

# Effective Vocabulary Strategies for Teaching Greek as a Foreign Language: An initial Reconnaissance

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## **Abstract**

Vocabulary development in language learners is investigated through two basic strategic modes: teaching and learning strategies. The former lies entirely in the hands of the language teacher while the latter is predominantly executed by the learner, although it should be promoted by the teacher as well. This study wishes to contribute to the discussion by providing evidence from teachers in reading comprehension tasks. We wish to record the most common and effective vocabulary teaching strategies that teachers have adopted in the teaching of Greek as a Foreign Language (GFL) in consideration of the learners' L2 language level. Almost all teachers of GFL in Istanbul (Turkey), members of the Dialog-os digital community, contributed to this study. Study results showed that among the most common and effective strategies adopted by teachers of GFL were a) the use of new words in context b) the utilization of morphological segmentation of unknown words c) providing synonyms and antonyms and d) the use of audio and visual material.

**Keywords:** vocabulary development; strategies; Greek as foreign language; Greek in Turkey; language level

## Introduction

Mastering vocabulary in a second language (L2) is a difficult and demanding task in which individual learner differences have been suggested to play an important role (Carroll and Kowitz, 1994; Catalán, 2003). In formal educational school settings, there are typically three types of individuals involved in creating an environment that allows vocabulary teaching and learning to develop. On the one hand, there is the language teacher who is often responsible for constructing the curriculum, implementing the syllabus, deciding on the teaching material, selecting the methodology and implementing teaching strategies. On the other hand, there is the learner who either explicitly selects his/her preferred learning strategies to cope with the material or implicitly adopts some of those inferred by the teacher. There is also a third party, the co-learner, who often remains comparatively neglected, and whose impact on the learning process is rarely considered (Volet et. al., 2009, p. 144).

In the related literature it is possible to locate a vast range of vocabulary teaching strategies, applied by the teachers, and an equal number of learning strategies adopted or created by the students, which are equally important and ideally should work hand in hand. Over the last few decades many researchers have been trying to define, categorize, and study them in depth, while attempting to measure their role in, and impact on mastering vocabulary. Although there are strategies that could easily be used by both the teacher and the learner, this paper discusses the strategies employed solely by teachers (Al-Jarf, 2007; Fu and Lundmark, 2009; Josefsson, 2012; Lai, 2005; Rousoulioti and Mouti, 2016).

In this aspect, students' behavior becomes a key factor that drives the planning and strategy implementation of teaching (Mitsis, 1998), while the teacher remains a facilitator in the learning process and supports the learners with supportive and corrective feedback (Ypsilandis, 2002, 2014; Ypsilandis and Mouti, 2017) so that they can

achieve their personal goals, as effectively and quickly as possible. While this procedure requires many hours of teaching experience (Knight, 2002; Monika et al., 2017) and it is time consuming, the evolution of technology comes to help and strengthen the teachers' effort, allowing them to participate in online communities that provide collaboration and extend their teaching and research capacities (Patton and Parker, 2017).

Vocabulary teaching requires teachers to glean information from empirical studies about the different strategies available, as well as their proved effectiveness. We contribute to this discussion by following a two-stage approach; initially, we register the vocabulary teaching strategies used by language teachers and then, at a second stage, compare those to the learning strategies developed (implicitly or explicitly) by learners in order to triangulate study results. This paper focuses on the first stage of this approach and explores vocabulary strategies adopted by teachers of GFL.

### **Review of relevant literature**

Although the literature on learning strategies is steadily increasing, the nature of strategies is described as (Cohen and Wang, 2018; Risco, I.C., 2019) sequential and clustering, "...the use of functions (where metacognitive, cognitive, affective, or social) may fluctuate not only during the use of one strategy but also when learners switch from one strategy to another (and back again)" (Cohen & Wang, 2018, p. 181). In that respect, strategies seem to be dynamic and more likely to operate on a continuum rather than being categorized in rigid sections.

The collection of introspective data (collected mainly through students' learning journals, teachers' field notes, questionnaires and mind maps) requires samples from subjects with increased awareness of their mental operations (Becerra et al., 2015). That is not always the case, as there might be differences between

what research subjects claim they do and what they actually do. On the other hand, asking teachers to declare what they actually do in their practice of vocabulary teaching may be a more reliable source.

Vocabulary teaching strategies could be divided into two broad categories, depending on the stage these are deployed in the language classroom: a) those (explicit or implicit) selected and implemented by the teacher when a new item is introduced to an audience of learners (introductory vocabulary teaching strategies), and b) those utilized through close exercises and drills, which typically exist in almost every traditional (or not) language textbook (Fan and Kaeley, 2000). These types of exercises do not aim to correct or evaluate student performance but provide an opportunity for immediate practice with the new linguistic features (vocabulary in this case) introduced by a text or a dialogue and are claimed to assist with an automation process in the human brain (Johnson, 2001). Most research on vocabulary teaching strategies concentrates on category (a) presented above and this paper adds to this discussion. A selected recent literature on the topic is briefly discussed below.

Lai (2005) conducted a study of Taiwanese EFL senior high school teachers attempting to record the most useful vocabulary teaching strategies. Cognitive strategies were found to be the most widely used, followed by direct vocabulary teaching strategies or word morphological analysis. Linking a word to its synonyms and antonyms also scored high on this list, as one of the most selected teaching strategies, while metacognitive strategies (self-testing and skipping a new word) were found to be relatively popular among the afore-mentioned high school teachers. Dictionaries were also recorded as useful support tools.

