This Bulletin examines the actions that learners can take to increase their acquisition of vocabulary. It will be divided into two parts: strategies for discovering the meaning of words, and strategies for integrating the meaning of words once they have been initially encountered (Schmitt, 2000).

STRATEGIES FOR DISCOVERING A WORD'S MEANING

Initial discovery of meaning involves a combination of detail and social strategies. **Detail Strategies:**
1. **Understanding parts of speech.** Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions are common labels which, when properly understood by students, can help them understand how words function.
2. **Analyzing affixes and roots.** The ability to understand affixation and root forms may be challenging to students whose languages do not contain such word structures. A great deal of practice is necessary to help all students comfortably recognize these forms.
3. **Checking for L1 cognate.** Cognates are words which share similar form and meaning across languages. Slavic and Romance languages share such words with English.
4. **Analyzing accompanying pictures (for print) and gestures (for oral language).** Associating words with additional visual information is helpful.
5. **Guessing meaning from textual context.** The ability to obtain clues concerning the meaning of an unknown word by examining surrounding words is a crucial strategy to use in reading.
6. **Using a dictionary.** The varied uses of a dictionary as a resource is a lifelong, practical skill students can learn.

**Social Strategy:**
1. **Asking teachers or classmates for a synonym, paraphrasing, or L1 translation.** Knowing when and how to ask for assistance in understanding a word requires practice.
STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING THE MEANING OF A WORD AFTER IT HAS BEEN ENCOUNTERED

Integrating the meaning of a word takes time and several encounters. Students can learn new words using the following strategies:

**Social Strategies:**
1. **Studying and practicing meaning in a group.** Group focus on words helps integration.
2. **Interacting with native speakers.** Communication offers opportunities for receptive and productive practice.

**Memory Strategies:**
1. **Connecting the word to a previous personal experience.** Association with background knowledge helps cement the word in a student’s memory.
2. **Connecting the word to its synonym and antonym.** This is another way of associating a word with what the student already knows.
3. **Using semantic maps.** As a graphic organizer, a semantic map provides visual support.
4. **Imagining the word’s form and meaning.** Having students connect the word’s form/meaning to visual modality helps learning.
5. **Grouping words together to study them.** Grouping words according to categories is very helpful.
6. **Studying the spelling of a word.** Sound-symbol correspondence of English words is often challenging and requires direct practice by students.
7. **Saying the new word aloud and/or using physical action when studying.** Auditory support provided by repeating the word orally provides additional modality support.

**Cognitive Strategies:**
1. **Repeating the word.** Verbal repetition helps lock in the sound with its meaning.
2. **Writing the word several times.** This strategy provides additional visual practice.
3. **Word lists.** Since several encounters are necessary to learn a word, even isolated word lists can assist in learning, provided they are not the only strategy that is used.

**Metacognitive Strategies:**
1. **Using English-language media.** Songs, movies, etc., can greatly embed knowledge of words.
2. **Practicing/reviewing words at spaced time intervals.** Words must be reviewed periodically in order to ensure learning.
3. **Testing oneself with word tests.** Review can be accomplished by individual or small group testing.
4. **Skipping the new word.** Bypassing the word, especially when reading extended continuous print, maintains comprehensibility.

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Words are learned incidentally and through focused practice. The strategies outlined here can greatly assist students in expanding their repertoire of ways to independently overcome the challenges of incomprehensible vocabulary.

Teacher modeling, followed by consistent student practice, is the best way for students to acquire these strategies. Students must practice these strategies, if they are to become language problem-solvers in learning content.

"Vocabulary is the fuel of language."

Without an extensive knowledge of words, students’ achievement in academic literacy is seriously impaired. Words are learned only through intensive and extensive contact with language. The strategies discussed here will help students develop vocabulary.

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**SOURCES:**