

An Investigation of the Role of L1 Gloss and L2 Context in English Vocabulary Learning Among Primary ESL Learners

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Abstract

For many decades, the use of the first language (L1) in second language vocabulary learning has been a controversial issue. Some advocate the presentation of L1 glosses to aid the understanding of word meanings, while some advocate deriving meaning from pure L2 context. In view of this, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness and students' preference and attitudes towards the three learning conditions, which are 1) L1 glosses, 2) L2 contexts and 3) a combination of both L1 glosses and L2 contexts. 18 local band-one primary five students participated in the study, in which they were divided into groups and learned the target words under different learning conditions separately. Their learning was assessed through immediate recall and retention tests. They were also invited to fill in a questionnaire to indicate their preference for the three approaches. It was found out that students learning from the combined approach outperformed the other two groups in both immediate recall and long-term retention of word meanings. From the questionnaire results, though it was reported that learners use the guessing strategy from L2 context the most, they still desire to have both Chinese glosses and English example contexts in learning English vocabulary. The findings suggest that teachers should be flexible in strategy choices and L1 glosses and L2 context should be seen as complementary to each other in English vocabulary acquisition.

Reflection

This capstone project best represents what I have acquired throughout my four-year study as a student of English major at CUHK. Studying courses such as Acquisition of English as a Second Language, Bilingualism and Lexical Studies in English, I have developed my keen interest in linguistics and second language teaching. Utilizing what I have learnt in the English Department, I decided to work on the topic of L2 vocabulary teaching in Hong Kong schools, with a special focus on the effects of L1 gloss and L2 context. This project was a unique opportunity that allows me to conduct my own research by delivering mini lessons to a group of students, and at the same time explore their views and difficulties they encountered during the learning process of English vocabulary. Again, the research is a tough yet fruitful experience in the pursuit of my Bachelor's degree. At last, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Suzanne Wong, for her inspiration, guidance and invaluable advice while I was working on my project.