Fu and Lundmark (2009) investigated the language teaching strategies used by EFL teachers in China at primary school level. Results of this study also showed that the overwhelming majority of teachers in their study did not take into account the learning style of

their students and adopted a more traditional teaching approach, based on memorizing vocabulary and presenting it in a vacuum and out of context. Fu and Lundmark argued that effective learning would be enhanced should there be an association between teaching styles and learning styles.

In another study of EFL vocabulary teaching strategies involving a reading task, Josefsson (2012) explored the impact of the instructors' teaching experience on strategy selection in a Swedish school. Teaching experience in this study was the tested independent controlled variable with the adopted teaching strategies being the controlled variable. The two variables were found to be statistically associated along with the fact that teachers with more work experience followed a more systematic approach to vocabulary teaching than their younger colleagues. Both groups of subjects were in agreement about the importance of contextualized vocabulary learning given the fact that the same word could be assigned different meanings or carry different pragmatic values in different contexts. In addition, both groups pointed out the benefits of vocabulary development from extensive reading. Although Josefsson hypothesised that his subjects would apply a communicative teamwork approach to vocabulary teaching, as suggested by Nation and Newton (1997, p. 243 - 244), his findings did not support this prediction.

It is evident that most studies concerned the learning of English as an L2, while comparatively little has been carried out about vocabulary learning in L1 or other minority L2 languages.

Regarding language learning strategies in the Greek setting, researchers, in two collective volumes (Gavriilidou et al., 2017 & Gavriilidou & Petrogiannis, 2016), explore Language Learning Strategy (LLS) use by upper elementary and junior secondary students in public schools in Greece. They provide evidence of the first phase of a large-scale project entitled "Adaptation of the Strategy

Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) in Greek and Turkish and strategic profiling of primary and secondary school learners and teachers”.

One more study in this direction (Rousoulioti and Mouti, 2016) explores vocabulary strategies adopted by adult learners of Greek as an L2, examining teachers' experience as an independent variable. Their study showed that teachers: a) encouraged learners to infer the meaning of new items from context, b) used morphological analysis as a strategy, c) incorporated sound and meaning associations into their L1 or other languages their subjects possessed, where possible, d) employed dictionaries as reference tools and educational word games for practice, and e) grouped new items and presented them thematically.

Several studies show that the use of vocabulary strategies (specifically discovery strategies) by students are included in the L2 teaching curricula until these can be employed by learners themselves, almost automatically.

It may be concluded, at this stage, that a framework for registering teacher strategic preference is missing from the related literature. There is no uniformity of instruments used nor is there a consensus on the procedures to be followed (possibly due to the different teaching styles of the professionals in the field). In this light, comparisons of results between relevant studies cannot be highly systematic.

### **The aim of the study**

The goal of this study was to record the most common vocabulary teaching strategies adopted by teachers of Greek as FL in the Dialogos e-community in Turkey.

This study poses the following research questions, in reference to the vocabulary teaching strategies investigated:

1. What vocabulary teaching strategies do the Dialog-os digital community teachers use in their classes when considering the L2 level?
2. What are the factors/criteria affecting strategy selection?
3. What are the most, in their opinion, effective strategies?

In the first question, participants were asked to declare the strategic choices they made regarding the teaching of vocabulary in their classes while also considering the students' level. The second question recorded a set of criteria that informed their decisions, while the third asked them to give their personal expert opinion on the most effective vocabulary teaching strategies.

Despite its ethnographic orientation and character, this pilot is the first step in a wider study on vocabulary acquisition and merits attention as it pairs teaching and learning strategies. It is worth mentioning that the researcher conducting this study was a member of the teachers' community. The researcher struggled simultaneously with distance and immersion (de Jong et. al., 2013, p. 169) and won teachers' trust.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Setting and Participants**

Teachers participating in this research were members of Dialog-os, a digital community teaching Greek as L2 in Turkey. Dialog-os was founded by the Center for the Greek Language, in collaboration with the Sismanoglio Megaro of the General Consulate of Greece in Istanbul in 2014. Members of Dialog-os are all teachers involved in the teaching of GFL in the Istanbul (Turkey) metropolitan area to adult students with Turkish as their first language. Initially the survey involved 24 teachers (the entire population), of whom 20 finally completed the questionnaire-instrument of study (return rate at 83.3%). Six of the teachers were male and fourteen were female. The research subjects were active in posting teaching materials on the

aforementioned platform, had a minimum of two years' teaching experience, and were thus considered qualified enough to provide the type of information requested in the study.

### **Tool of the study**

A questionnaire was adapted from Chamot and O'Malley (1990), Schmitt (1997) and Nation (2001). These are well-known tested tools for data collection of vocabulary learning strategies, which categorize the latter in social, memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and identifying sections. A 5-point frequency ordinal Likert scale (never=0, rarely=1, sometimes=2, often=3, always= 4) was used to allow subjects to select the most relevant answer. The questions appearing on the questionnaire were formulated on the basis of the research questions and in agreement with other studies in the field (Filiás, 1996; Litwin, 1995).

