

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Sabzevar Tarbiat Moallem University

Faculty of Literature and Humanities

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts (MA)

**Incidental Vocabulary Learning and Recall by
Intermediate Foreign Language Students: The Influence
of Marginal Glosses, Dictionary Use, and Summary
Writing**

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June, 2011

In the Name of Allah

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To

My Dear Parents

&

The Best Husband of the World

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to my kind and forbearing supervisor, Dr. Ghapanchi, for the great help and contribution he made to improve and extend this study.

My special thanks go to Dr. Ghazanfari, my conscientious advisor, for the invaluable guidelines and feedback he provided me with this thesis.

I would like to express my gratitude to my honorable professor Mr. Estiri for his meticulous and valuable comments on the first draft of this thesis.

I also wish to offer my heartfelt thanks to the following persons who contributed, in some way to the development of the text.

To Dr. Elyasi, Dr. Davoudi, Mr. Ziaee and Mr. Molavi from the English Department in Sabzevar Tarbiat Moallem University.

To my dear friend, Dr. S. Jomhour, for her valuable help in the statistical analysis of the data.

I am thankful to Dr. Zolfagharkhani, the head of the English Department, and all my professors at B.A. and M.A. levels

I am profoundly indebted to my parents for their constant support and encouragement in the course of the development of the text.

Finally, thanks to my beloved husband Morteza, whose unwavering belief in my abilities and love for me were a tremendous source of motivation and support.

ABSTRACT

This research tried to compare the effects of four reading conditions on incidental vocabulary learning and recall of intermediate EFL learners. In order to arrive at logical answers to the problems, a sample population of 120 Iranian senior high school students studying at three language institutes in Tehran, Mashhad and Torghabe (North of Khorasan) were selected. They read two short passages in one of four reading conditions: Marginal Glosses in L1 (i.e., provision of L1 translations of unknown words), Marginal Glosses in L2 (i.e., provision of L2 meanings of unknown words), Dictionary Use (i.e., opportunity to use a dictionary), or Summary Writing (i.e., writing a little summary of both texts, using new words). After reading, students were tested for their recall of 30 words that had appeared once to six times in the texts. And two weeks later, they were tested again to see the retention of the words in the long term. First, this study aimed at understanding the possible influence of four learning conditions on vocabulary learning and recall. Then, it aimed at investigating whether the retention of the meaning of the words is the highest in Summary Writing group, and whether it lowers in Dictionary Use group, L1 Marginal Gloss group and L2 Marginal Gloss group respectively. To achieve the goals of the study, a reading session was held and two posttests were administered under each of the four conditions. The first test was immediately after reading the texts and the second test after two weeks. Finally, the data obtained from the results of the participants' performance on the tests were analyzed and interpreted statistically. A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that all of the four reading conditions had a significant effect on incidental learning and recall of the words. However, according to Duncan's multiple range test (MRT) neither the immediate nor the delayed tests revealed significant differences among the four types. In other words, it does not make any significant difference whether to use marginal glosses, dictionary or to write a summary for incidental vocabulary learning, because they are proven to have statistically equal consequences.

Key words: Incidental vocabulary learning; short-term / long-term retention; L1 / L2 marginal gloss; dictionary use; summary writing.

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List of Abbreviations

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
DU	Dictionary Use
L2	foreign/second language
LTM	Long Term Memory
MG	Marginal Gloss
MG 1	Bilingual Marginal Gloss
MG 2	Monolingual Marginal Gloss
MRT	(Duncan's) multiple range test
STM	Short Term Memory
SW	Summary Writing
WM	Working Memory

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

It is impossible to comprehend either a native or foreign language text without understanding the text's vocabulary. Reading comprehension (both in L1 and L2) is more strongly related to vocabulary knowledge than to other components of reading such as making inferences, grasping the main idea, guessing the unknown words and so on (Laufer,1997).

Attention to vocabulary plays a vital role in the profession of language teaching. This vital role necessitates a reliable and efficient programming for this language component. Although some teachers may think that vocabulary learning is easy, learning new vocabulary items has always been challenging for the learners. Different ways of learning vocabulary are usually utilized by the students such as using flash cards, notebook, referring to bilingual and monolingual dictionaries to check the meaning, or giving some synonyms and antonyms to name but a few. In spite of these efforts and difficulties, according to Nemati (2009) vocabulary is by far the most unmanageable and challenging component. This raises a fundamental query that which method could be used to make vocabulary less of struggle? She argues that one possible answer to the problem of vocabulary is applying teaching vocabulary learning strategies.

Wei (2007, cited in Nemati, 2009, p. 014) mentioned that research into language learning strategies began in the 1960s and since the mid 1980s, vocabulary learning has been drawing growing attention from ESL researchers, particularly, the 1990s, witnessed a noticeable number of publications, vocabulary is now a current focus in ESL pedagogy and research.

Incidental vocabulary learning, specifically, has proved to be a controversial issue and a question of long debate with regard to its impacts on the process of vocabulary learning (Coady, 1997; Zhang, 2001; De Ridder, 2002; Karp, 2002; Takeuchi, 2004; Pulido, 2007; Prichard, 2008).

According to Nation (2001) extensive reading is useful for vocabulary growth and is called incidental learning. Therefore, vocabulary can be acquired through reading (Krashen, 1995) or any “fully contextualized activities”, to use Oxford and Scarcella’s (1994) term. Furthermore, vocabulary words which are acquired in this way retain not just their referential meaning but also the syntactic, pragmatic, and even emotional information from their context. Most important, vocabulary is no longer believed to be acquired as separate items. It is an integral part of discourse and is developed along with reading strategies such as contextual guessing or dictionary use.

