult dictionaries when one might expect them to be. In only half of the 12 signposted vocabulary sections in the book are dictionaries mentioned; and in the 12 ‘postscript’ sections (which include functional and discourse points usually realized lexically) dictionaries are called for just twice. Considering the relatively substantial amount of lexical material in the book, one might assume there should be more guidance with regard to aspects of word knowledge (i.e. collocation, colligation, pragmatics, register, style, etc.) and to the fact that

often this information can be found in dictionaries. An explanation for this state of affairs may lie in the fact that the authors seem to intend much of this new lexis (in particular the idiomatic expressions) primarily for receptive use, since such use entails fewer elements of word knowledge (Laufer 1997; Hulstijn 2001; Nation 2001). This is evident in the teacher's notes for an activity introducing common social expressions, where the following remark appears:

Such expressions, like any idiomatic language, are extremely context sensitive. It would be so easy for a student to attempt to use one of these expressions in a real situation, and for any number of reasons it would be inappropriate ... If students try to be idiomatic and make a mistake of any kind – grammatical, word order, pronunciation – it can be impossible to understand what they are trying to say. So don't discourage your students from trying to use these expressions. But equally don't expect to hear them being used spontaneously from now on (TB47).

Similar warnings occur at several other points in the teacher's book, further suggesting a receptive orientation toward the lexical material. It should be noted, however, that this point is not made explicit anywhere in the students' book or workbook. Furthermore, learners are often asked to use new lexis productively, for example by repeating the dialog in which it was presented. This could be said to constitute a mixed message to learners and teachers. At any rate, it suffices to say that *Headway* devotes minimal attention to dictionary training and requires little dictionary use in the implementation of its activities and procedures for learning.

*Innovations* received the lowest rating in this category. There are no activities in the materials which could be said to constitute either explicit or implicit learner training in dictionary use. Dictionaries are nowhere mentioned in the six pages of learning advice occurring throughout the book. Furthermore, of the more than 100 exercises in the students' book focusing on lexis, dictionaries are mentioned in the rubrics only nine times. In each case learners are told to check the meaning of new or unfamiliar words or expressions or, in what could be seen as encouraging bilingual dictionary use, to "translate any vocabulary you're unsure of" (SB40). Indeed, *Innovations* appears to even question the veracity of dictionaries at one point, in a language note on the word *dishy*, which is presented as an adjective for describing appearance. The authors note, "Some dictionaries say that this is a rather old-fashioned word, but many young British people in their twenties use it, particularly women" (SB81). By itself

such a remark might be innocuous, but in this context, with a lack of other instruction or guidance, learners might draw negative conclusions about the quality of information to be found in dictionaries.

The lack of attention paid to resource use in *Innovations* is notable, especially if one considers the authors' claims to have based the course on a lexical syllabus and the considerable amount of lexical material that learners are presented with. Additionally, the fact that the book contains learning advice related to other strategies and practices which can aid independent learning after the course, such as extensive reading and keeping a notebook (SB149), makes the omission of dictionaries all the more striking.

To summarize the findings in this section, *Cutting Edge's* treatment stands out by virtue of the substantial attention it devotes to training in dictionary use. Students using these materials probably stand a much better chance of improving their use of resources than with the other books in the study, whose treatments are minimal or negligible. However, crucial matters related to *timing* – i.e. when to use dictionaries during reading, and when to use monolingual versus bilingual dictionaries – and the lack of attention to general learner training principles remain crucial gaps in all the training analyzed here.

#### 4.5 Key strategy #3: Recording

<i>Cutting Edge</i>	<i>New Headway</i>	<i>Innovations</i>
* *	0	* *

It will be remembered from the literature review that most language learners already practice recording strategies insofar as they take some sort of notes during class. However, the quality of those notes, and how they are used, vary greatly. Many methodologists have supported the use of notebooks specifically for vocabulary and pointed out opportunities that exist for integrating these into classroom teaching. The literature review noted specific guidelines that have been suggested for the best ways to organize vocabulary notebooks, as well as methods for linking notebook use to training in a range of other vocabulary learning strategies, in particular aspects of lexical knowledge and incremental learning. The use of word cards as yet another form of recording strategy, which offers the potential to integrate retrieval and distributed repetition, was also mentioned.