The first part of the questionnaire included 6 closed and 3 open-ended questions registering teachers' profiles, which comprised the independent variables of the study (gender, age, education, training in teaching GFL, training in teaching other foreign languages, their teaching experience in Greek or in other languages, language level at which they have taught and the number of students in their classes). The second part of the survey consisted of another 6 closed-ended questions aiming to identify the vocabulary teaching strategies used by these teachers, in relation with the L2 proficiency of their students, the criteria according to which the subjects selected each strategy, and, in their opinion, the most effective vocabulary teaching strategies (all dependent variables of the study). The selected tool provided opportunities for more systematic comparisons with similar studies in the field in which the same research tool had been or will be adopted.



## Procedure

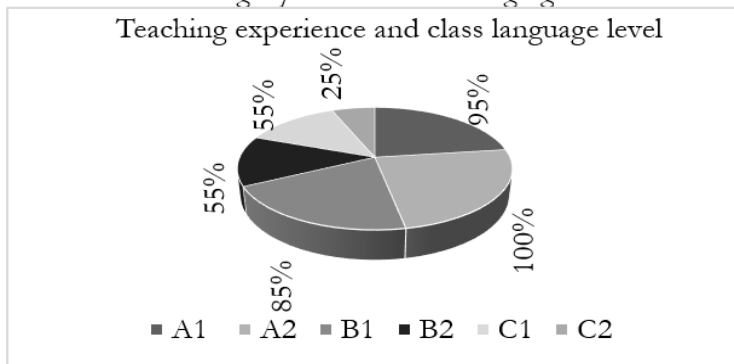
The questionnaire was completed electronically. A pilot test of the instrument, which took place prior to the study, with 10 teachers of Greek as a foreign Language (who did not participate in the study), attested to its suitability.

## Study results

### Profile of the Participants

The average age of the participants was 35.7 years; 40% had a PhD., 50% an MA, and 10% a BA. It appears that despite their young age, the participants were highly qualified humanities and social science graduates. More specifically, 60% came from language-related departments, such as linguistics, Greek philology, and foreign literatures, while 15% studied history. Two of the subjects claimed to have experience in curricula design and the teaching of GFL, whereas 65% responded that they had not received any training in GFL teaching (except through the Dialog-os digital community meetings). The remaining 35% reported that they had participated in seminars, training programs, or workshops in this area. The participants' teaching experience ranged from 2 to 17 years with an average of 7 years. Finally, 70% of the respondents declared to have taught other foreign languages as well, prior to their engagement in the teaching

*Pie Chart 1. Teaching experience and class language level*



of GFL in Turkey. Pie chart 1 below shows the percentages of the participants' teaching experience at different levels, according to the Common European Framework for languages (CEFR, 2001).

Almost all participants claimed to have taught at the following levels: A1 (95%), A2 (100%) and B1 (85%). It is noteworthy that as the class level of language proficiency increased, the teachers' experience decreased by 55% in both B2 and C1 levels, and by 25% in C2, mainly due to the fact that the number of students continuing on to advanced level language studies decreases.

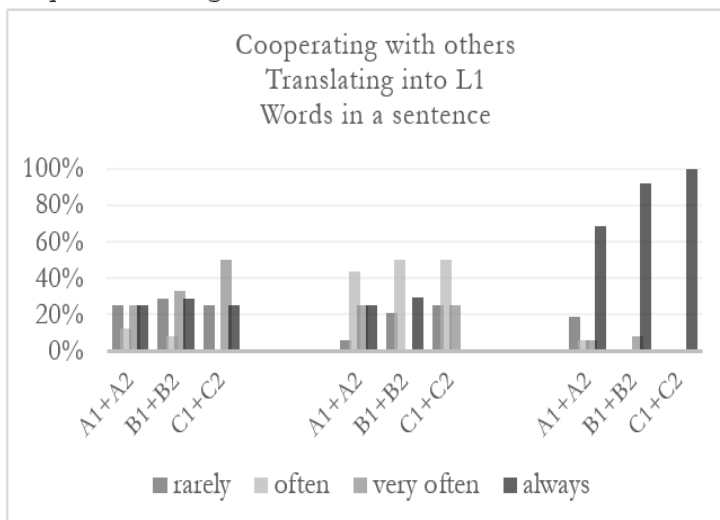
### **Frequencies of the dependent variables considering the L2 level (Research question 1)**

Frequencies of strategies are grouped and presented in the same way as they show up in the related literature (i.e. social, memory, cognitive, metacognitive, determination), each one paired with the students' language level. The subjects of the study varied in their opinion about the usage of the strategy at all levels.

### **Analysis of Frequencies of Social Strategies**

Social Strategies (Graph 1), including New Words in a Sentence-context, seem to have attracted most subjects in a scaffolded manner from the lowest to the highest levels. In fact, at the B1+B2 and C1+C2 levels, response to this strategy reached the absolute 100% point selection. Cooperating With Others followed and L1 Translation came in as the third option. As the language level increased, teachers abandoned this strategy and moved on to more monolingual solutions. Explaining a Word by Providing a Definition in the L2, which is a form of direct teaching as well, was stated to be used by one teacher only.

Graph 1 Social strategies



### Analysis of Frequencies of Memory Strategies

*Connecting a New Vocabulary Item to its Synonyms and Antonyms* was one of the *Memory Strategies* (Graph 2) which retained its high usage. The claimed usage of this strategy was in direct balance with the learners' language level (the higher the level the more frequent was the use of this strategy), which is not surprising, since the increased vocabulary at higher levels enables teachers to use synonyms to teach new items.