1.2. Significance of the Study

It is no doubt that learning vocabulary is an essential part for language mastery (Schmitt 2008). However, neither a clear understanding how a word is acquired nor a method that best enhances vocabulary learning has not been accomplished, partly due to the fact that lexical learning is a complicated multifaceted learning influenced by a wide variety of factors (Meara, 1996; cited in Yongqi-Gu, 2003; Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2008; Srichamnong, 2009). A large amount of research during the recent decades has been attempting to achieve different ways and strategies of enhancing vocabulary knowledge. To name but a few, Yoshii (2006)

investigated the effect of glosses on incidental vocabulary learning; Wei (2007) examined vocabulary learning of college-level learners; and Nemati (2009) who studied “memory vocabulary learning strategies”. Likewise, the present study aims to introduce and compare four ways to enhance incidental second language (L2)/foreign language (FL) vocabulary acquisition. The finding will primarily be beneficial for EFL teachers and learners. It can serve as a source of ideas and insights to develop in learners an awareness of alternative vocabulary learning strategies that involve active processing of the target vocabulary.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

It is apparent that lexical items can be acquired incidentally through reading (Hulstijn, 2001; Rieder, 2003; Schmitt, 2008). However, incidental vocabulary learning through reading is not always effective especially for ESL/EFL learners (Laufer, 2001). Frequently, L2 vocabulary gains from reading are relatively small and not necessarily efficient (Hulstijn, 1992; Day and Bamford, 1998; Min, 2008).

Such small gains of words learned solely by reading could be attributed by several factors. One of major factors could be the lack of noticing. Schmidt (1995) emphasizes that conscious attention is necessary for learning to take place; and noticing is generally the first stage of learning. However, it is highly possible that while reading, learners usually fail to notice unfamiliar words especially when they can understand the global message of the text without knowing those words. As the words go unnoticed, lexical learning then is unlikely to occur. Therefore, promoting the noticing of words, while reading, may help increase vocabulary gains.

This could be achieved by the use of gloss, dictionary or summary writing. This study is an attempt to answer the question of the preference of one of the conditions of L1 marginal gloss, L2 marginal gloss, dictionary use, and summary writing over the other three in view to retention of the English words as a foreign language vocabulary for Iranian students. Consequently the problem is stated in forms of five questions which are stated in section 1.5.

1.4. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of marginal glosses, dictionary use, and summary writing on vocabulary recall and retention of Iranian intermediate students. Accordingly, this study compares four conditions of incidental vocabulary learning with each other. It also tries to find whether any of these conditions have a better impact on long-term retention of the words.

According to "Depth of Processing Hypothesis" (more elaboration on this hypothesis is provided in section 2.5.), the more cognitive energy a person exerts when manipulating and thinking about a word, the more likely it is that they will be able to recall and use it later (Craik and Lockhart, 1972; Craik and Tulving, 1975). This hypothesis implies that it is not important how recently learners have learnt something. What is of more importance in learning is, in fact, the depth of processing. Such implications extend to pedagogy as well, suggesting that exercise and learning strategies which involve a deeper engagement with words should lead to higher retention compared to shallow activities. Given the above hypothesis, the present article seeks to introduce, from among four popular ways of incidental vocabulary learning through reading, vocabulary learning strategies which involve in deep processing and will consequently lead to

better retention. According to this hypothesis summary writing should have a deeper processing, and consequently it should lead to a better retention of the words. Because when learners read a text and then write a summary of that, they process more deeply than when they are just reading a text accompanying a marginal gloss with the purpose of answering comprehension questions. This will be discussed later in Chapter two.

1.5. Research Questions

Hulstijn, Hollander and Greidanus (1996) explored that the reoccurrence of unknown words, in combination with the provision of information concerning their meanings, increases the likelihood of incidental vocabulary learning. Thus, here there was no need to a control group because the influence of having glosses and additional tasks have been proven before (Hulstijn, 1992; Knight, 1994; Hulstijn, Hollander, & Greidanus, 1996; Jacobs, Dufon, & Fong, 1994; Watanabe, 1997).

In the present study, the influence of frequency of occurrence combined with the following factors was investigated: provision of word meaning in L1 and L2, the effort to check the meaning in a dictionary and production of summary as an output. This investigation was under the following two conditions, which are characteristic of many real life reading situations:

- (a) Intermediate L2 learners read an L2 text with the purpose of an overall understanding of it;
- (b) The texts contained a number of words with which they were not familiar.

The L2 learners in this study read a text under one of four conditions: Marginal L1 Glosses (MG1), Marginal L2 Glosses (MG2), Dictionary Use (DU), and Summary Writing (SW).

For students in the MG1 group, an L1 translation was provided in the margin for the targeted, unfamiliar words. Students in the MG2 group were given L2 meanings of unknown words. Those in the Dictionary group were free to use a dictionary and the targeted words were italicized. Students in Summary group were given marginal L2 glosses and they were asked to write a little summary of both texts, using new words.

To accomplish this investigation, the following research questions were formulated:

1) Do the four vocabulary learning conditions and the time interval between the two tests have a meaningful influence on the retention of the meaning of unfamiliar target words?

1a) Does L1 marginal gloss (MG1) have any significant effects on vocabulary learning and retention across the time?

1b) Does L2 marginal gloss (MG2) have any significant effects on vocabulary learning and retention across the time?

1c) Does the dictionary use (DU) have any significant effects on vocabulary learning and retention across the time?

1d) Does summary writing (SW) have any significant effects on vocabulary learning and retention across the time?

2) Is there any difference between learners' vocabulary learning and long-term retention in four conditions of reading?

1.5.1. Research Hypotheses

To answer the above questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated: