Incidental Vocabulary Learning in a Computer Assisted Language Learning Environment at University of Jaffna: a Comparison of the Effectiveness of L1 and L2 Glosses.

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Abstract

One of the most important components of performance in a second language, especially in academic settings is acquiring reading ability. Reading ability in turn depends on the single most important factor- vocabulary knowledge. However, the most pressing problems second language learners face is the large number of unknown vocabulary items they encounter when reading a text either in the conventional print mode or on computer screens. This problem is more severe when low proficiency learners are considered. Often the solution is provided by creating or providing glosses either in the learners' first language or in the target language. To investigate the problems encountered by these learners in a computer assisted language learning environment as a result of lack of vocabulary knowledge and to help enhance the incidental acquisition of second language (L2) vocabulary, this study was established to investigate the effectiveness of first language glosses (L1) and (L2) glosses in promoting incidental vocabulary acquisition and retention in a computer assisted language learning environment. 64 freshmen from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka participated in the study. The participants read a passage on computer screens with 18 highlighted target words which were pretested and found to be unknown to the participants. 9 of the target words were glossed in L1 meaning and the other 9 in L2 meaning using the special software developed for this study. The results revealed that more than 50% of the targeted words were acquired and stored in short term memory and more than 23% of the words were retained. When L1 glossed words are considered this was 59.44% and 28.44% respectively. The results of the t-tests employed on the data collected through the post tests revealed that L1 glosses are more effective than L2 glosses in promoting incidental vocabulary acquisition and retention in a computer assisted language learning environment and the difference is statistically highly significant. Hence, this study bears important implications for the teachers at the University of Jaffna who prepare ESL reading material to be used in a computer assisted language learning