The *Use of Realia, Pictures and Photographs* (Graph 2) strategy did not score well at higher levels and its usage diminished as the level increased, while, *The Keyword Method* (Graph 2) was used *Very Often* or *Always* at all language levels, with best results evident at higher levels, as students owned enough vocabulary and learning experience to construct their own visual associations. It is worth mentioning that as the level increased preferences moved towards the favourable attitude. The *Use of Semantic Maps* (Graph 2) according to Chatziachileous (n.d) is a strategy that can be incorporated in a variety of ways in language teaching (presentation, practice, evaluation,

repetition) and these (semantic maps) can be used not only by the teacher but also by the students as a team/cooperative activity.

*Thematic Grouping of Words* (Graph 2) was claimed to be widely used with scores ranging from *Often* to *Always*, while it was credited with being one of the various types of vocabulary organization in teaching that assists memory. This may be interpreted as a tendency from these subjects to understand vocabulary teaching not as an incidental/accidental procedure, but rather as a deliberate process that needs to be organized, a practice witnessed in recently published textbooks and dictionaries in which vocabulary is being presented thematically.

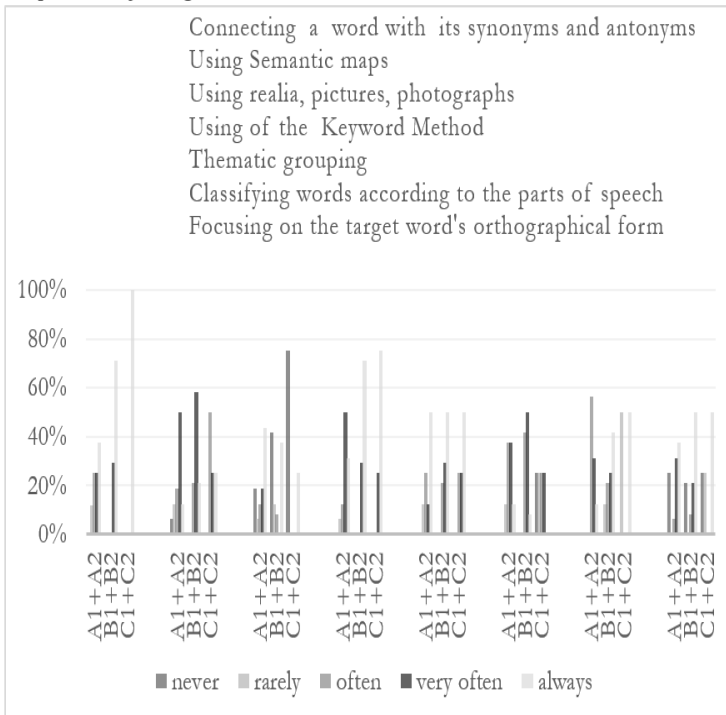
*Grouping and Classifying* words according to parts of speech (Graph 2) was also preferred when teaching grammar. The votes in this section shifted to the right side of the scale, with the *Never* option completely disregarded at all levels while at the C levels the option of *Always* was not selected at all.

In terms of the *Focusing on the Written Form* of words strategy (Graph 2), the majority of responses favoured the middle stances all the way to the right side of the scale, at the A1 and A2 levels, although at the B levels preferences were evenly spread across all stances. It is interesting to note that votes were divided between the *Rarely* and the *Always* option at the C levels. Notice also that when this strategy utilized spelling of new items as a strategic option, it received even more favorable reactions by the subjects of this sample, particularly at the lower language levels.

The *Use of Physical Response/Action or Sensation* (Graph 3) strategy, while teaching the meaning of a word (in accordance with the total physical response method) was found useful (*Very Often*) at all levels by these teachers. When considering the language level in connection with this strategy, for the first two levels (A-B), we can see that the teachers overwhelmingly chose the stances *Very Often* and

*Always* while no one chose the stance *Rarely*. On the other hand, answers were evenly divided between the negative (*Never* and *Rarely*) and the positive poles (*Often* and *Always*) at the C levels. This strategy can be applied more successfully to beginner levels, as the vocabulary taught at these levels is more specific and can be easily depicted through images or movements, contrary to vocabulary taught at advanced levels, which consists of words with more abstract meaning. At advanced levels, the *Use of Physical Movement and Sensation* strategy by teachers while teaching a word is probably not related to the vocabulary itself, but the teacher's speaking style.

