Error Patterns of Vocabulary Recognition for EFL Learners in Beijing and Hong Kong

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Sixty second year English majors from Beijing Normal University and sixty-five first year non-English majors from the Hong Kong Institute of Education were given a vocabulary recognition test (Goulden, Nation, & Read, 1990). They were asked to examine each word carefully, skip unknown words, and provide a Chinese equivalent or an English explanation to demonstrate that they know at least one meaning of the word. Errors thus elicited were tallied to determine the percentage of students in each sample making the same error. The number of right answers to each word and the number of students not being able to provide an answer to the word were recorded as well. These errors were then analyzed and grouped into categories. Four types of errors were identified: form errors, meaning errors, form and meaning errors, and part of speech errors. In addition, it was found that the overwhelming majority of errors produced by both groups were phonological or orthographic confusions and part of speech errors. Interpretations are provided in terms of both the learner's mental lexicon and their vocabulary learning strategies. Pedagogical implications are next discussed.