

The Effects of Glossing on Incidental Vocabulary Learning Through Reading-Based Oral Tasks

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The effects of single glossing have been identified in some studies, but research on the effects of bilingual glossing and multiple-choice glossing on incidental vocabulary learning is rather scarce. Furthermore, the role of glossing is often examined in the process of mere reading, and little is known as to how effective it can be in reading-plus activities like reading and retelling. This study investigated the effects of bilingual glossing and bilingual multiple-choice glossing on incidental vocabulary learning through reading-based oral tasks—reading and retelling— by two groups of non-English major college students in China. The independent-samples T-test for the immediate posttest indicated that multiple-choice glossing group outperformed the bilingual glossing group, but the difference is not significant. Nevertheless, multiple-choice glossing has yielded significant long lasting effects in the delayed posttest.

Key words: **bilingual glossing, bilingual multiple-choice glossing, reading and retelling**

INTRODUCTION

Glossing (annotation) is defined by Nation (2001) as “a brief definition or synonym, either in L1 or L2, which is provided with the text” (p. 174). Generally speaking, there are four types of annotation: text annotation,

picture annotation, audio and video annotation.

Glossing is a type of commonly used textual enhancement. Its role on incidental lexical learning has aroused wide interest in both L1 and L2 situations and positive effects have been identified (Chun & Plass, 1996; Hulstijn, Hollander & Greidanus, 1996; Watanabe, 1997). However, previous studies have generated mixed results as to whether L1, L2 or bilingual glosses are more effective on incidental lexical learning. Again, there is no consensus as to whether multiple-choice glossing or single glossing should be used (Hulstijn, 1992; Nagata, 1999; Watababe, 1997). Actually, multiple-choice glossing is not commonly used in English textbooks or other types of English reading material in China as well as other foreign language learning contexts. Up to now, research on the effects of multiple-choice glossing on incidental vocabulary learning has been rather scarce. It calls for further investigation to understand its facilitative role on lexical learning. Additionally, the role of glossing is commonly examined in the process of mere reading; little is known as to how effective it can be in other types of reading-plus activities like reading and retelling.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Incidental Vocabulary Learning via Reading

Much research evidence that demonstrates incidental vocabulary learning through various channels can be found in literature, such as, vocabulary learning via reading (Hulstijn et al., 1996; Rott, 1999; Tekmen, Anne & Daloglu, 2006), listening (Vidal, 2003), speaking (Ellis, 1995), writing (Webb, 2005) as well as from mixed channels (Joe, 1998; Paribakht & Wesche, 1999). Among these channels, reading might be the most heavily researched area that is likely to contribute to incidental vocabulary learning.

Despite the fact that incidental vocabulary learning does take place via global reading, research on incidental vocabulary learning often shows that

only small amounts of incidental vocabulary learning occur from reading-only. For example, Nagy, Herman, and Anderson (1987) investigating incidental vocabulary in normal reading revealed that overall possibility of learning a word was .05, only accounting for about one third the probability found with a comparable multiple-choice test in their previous study. Similarly, Swanbon and Gloppe's study (2002) demonstrated that the proportion of words acquired incidentally from reading was .06 for free reading, less than .08 when reading for text comprehension and .10 when reading to learn about the topic.

The findings of previous studies have demonstrated that chances of incidental vocabulary acquisition through global reading are rather small, although certain amount of vocabulary learning does take place in this process. Based on previous research, Hulstijn et al. (1996) summarized explanations for the small gains from mere reading. For example, "Readers may fail to notice the presence of unfamiliar words or simply ignore them; Sometimes readers fail to form a connection between form and meaning of unknown words because of redundant contextual information" (p. 328). It is also common that contextual clues are not adequate for successful inferences to happen. In addition, the unlikelihood of acquiring a word through a single encounter may also help to explain why learners can only acquire small number of words while reading. For example, Nation and Wang (1999) found that at least 10 exposures were necessary for a L2 word to be acquired. (As cited in Nation, 2001, p. 81)

Previous Studies on Glossing and Incidental Vocabulary Learning

Studies in literature have yielded positive effect of glossing on lexical learning (Chun & Plass, 1996; Davis, 1989; Hulstijn et al., 1996; Watanabe, 1997). However, it is quite disputable whether L1 or L2 glosses or bilingual glosses should be used. (Jacobs, Dufon, & Hong, 1994; Laufer & Shmueli, 1997; Miyasako, 2002).