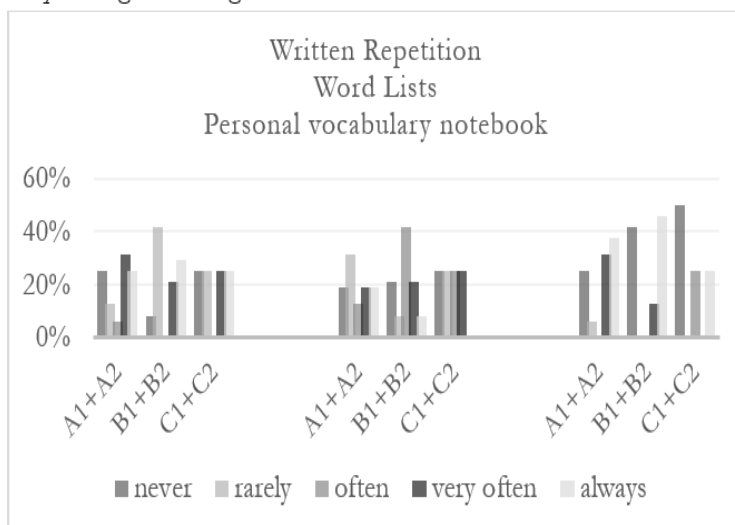
Graph 2 Memory strategies



### Analysis of Frequencies of the Cognitive Strategies

The selection of *Cognitive Strategies* (Graph 3) varied significantly. In particular, *Written Repetition* of words was used with almost the same frequency at each level, without being used less at the advanced levels of language where students can use the language in a satisfactory manner and copying words may be unnecessary. The *Use of Word Lists* strategy (Graph 3) did not show a large deviation, as it was used more or less at every level. The teachers' choices were spread across all stances on the scale. As regards the *Keep your own Personal Vocabulary Notebook Strategy* (Graph 3), the teachers' answers favored the two ends of the scale (*Never* and *Always*). At the A and B levels, more than half of the teachers encouraged students to keep their personal vocabulary notebook *Very Often* or *Always*, while the other half did not prompt students to create such a notebook.

Graph 3 Cognitive strategies



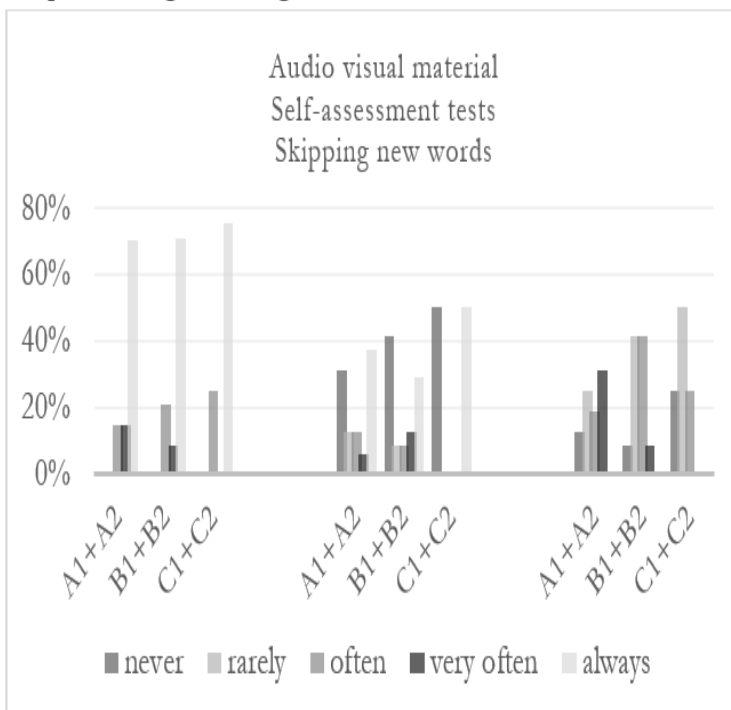
### **Analysis of Frequencies of Metacognitive Strategies**

Among the *Metacognitive Strategies* (Graph 4), the *Use of Audio and Visual Material strategy* was by far the most selected option, illustrating the growing application of electronic media in language teaching. Undoubtedly, no teacher excluded the *Use of Audio-visual Materials* from teaching, as there were zero selections in scales *Never* and *Rarely*.

The *Use of Self-assessment Tests* (Graph 4) strategy at the end of the lesson highly depended on the students' L2 level. Most responses congregated at the high and low extremes with most teachers using such tests responding *Never* and *Always*, probably at the B and C advanced levels, the results contradicted each other, with half the teachers responding *Never* and the rest responding *Always* to this strategy, probably due to their previous training in this alternative method of assessment (Iliopoulou and Rousoulioti, 2019).

As the level increased, the rate at which learners utilised the *Skip an Unknown Word with Low Frequency* strategy (Graph 4) gradually decreased. Thus a word was skipped *Very Often* at the A levels but *Never* at the C levels. This was probably due to the fact that at the beginner levels the objective was for the student to acquire basic vocabulary; emphasis was placed on the holistic understanding of a text, regardless of the unknown words that were definitely present. At advanced levels though, the main goal was to broaden the vocabulary of students which entailed the quantitative increase of the word units and master the register differentiation. Once again awareness of the context in which these words were used is proved to be significant (Iakovou et al., 2019).

Graph 4 Metacognitive strategies



It is understandable, therefore, that students were not advised to skip any word, since at advanced language levels their goal was “to develop a greater degree of accuracy and fluency in the processing of the target language” (Iakovou et al., 2019, p. 7). Finally, at advanced levels the participants (teachers) declared that they intended to provide students with the opportunity to work with more specialized vocabulary, which is more complex and difficult to comprehend (Iakovou et al., 2019).



## Analysis of Frequencies of Determination Strategies

In terms of *Determination Strategies* (Graph 5), *Morphological Segmentation* of a word into its parts (theme, affixes, components) was stated to be a widely-used strategy.

As a learning strategy, *Morphological Segmentation* was the analysis of the components of a word that sports an internal structure, in order to extract the complete meaning of that word based upon the combination of its components and the relationships between them. The ultimate goal was a more effective teaching and learning process (Anastasiadi-Symeonidi and Mitsiaki, 2009, p. 69). This strategy requires the students' exposure to receptive texts (verbal and written) that come in a variety of forms (Iakovou, 2009, p. 69).

However, it is interesting to note that the above strategy scored very high at beginner levels, where the aim is not to teach the morphology of a word, but introduce familiar or cognate words, which resemble each other in L1 and L2 (Charalambakis, 1999, p. 330; Goutsos, 2005, p. 54; Lotto and De Groot, 1998; Meara, 1993) or words that have common components.

