

# **Incidental L2 Vocabulary Acquisition in Poem Comprehension by Hong Kong**

**Advanced Learners of English**

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## **Abstract**

Second language vocabulary acquisition does not only occur intentionally but also in activities such as reading, listening, conversation, with the aim of having fun, communicating, comprehending, or getting new information, except learning the meanings of unknown words. When they encounter new words during the activities, they may unconsciously process the words in their brain, and get familiarized with the words. While a number of studies have proved the effectiveness of incidental L2 vocabulary acquisition through reading, none of the empirical studies on incidental L2 vocabulary acquisition, to my best knowledge, had poems as the reading material. To fill this research gap, the present study is a replication of Nassaji (2003) that aims to explore L2 vocabulary acquisition as a by-product of poem reading for comprehension by Hong Kong advanced learners of English. It focuses on identifying the types of knowledge sources and strategies learners used in inferring meaning of unknown words from context, their relationship with inferential success and with learners' disciplinary experience in analyzing poems. Introspective and retrospective data, mainly think-aloud techniques, were collected from four university English majors in Hong Kong who were asked to infer unfamiliar word meanings from context while and after reading a poem. An analysis of learners' responses reveals new categories of knowledge sources and strategies, whereas does not demonstrate great variation in the use of them among learners with different amount of disciplinary experience. The findings also show an overall low percentage of successful inferences. Although certain knowledge sources and strategies were more associated with

inferencing success, there was no causal relationship between success and knowledge sources and strategies.

## **Reflection**

This capstone project best summarizes my academic life as an English major for four years and is a report card demonstrating how I integrated what I have gained from my major courses into my own study. I have been curious about acquiring a second language since I was in secondary school. In courses like Second Language Acquisition, Pedagogical Grammar of English, and Lexical Studies of English, I was fascinated by the amount of unconscious knowledge behind something we think we are conscious of. Taking the theories and real examples I have learnt in these courses as the basis, I decided to work on the topic of incidental vocabulary acquisition because I would like to examine the mysterious processes of it that most learners are not aware of. I was hesitating about which way to go at first and was sometimes lost during the project but thanks to the advice and confidence given by my supervisor, Professor Helen Zhao, I was able to overcome those times and make the entire experience a rewarding and unforgettable one.