Another controversy is that whether multiple-choice glossing or single glossing is more facilitative to lexical learning. Multiple-choice glossing usually involves learners in decision making as to which choice is closest in meaning to the unfamiliar word. Hulstijn (1992, experiment III and experiment V) investigated the role of single glossing and multiple-choice glossing on incidental lexical learning with some adult learners who took Dutch as a second language. In the multiple-choice gloss condition, one correct synonym and three distracters were provided, while in the single-gloss condition, only a correct synonym was given. Results of experiment III indicated that the multi-choice condition yielded significantly higher vocabulary gains than the single-synonym condition. However, no significant difference was found between multiple-choice gloss and single gloss in experiment V. Hulstijn pointed out that the high probability of wrong inferences in multiple-choice condition was no guarantee of the superiority of multi-choice glossing to single synonym.

In another carefully designed study by Watababe (1997) aiming to investigate the influence of multiple-choice glossing and single glossing on lexical learning, 231 university students from four universities who were learning English as a second language took part in the study and were assigned to the four learning conditions with four text formats: 1) appositive (English or L2 explanations inserted right after each target word), 2) single marginal glosses (L2 explanations), 3) multiple-choice glosses (two alternative explanations of target words with one correct meaning and a distracter), 4) text only. The results showed that subjects in both single marginal gloss condition and multiple-choice gloss condition outperformed those in appositive and text only conditions both in the immediate and delayed posttest. The single marginal gloss group achieved even higher mean scores than the multiple-choice group, but the difference in the mean scores between the two groups did not amount to statistical significance. It was suggested that subjects in the multiple-choice group may have wrong choices resulting from wrong inferences since their choices went unchecked.

The problem of incorrect inferencing by learners because of not being told

the correct meanings of target words seemed to be solved by Nagata (1999) who used computer to give subjects immediate feedback to their choices of word meanings. In this study, significant higher vocabulary gains were achieved by the multiple-choice group than the single gloss group in the immediate posttest, but no significant difference was found in the delayed posttest a month later.

To sum up, mixed results have been found in former studies examining the role of glossing on incidental vocabulary learning. It is quite disputable as to whether L1 or L2 or bilingual glossing is preferable. The same is true with the controversy of whether single or multiple-choice glossing should be adopted. Regardless of the mixed results, researchers of previous studies seem to have neglected participants' vocabulary size and language proficiency level. In addition, research on the effects of multiple-choice glossing is rather scarce both in China and abroad. And up to now little research has been conducted to investigate the effects of bilingual multiple-choice glossing on incidental lexical learning despite the fact that it is likely to offer learners with more chances to notice the unknown words and ease the reading process. The adoption of bilingual glosses and reading-plus activities in the present study is to increase the likelihood of learners noticing the target words.

In recent years, the adoption of reading plus activities has been strongly recommended to enhance lexical learning as well as overall language ability of learners, among which reading and speaking activities are gaining increasing popularity. As Nation (2001) put it:

Teachers should design speaking activities to help incidental vocabulary learning. A vocabulary goal can be effectively incorporated into speaking activities like retelling, role play, ranking etc. In the process of reading and retelling, text provides the new vocabulary and context, and retelling gives learners opportunities to retrieve the vocabulary and make generative use of it. (p. 134)

Thus, the present study aims to examine gloss effects in reading-based

speaking activities, which take the form of reading and retelling.