*Cutting Edge* again receives the highest rating in a treatment classified as giving moderate attention to the strategy. The book's approach addresses note-taking explicitly more than once under the rubric of learner training. And for the first time in this investigation, the materials also directly call on learners to reflect on their current recording practices and discuss their views on the topic, fulfilling to some degree the general training guideline regarding provision of a motivational framework.

The centerpiece of the treatment here is another learner-training worksheet from the teacher's book entitled "Making notes in class" (Appendix F), which starts by asking students to consider and react to several statements such as "I never take notes during a lesson" or "I sometimes find it hard to make sense of the notes I've made, and I often lose them". Next, three examples of learners' notes, based on actual material from the book and illustrating various strengths and weaknesses, are provided for students to evaluate. The opposite side of the sheet contains two commentaries corresponding to the tasks on the front. The first is devoted to general advice about note-taking and the second addresses the question of organization and what to include. Learners are told to look back at any notes they have taken in previous lessons and evaluate them, and then to choose some of the new methods presented and try them out "for the next week or two" (TB111). This suggests monitoring and evaluation, which could be said to address the learner-training guideline regarding a balance of metacognitive and cognitive strategy development, but it must be noted that there is no explicit follow-up to this suggestion. Presumably it is left to the teacher to remember to have students discuss and assess their experimentation at a later date.

The reason for *Cutting Edge's* moderate rating has to do with the lack of any practice opportunities related to note-taking that are integrated with the other language learning activities in the book, as well as the nature of the advice given regarding note-taking. It will be noted that the learner-training worksheet addresses taking notes "in class", which is rather different than keeping a vocabulary notebook, and so could presumably include other things such as grammar points (although the examples in the worksheet appear primarily lexical in nature). The suggestions regarding content and organization are also quite general. In essence, learners are told that it is good to be active and take notes, but they should not write down everything, especially things they know already. Students are also reminded that translations and examples are helpful, that drawings and the use of different colors can be memory aids if they are relevant, and that keeping notes in a file or notebook is better than writing them "on

a loose piece of paper” (TB111). A few specific suggestions are provided regarding what to include, e.g. use headings and record things like synonyms, pronunciation, useful collocations and typical mistakes. According to the criteria in this study, however, a fuller and more explicit link to all the aspects of lexical knowledge is warranted, along with clearer guidance on note-taking formats which might be used to accomplish this. As mentioned, note-taking is a strategy which is much practiced but generally poorly executed. When the authors advise teachers to “stress that there is no ‘correct’ way of taking notes as much depends on personal preference and learning style” (TB96), it can be argued this does little to redress the problem. Furthermore, there is no mention anywhere in the materials of what students can or should do with notes after recording them, i.e. how to exploit them for learning.

Elsewhere in *Cutting Edge*, recording strategies receive a brief, general mention in a general learner-training worksheet titled “Making the most of your classroom time”. It begins by asking learners to indicate whether or not a collection of statements about language learning are true in their own case, and includes the statement “I take notes during lessons, and try to review what I’ve learned after class” (TB104). A brief commentary on the statements refers students to the note-taking worksheet mentioned above and suggests devoting time outside class to review notes. Additionally, there is a note-taking task integrated into the skills-development activity on SB71, where learners listen to excerpts of a lecture on time management. Here again, however, the focus is on recording for purposes other than vocabulary learning.

Finally, although word cards are not mentioned as such in *Cutting Edge*, the authors suggest something that sounds quite similar in the teacher’s notes. In a section in the introduction called “Working with lexis”, the book recommends creating “a phrase bank” by copying new words and multi-word items from each lesson onto slips of card or paper (Appendix G). The authors suggest using the cards for whole-class revision. The formats of the cards, and the way they are to be used for testing and retrieval, sound quite similar to Nation’s description of word cards (see Section 2.5.3).

