

Exploring the relationship between educational background, vocabulary learning strategy use, and vocabulary knowledge in immigrants learning L2 Swedish

Research in SLA has traditionally involved mainly well-educated language learners. Therefore, scholars have recently pointed out the need to investigate more diverse populations of L2 learners (Andringa & Godfroid 2019). The present project responds to this call by examining the role of educational background in vocabulary-learning-strategy use and vocabulary knowledge in immigrants studying L2 Swedish. Research on individual differences in SLA suggests that strategy use may affect learning outcomes and that strategies might also be successfully instructed (Griffiths, 2022). Hence one can speculate that well-educated learners have generally more efficient strategies, giving them an advantage compared to less educated learners. However, findings are inconclusive with regard to the relationship between educational background and strategic behavior (LaBontee 2019). The present study addresses this knowledge gap.

In this ongoing project, a questionnaire was distributed to 42 adult immigrants studying L2 Swedish at the A2 level. The group was heterogeneous with regard to age (Mdn = 35; IQR = 25–45), length of residence in Sweden (Mdn = 4; IQR = 2–5), years of education (Mdn = 10; IQR = 9–14), and language background; the most represented L1s among the participants were Arabic, Kurdish and Farsi. Vocabulary knowledge was measured with a modified version of Bokander's (2016) SweLT test, with items selected to match the participants' level of L2 Swedish. Use of vocabulary-learning strategies was examined with a modified version of Labontee's (2019) SVLSS 2.0 test. Together, these data enable us to explore interactions between educational background, vocabulary knowledge, and strategy use, while controlling for participants' age, time of residence, and language background.

Data collected so far indicate that learners with a shorter education generally use fewer vocabulary-learning strategies, compared to learners with longer education. Importantly, learners with shorter education also appear to prefer basic strategies, like writing and rehearsing wordlists, and this preference is negatively correlated with vocabulary knowledge. In contrast, learners with longer education prefer contextual strategies, like guessing the meaning of new words, and this preference is positively correlated with vocabulary knowledge. In other words, while less-educated learners appear to focus on rehearsing words, more well-educated learners strive to learn new words in an autonomous way, which may enable them to acquire a larger vocabulary. These results suggest that research on vocabulary-learning-strategy use in well-educated L2 learners cannot be directly generalised to other populations. In addition, the findings may be helpful for L2 teachers aiming at individualising their strategy-use instruction.

References

- Andringa, S., & Godfroid, A. (2019). SLA for all? Reproducing second language acquisition research in non-academic samples. *Language learning*, 69, 5–10.
- Bokander, L. (2016). SweLT 1.0: konstruktion och pilottestning av ett nytt svenskt frekvensbaserat ordförrådtest. *Nordand: nordisk tidskrift för andrespråksforskning*, 11(1), 39–60.
- Griffiths, C. (2022). Learning Styles and Strategies. In: S. Li, P. Hiver, and M. Papi (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Individual Differences*, 82–94. Routledge.
- LaBontee, R. (2019). Strategic vocabulary learning in the Swedish second language context. Doctoral thesis. University of Gothenburg.