In the present study, the students' L1 was Turkish. A great number of words that are similar in Greek and Turkish are either international words, mainly of Greek origin (*tiléfono* 'telephone', *fotographía* 'photography'), or Greek loanwords from Turkish (*dulápi* 'cupboard,' *jiléko* 'vest') (Goutsos, 2005). It is very likely, therefore, that teachers used cognate words to teach the vocabulary of a unit. They have to take into consideration principles regarding vocabulary, grading according to the language level and the selected thematic field (Iakovou et al., 2019).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that teachers who participated in this study taught adult learners, who were particularly interested in the process of word formation, origin and meaning. The

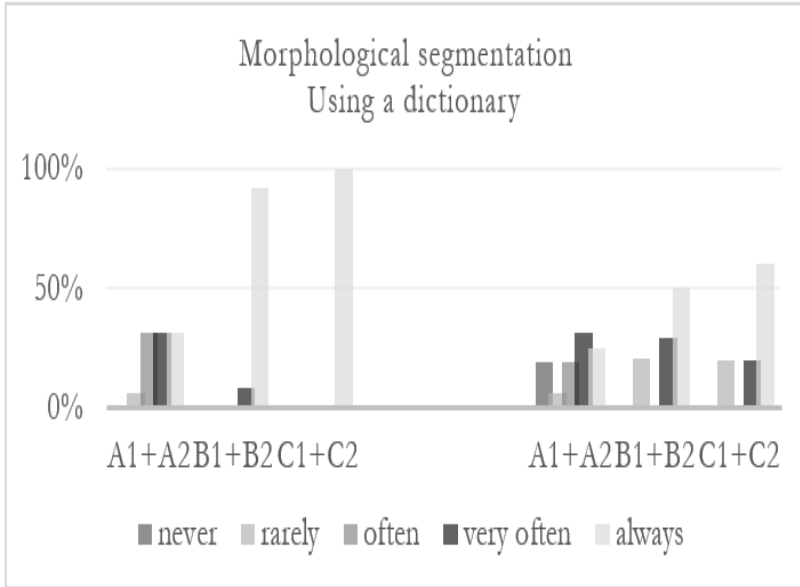
aforementioned students<sup>1</sup> often asked their teachers for further clarifications. Therefore, since etymology is a very important source of interpreting meaning and word formation (Zagka, 2007, p. 1209), it is normal that the linguistic field of etymology attracts the students' interest.

The *Use of Dictionaries* (Graph 5) strategy increased significantly depending on the L2. At beginner levels, the teachers' choices were spread across all stances on the scale. However, teachers claimed to use dictionaries *Very Often* and more importantly *Always* at B and C levels. In agreement with Knight's (1994) findings that learners who consulted a dictionary learned more words in both immediate and delayed tests than those who did not, in the present study no distinction was made between monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. However, Anastasiadi-Symeonidi and Mitsiaki (2009, p. 23) argue that the *Use of Monolingual Dictionaries* in the teaching of GFL can be effectively integrated into the learning process particularly when students are familiar with their use.

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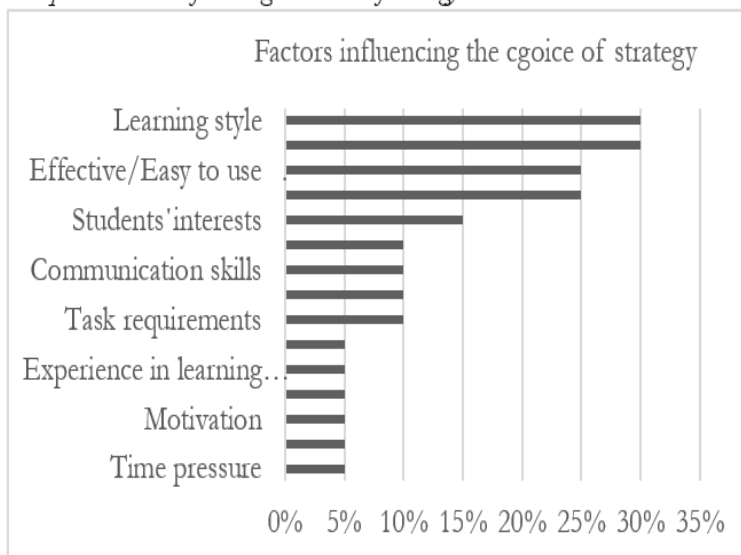
<sup>1</sup> The Digital environment of Dialog-os hosts the Teachers' community and the Students' community. The Students' community was activated during the school year 2014-2015 and aimed at creating a platform where students of classes were given the opportunity to use the Greek language in a Greek communication environment. The Students' community was constructed by the interests of the students who learn Greek as L2. Among others, a group named "History of the Greek Language and Etymology of Words" was also created.

*Graph 5 Determination strategies*



### **Factors affecting the choice of vocabulary teaching strategies (Research question 2)**

All teachers used teaching strategies, and the majority did so (80%) purposefully, since the criteria by which they chose their strategy varied (Graph 6).