*Headway* raises expectations with its claim in the introduction to the teacher’s book to “encourage good vocabulary learning habits such as ... keeping records” (TB5), but a thorough examination of the students’ book, teacher’s book and workbook failed to uncover any material devoted to the practice per se. Some copying from the board is suggested on rare



occasions in the teacher's book, as is the case with a section on idiomatic and colloquial expressions on SB87 (TB85). It might also be supposed that the third task in the section on time expressions (Appendix H), where students have to write example sentences illustrating the meaning of each expression, is a type of recording task. But otherwise there is no mention of notes or note-taking, which accounts for the "0" rating in this case.

*Innovations*, like *Cutting Edge*, receives a "moderate" rating, primarily on the basis of two features. The first is an "Expressions organizer" (Appendix I), which comprises a section in the back of the book where learners can record translations for 17-20 expressions from each of the book's 20 half-units. Notes in every unit of the teacher's book remind the teacher to recommend that learners make use of this section in order to help remember useful items they have studied. Clearly this constitutes frequent practice under the criteria in the present study, but it is questionable whether the practice is appropriate according to our guidelines. It will be noticed immediately that the focus is on one single type of lexical item – the fixed expression – and most of these in the organizer have already been selected by the authors themselves, leaving only a few spaces at the end for the learners' own choices. One can also debate the wisdom of encouraging one-to-one equivalencies between such items. To be sure, it is important to translate multi-word items as wholes, rather than word-for-word, in order to retain the original sense and pragmatic force (Moon 1997). But as was argued in Chapter Two, learners should be encouraged to record other aspects of lexical knowledge as well, such usage information, pronunciation, example sentences, etc. The format here offers little space for such information and also renders alphabetical or other alternate means of organization difficult. Additionally, the fact that the expressions organizer is located in the students' book, while making it handy for classroom use, increases the likelihood that learners will not use it after the course.

The second feature is a "learning advice" page devoted to note-taking (Appendix J), which clearly constitutes an explicit focus on learning processes. The page asks learners to consider how they are organizing and storing the lexis they are learning, and then advises daily use of a notebook for this purpose, alongside suggestions for possible formats. These include sections containing phrasal verbs, adjective + noun collocations, or language organized around topics such as holidays or health. Such a variety of options will certainly be helpful. However, there is no explicit mention of the various aspects of lexical knowledge. Also, as with *Cutting Edge*, the advice provided is too general and open-ended. Learners are told,

“You can decide for yourself what sections you want. The most important thing is that your notebook is organized” (TB118). There are no models for students to consider and the advice is not linked explicitly to any tasks elsewhere in the book, beyond the frequent injunctions in the teacher’s notes to remind students to record useful collocations they come across. This implies a lack of balanced metacognitive and cognitive strategy development as necessitated by our criteria. Additionally, while it is certainly helpful to encourage learners to use their notebooks every day for storing new items, there is no guidance about using them to revise or add to those already recorded. As mentioned, this will be important for retention, fluent access and the development of incremental knowledge.

There is one additional mention of recording in another learning advice page at the end of the book, which is devoted to suggestions for continuing one’s learning after the course. One of the ideas listed is to “keep a vocabulary notebook and make a note of something new every day” (SB148). This is certainly laudable, but as with all the learning advice in *Innovations*, it does not address the learner training principle about providing a motivational framework. The advice is simply presented on the page without any opportunity for learners to react to it or discuss it in relation to their own beliefs or language-learning practices.

Finally, it should be noted that in neither *Headway* nor *Innovations* is there mention of the word card strategy or anything like it.

To summarize the findings of this section, we can say that in those cases where note-taking is even addressed, there is a crucial lack of specific guidance for how to keep and exploit lexical records, as well as tasks or other material to fulfill most of the general learning-training principles we are concerned with. It appears unlikely that students’ use of recording strategies will be much altered on the basis of the training they receive in these books.

\* \* \* \*

This concludes the presentation and discussion of the findings. In the next and final chapter I will summarize the overall findings of the study, acknowledge its limitations, and mention some the implications it poses for different groups involved in ELT, before concluding with some final thoughts.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary

To sum up, the chosen coursebooks display considerable variation in the amount and type of attention they devote to the three key vocabulary learning strategies addressed in this study. In some cases, a strategy is treated explicitly, in others implicitly. In some cases, a book asserts the importance of a certain strategy but does little to foster its development; in others, the authors require use of a strategy in language-learning exercises but provide no training or guidance. And in some cases, a key strategy is mentioned only in passing or ignored completely. Furthermore, where the materials do in fact address the development of a strategy explicitly, important principles of general learner training, which could help increase the chances of the strategy being maintained and transferred, are usually not observed. In particular, the materials analyzed here generally fail to provide either a motivational framework for learner training or an appropriate balance in the development of metacognitive and cognitive skills.

