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Incidental EFL Vocabulary Learning: The Effects of Interactive Multiple-Choice Glosses

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Abstract

An important role of vocabulary in language learning has been recognised as lexical knowledge is very likely to determine a mastery of language. Teachers and researchers then have been attempting to find ways to improve both quantity and quality of learners' vocabulary repertoire.

It is commonly accepted that reading is one of major sources of vocabulary learning. Words can be acquired incidentally through reading (Day, Omura, & Hiramatsu, 1991; Dupay & Krashen, 1993; Horst, 2005; Huang & Liou, 2007; Hulstijn, 1992; Krashen, 2004; Min, 2008; Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985; Nation, 2001; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Schmitt, 2008; Waring & Nation, 2004). However, the efficiency and efficacy of this method has been challenged (Waring & Takaki, 2003; Zimmerman, 1997). Vocabulary gains from only-reading are usually found small. Thus, an efficient way that helps strengthen and speed up lexical acquisition process is called for. One possible way could be the use of glosses (e.g. Hulstijn, Hollander, & Greidanus, 1996), particularly a computerised interactive gloss (Nagata, 1999).

The present study examines whether or not incidental vocabulary learning through (online) reading can be facilitated by the use of interactive multiple-choice glosses (IMG). Forty-five Thai intermediate-level EFL learners were put into two different experimental groups. Group 1 (G1) could consult IMG while reading the texts. As opposed to G1, the second group (G2) read the texts without IMG. The vocabulary post-tests reveal that interactive multiple-choice glosses (IMG) positively impact on acquisition and retention of words. Students who accessed to IMG while reading learned words significantly more than those who simply read with no glosses measured on both immediate and delayed post-tests. Furthermore, learned words are decayed over two-week time. Yet, the provision of IMG is associated with better long-term retention of learned words.