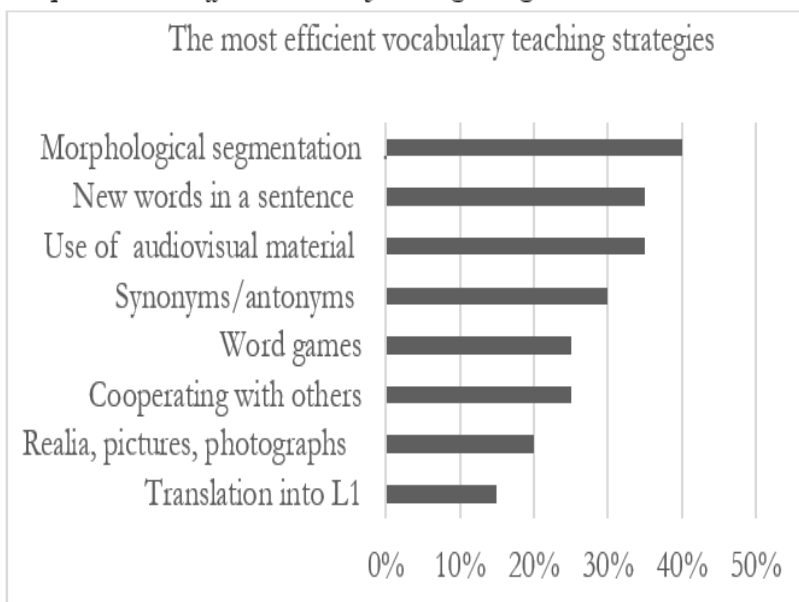
*Graph 6 Factors influencing the choice of strategy*

Twenty percent of the teachers did not specify the factors influencing their choice of strategy. The teachers cited taking into account the learning style of their students, as well as their needs, a factor supported by Oxford and Scarcella (1994) as they are also informed about the interests of their students, in order to implement a strategy and assess their language level. They relied on strategies that they considered effective, attractive and easy to use, observing whether students responded to them. Their ultimate goal was faster development of communication skills. Age did not affect their choice much and neither did the task requirements.

### The most and least efficient vocabulary teaching strategies (Research question 3)

The participants in our survey were asked to choose the three most efficient strategies, in their opinion (Graph 7), from the list of strategies discussed in this study.

Graph 7 The most efficient vocabulary teaching strategies



A strategic choice, among the most efficient learning strategies for teaching vocabulary, was found to be (Graph 7) *Morphological Segmentation*. Although this is a useful strategy (Anastasiadi-Symeonidi and Mitsiaki, 2009), other studies (Bensoussan and Laufer, 1984) showed that deceptively transparent words can lead to incorrect guesses and therefore scholars have suggested that this strategy be used as a supportive confirmation method of other strategies (Clarke and Nation, 1980).

*Use of an Unknown Word*, which draws on context, and *Use of Audiovisual Material*, which is applied frequently by all teachers, comprised the second most efficient strategy reported (Graph 4). Audio visual materials (films, videos, TV) are simple, easily accessible tools that enable students to interact with authentic environments using the target language. The combination of image and sound stimulates students, increases their interest, and helps them memorize the information provided.

*Synonyms/Antonyms* came third on the preference list. However, Tinkham's study (1993) has shown that presenting closely related new words at the same time may confuse some students and hinder learning as learners face difficulty separating two semantically close words without mixing them (Gu and Johnson, 1996). Nation (2001) and Cohen (1990) advise teachers to introduce words related to a particular subject rather than each other (e.g. synonyms and antonyms) (Oxford and Scarcella, 1994).

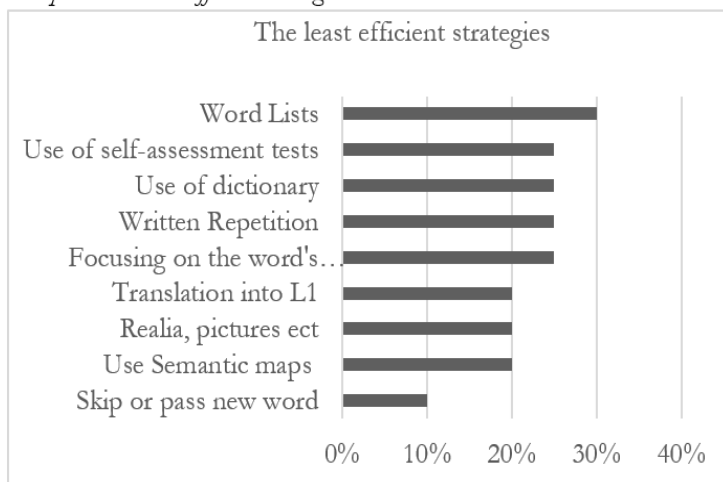
One more strategy that was added by the teachers (it was not an option in the questionnaire) was the educational word games. Educational word games are among the most efficient vocabulary teaching strategies, revealing teachers' efforts to make their lesson enjoyable and interesting. Crossword puzzles and words search enable students to memorize vocabulary by focusing on the form and meaning of words.

Word games to choose from are Taboo, Bingo, Guess Who, Scrabble, "Name, Place, Animal, Thing," where students use and practice the vocabulary that has already been taught. These games can easily be adopted at all levels. The main advantage of playing a game is that students do not think of the language they use, but spontaneously communicate by using it.

Among the least efficient strategies (Graph 8) for the teaching of vocabulary in the classroom was the creation of *Word*

*Lists Strategy*. The following strategies ranked second in their choice: the *Use of Dictionaries*, *Self-assessment Tests* at the end of each lesson, *Focusing on the Written Form* of words and the *Written Repetition* of words. *Written Repetition* of words is a traditional way of learning vocabulary, and teachers classified it as inefficient, even though it was widely used by several of them. This same strategy is also a widespread strategy that students often refuse to give up (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990), as they believe that it is an effective way to learn.