We are compelled to conclude that, assuming no supplementary training or materials are provided, use of these coursebooks will yield variable and generally inadequate development of the three key strategies in question. With the possible exception of *Cutting Edge's* treatment of dictionary skills, the learner training analyzed here ultimately proves insufficient, given the criteria established in this paper. In general, the task of developing skillful use of key strategies appears to be very much left to teachers or to learners themselves. If this is so, we are probably safe in assuming that many learners using these books will continue to go about their language learning handicapped by the lack of a sufficient repertoire of strategic tools for lexical development. The situation calls to mind the findings of Gu and Johnson's study (1996) of strategy use among Chinese university students: a small proportion of naturally gifted learners exploiting strategies effectively and making progress, while the overwhelming majority lag behind, their language-learning efforts hampered by a lack of knowledge about, and training in, these important skills and techniques.

### 5.2 Limitations of the study

Given the qualitative nature and limited scope of the present investigation, it is clearly impossible to generalize and say that all commercial coursebooks are inadequate in their

treatment of key strategies. This study analyzed three books sampled from a global ELT market that at any one time offers hundreds of titles to choose from. Obviously, others in this market – indeed even other books in the same series analyzed here but at different proficiency levels – may very well provide more thorough and effective training in vocabulary learning strategies according to our criteria. By the same token, they may also perform worse. Perhaps the safest and most instructive generalization to make, therefore, is that one can and should expect great variation in the way coursebooks treat the development of vocabulary learning strategies.

Nevertheless, it must be said that these three coursebooks have appeared prominently on ELT bestseller lists and so could be said to exert a considerable potential influence on classroom practice. I believe they are also, as a group, broadly representative of current sensibilities regarding methodology and syllabus design among materials developers. In light of these factors, there are several important implications to consider for different areas of endeavor connected to ELT.

### 5.3 Implications

#### 5.3.1 For materials writers

Assuming that one accepts the argument that training in vocabulary learning strategies is warranted, and further that commercial coursebooks are an appropriate place for such training to be based, what implications can materials writers draw from these findings? The most obvious is that there is clearly great scope for a more thorough treatment of key strategies in coursebooks. First and foremost is the need for writers to become better acquainted with the research and scholarship regarding vocabulary learning strategies so as to ensure that their advice is appropriate and well founded. Also, as this study has clearly shown, there is a great need for a fuller understanding of the processes of learner training, and to have this understanding reflected in the tasks and guidance provided to students and teachers. We have noted in particular the lack of attention to metacognitive strategy development and psychological preparation. Here especially materials writers should take heed. It is disheartening to realize that in their survey review a decade ago, Sinclair and Ellis (1992) noted the same fundamental shortcomings in the coursebooks they analyzed. Coursebook writers must recognize that foregoing these aspects of learner training potentially renders moot any attention they devote to the matter and raises the question: why even bother?

For coursebook writers who are interested in a more thorough approach in line with the ideas presented in this dissertation, one continuing challenge will be the limitations imposed on them by publishers. A common theme in the materials-development literature is the lack of space and the strict specifications publishers have for main, general coursebooks (see for example Littlejohn 1992; Bell and Gower 1998; Tomlinson 1998). Bearing this in mind, one insight resulting from the present study is the enhanced learner-training role that might be accorded to workbooks. The conventional role of workbooks has been to reinforce and consolidate material studied in class. However, judging from experience, it would appear that many classroom teachers have difficulty integrating and exploiting them fully; indeed, workbooks are often treated as optional cast-offs. Little mention of them is made in the writing on materials development but it seems fair to say that publishers treat them much more liberally than coursebooks, judging from the great variety in length, content and format evident among the ones examined in this study. Because of this, and because they are meant to be used outside class, workbooks could easily be retooled to include more of learner-training functions. Unencumbered by the need to present new material in every unit (as is the case with coursebooks), workbooks could provide learners with repeated, iterative practice in the use of key strategies. They could also provide the necessary space for commentary on the rationale behind vocabulary strategies and detailed guidance in using them. Learners could experiment independently using the workbook and then return to the classroom with it to discuss their successes and difficulties. The book could provide teachers with a record of the students' attempts and a forum for giving feedback. This approach might not only allow for more thorough learner training but also render workbooks themselves more relevant.