Employed particularly at low language levels, *The Use Of Realia* (photographs, paintings, etc.) ranked third on this list of inefficient strategies, along with *The Use of Semantic Maps* and *Translation of the Unknown Words into L1*. *The Translation of a Word into a Student's L1* is a pervasive strategy used by teachers even at high levels while it is considered one of the least effective vocabulary teaching strategies. As this study consisted of students with a common language (Turkish), teachers translated into their L1 as it appeared easy and time-saving. Moreover, students often wish to find out the corresponding term in their own language to make sure that they have understood it correctly. Karimian & Talebinejad (2013, p. 607) claim that translating into L1 encourages students to continue their studies since they come to a better understanding of the L2 they are learning. Undoubtedly, providing synonyms of a word into the target language, with the help of words already known to students, is a practice greatly preferred (Rousoulioti and Mouti, 2016).

*Graph 8 The least efficient strategies*

## Summary and Discussion

The participants of this study proved to be suitable for the targeted task, having the professional experience to provide valuable data as to their strategic habits for vocabulary teaching, while the tool selected was also found appropriate for the task.

Summarizing major findings, we can claim the following:

a) In agreement with earlier direct strategic choices, suggested by Schmitt (2000, p. 116, 146-149) and Nation (2001, p. 120, 232-233), these participants incorporated new vocabulary in examples that made the meanings of the item transparent to learners at early levels, a strategy abandoned later at higher levels. b) Providing definitions in the L2 was not a popular selection, following Nation's (1990) recommendation of it being difficult to locate the absolute correspondence between words of an L1 and an L2, a convention that may lead to negative transfer and result in pragmalinguistic failure (James, Scholfield and Ypsilandis, 1992, 1994). c) Connecting a new vocabulary item to its synonyms and antonyms scored high in



this sample, similarly to Lai's (2005) findings, which supports the existence of similarities in the strategic choices of language teaching professionals around the globe, despite cultural differences and geographical distance. d) Connecting new items to previous (prior) knowledge, a highly used memory strategy, is in accordance with the constructivist concept of language learning, and it is particularly effective when new items carry abstract and non-concrete meanings which, in their turn, are more suited to the use of images and realia. This strategy is in the direction of a recently flipped learning approach to language teaching where prior knowledge of learners is promoted and activated in class (Boettger and Ypsilandis, forthcoming). e) Social, metacognitive and determination strategies were applied at all levels (from A1 to C2) to a large extent, with the exception of the *Skipping New Words Strategy* (especially low frequency ones) which was low-rated, at all levels. f) Among the memory strategies selected, *Using Realia, Pictures and Photographs* were claimed to be used primarily at lower levels (A1 and A2) attesting to a possible reality in the sense that vocabulary items become less concrete and more abstract at higher levels. g) The *Keyword Method* was selected mostly in advanced and higher levels (B and C) while the *Use of Semantic Maps* was applied at all levels and especially at A and B. Jenpattarakul (2012, quoted in Piribabadi and Rahmany, 2014) believes that students store and retrieve new sets of words through the use of keywords, while expanding their imagination and creativity. This means that the more imagination and creativity students have, the better they can memorize new vocabulary. h) Although cognitive strategies were less preferred, unlike findings reported in Lai (2005), the maintenance of a *Personal Vocabulary Notebook* strategy was adopted at A and B levels.

Other findings of this study concern the strategies used more frequently by teachers who also claimed that those were most useful. These were: a) morphological segmentation, b) the use of audio-

visual materials and the teaching of new vocabulary in context, and c) the use of synonyms/antonyms, a finding that comes in agreement with Lai (2005). The *Use of Dictionaries* was another strategy employed by members of this sample, also reported in Lai (2005) as this teaching tool, together with word games, seems to support the teaching praxis globally (Rousoulioti and Mouti, 2016). Finally, the least effective vocabulary strategies included word lists, focusing on the written form of words, the use of self-assessment tests and written repetition.

Notice that vocabulary teaching is not a random process but is coupled with strategies that are based on students' needs, specifically, students' learning styles, their motivations, their interests, and their L2 levels. It is needless to add that the effectiveness of each strategy is a basic parameter that determines teachers' choices. Finally, it needs to be pointed out that the strategies chosen by a teacher aim to create the conditions and an appropriate environment to support the learning process in a way that it becomes efficient and productive, an endeavor that needs to be properly organized.

### **Limitations of this study**

Among the limitations are a) the study tool was rather long for teachers to complete; b) the size of the sample was small for a research of this type. However, it is considered to be a good pilot for the vocabulary strategies used by GFL teachers in Istanbul and may be used as a first step for similar studies with larger samples.

### **Conclusion**

The scope of this study was to explore vocabulary strategies adopted by teachers of GFL in Istanbul (Turkey). The results demonstrated that among the most common and effective strategies adopted by the teachers are the following from various categories: a social one (the use of new words in context), a memory one (providing synonyms

and antonyms), a determination one (morphological segmentation of unknown words) and a metacognitive one (the use of audio and visual material). The language level of the students affects the choice of strategies that their teachers adopt. Teachers in this community showed less preference for the use of cognitive strategies. This is probably due to the fact that they take into account the learning style of their students, as well as their needs and interests in order to develop their communication skills. The study wishes to contribute to the discussion by providing insights into the strategies teachers consider effective for teaching vocabulary in reading comprehension tasks.

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