### 5.3.2 For teachers and teacher training

Where teaching materials fall short, teachers should be able to fill the gaps. With regard to vocabulary learning strategies in particular, this capacity should be recognized and addressed in teacher-training programs. Vocabulary learning strategy development and principled learner training should be incorporated into teacher-training curricula. Additionally, an awareness of learning strategies should be integrated into the materials-evaluation component of such training courses, with the goal that teachers become discriminating users of materials, able to identify omissions and weaknesses and to supplement accordingly.

Achieving these goals through teacher training will be no small feat. O'Malley and Chamot relate how in their own training efforts they found that teachers needed “considerable exposure to the concept of learning strategies as opposed to teaching strategies, and repeated practice in designing and providing learning strategy instruction before they feel comfortable with incorporating strategy training in their classrooms” (1990:155). Even so, it is hoped that this study will have convinced at least some that vocabulary learning strategies are important enough to merit such an undertaking.

### 5.3.3 For researchers

If this paper has shown anything conclusively, it is that more research is needed in the area of vocabulary learning strategies. In particular, there should be longitudinal, classroom-based studies into the effectiveness of strategy training to investigate, for example, the influence of learners' cultural and educational background and other factors. Researchers should collaborate with classroom teachers to ensure that the training in their projects is appropriate and thorough. Additionally, teachers themselves can design action-research projects to help broaden the base of training techniques and add to the research agenda.

### 5.3.4 For educational-technology developers

Finally, one more implication to consider is the possibility of harnessing the power of the microprocessor to make key strategies easier to practice once they have been mastered. As noted earlier, computer-based dictionaries already exist and are growing in popularity; there is also software available to help learners review learned information using the strategies of retrieval and distributed repetition. One can easily imagine as well the creation of individual vocabulary databases in which learners are able to store, retrieve and cross-reference personally relevant lexical information of many different types. A software program which combined all three of these functions is easily within the reach of current technology, and without a doubt would benefit many learners who might not otherwise have the time or inclination to practice key-strategy use in their language learning.

## 5.4 Conclusion

An underlying premise of this investigation has been that vocabulary learning strategies – not only these ‘key’ three but others as well – are worthy of greater attention in coursebooks and, by extension, language classrooms. This is not a trivial proposition, considering that it

touches upon perhaps the most fundamental question facing teachers, materials writers and syllabus designers. That is, how to best put to use the relatively little amount of classroom time that can be spent learning a language, when there are so many competing areas which lay claim to learners' and teachers' attention? I have proposed spending more time on vocabulary-strategy training, arguing on the basis of the importance – or as many believe, centrality – of lexis to the task of learning a language. However, an additional justification, if needed, could be found in broader educational ideals; specifically, those related to developing the capacity for self-directed learning, with the eventual goal of learner autonomy. Insofar as vocabulary learning strategies contribute toward this goal, they may very well represent the fishing lessons in the famous proverb: “Give a man a fish and he’ll eat for a day ...” We in ELT should remember that, while providing learners with immediate nourishment in our lessons, we can and should be imparting on them as well the tools needed to go out and find such nourishment on their own.

It can be said truthfully that the field of ELT manages to survive and even thrive in spite of considerable gaps between theory and practice. There are the opinions of the experts – the theorists and researchers who tell teachers and materials writers what they should be doing – and then there is what is actually being done. Littlejohn, in this landmark PhD thesis entitled “Why are teaching materials the way they are?” (1992), pointed out some of the powerful, economic, sociopolitical and personal forces that help such gaps persist in the field of materials design. Significant change is generally slow in coming in this field and it usually occurs at the cost of considerable effort. It is hoped, however, that this investigation has convinced at least some that such effort would be worthwhile in the case of vocabulary learning strategies.

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