The Role of Attention in Second Language Acquisition

“In cognitive psychology, cognitive science and SLA, the notion that attention is necessary for learning to take place is relatively well accepted” (Izumi & Bigelow, 2000, p. 240). Schmidt (1994) put forward the noticing hypothesis, which has a great impact on the study of second language acquisition. He argued that in order to acquire any particular aspect of second language, the learner must first notice it, or bring consciousness to bear on that aspect of L2. Not all input had equal value and only that input which was noticed could become available for intake and effective processing. “Both Gass (1998, 1997) and Schmidt (1990, 1992, 1993a, 1994, 2001) have argued for attention as one of factors that determine whether something in input will be noticed or not” (as cited in Gass, Svetic, & Lemelin, 2003, p. 498). Gass et al. (2003) also found that attention exerts differential effects on different parts of language like lexicon and syntax. As to the role of attention in incidental vocabulary acquisition, Schmidt further argued that incidental learning was both possible and effective when the demands of a task could help focus learners’ attention on what was to be learned. From Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis, it is natural to infer that incidental vocabulary learning also calls for the involvement of “noticing” or without certain degree of noticing, vocabulary learning can hardly take place, even in the case of incidental vocabulary learning. Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) also mentioned, “It is important to note that incidental learning does not mean unattended learning” (p. 554).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As multiple-choice glossing is likely to provide participants with more chances to notice the words, the paper is to find whether it will yield more

word gains than bilingual glossing. The research questions are the following:

1. Do different types of glossing, namely bilingual glosses and bilingual multiple-choice glosses have different effects on vocabulary acquisition in the process of reading and retelling?
2. If so, to what extent do the two types of glossing differ from each other in the immediate posttest and the delayed posttest?

METHOD

Participants

One hundred and two second-year non-English majors from two intact classes in one university in China were chosen to have a vocabulary level test (Schmitt & Clapham, 2001). All the students were from the same proficiency level—advanced level according to the placement of the university based on their performance in the National Entrance Examination. The analysis of their mean scores in the vocabulary level test and their English scores in the National Entrance Exam indicates no significant differences. The purpose of the analysis is to reduce the likelihood that vocabulary size or English proficiency may influence their lexical achievement in the present study. As a result, 2 groups of students, each of which contains 30 students were chosen as valid subjects in the present study.

Material and Target Words

The reading material was a passage taken from New Concept English III, which was an integrated course for intermediate students. Its topic was considered to be familiar by two experienced teachers who were working with the participants and it contained potential target words which were most likely to be unknown to the subjects. 10 target words were finally decided on with the help of 40 students with similar English proficiency level: *compile*,

assiduously, inveterate, pitfall, unsettling, wane, creep, fend off, doze off, and jibe. (Appendix 1)

The Tasks

Two groups of participants were randomly assigned one of the following tasks.

Task 1: Reading and Retelling with Bilingual Glosses

Participants in this group were divided into pairs and were given 5 minutes to read through a passage entitled 'New Year Resolutions' which was glossed with both Chinese and English definitions (Appendix 2). Then they were to finish the retelling task with a peer within 30 minutes.

Task 2: Reading and Retelling with Multiple-choice Glosses

Participants in task 2 did the same reading and retelling task, but they had access to multiple-choice glosses (Appendix 3), which means they need to guess the meanings of target words with the help of contexts. Each target word was provided with three definitions, both English and Chinese, including one correct meaning and two distracters. The subjects in the multiple-choice conditions need to choose the items which were closest in meaning with the target words. After they had finished guessing word meanings, they could refer to the correct meanings of the target words which were printed upside-down at the bottom of the glossing sheet.

Instruments

The Immediate Posttest

Participants handed in all the reading materials after finishing the reading

and retelling tasks and were unexpectedly given a vocabulary acquisition test of the ten target words, which was in the format of Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) constructed by Wesche and Paribakht (1996).

- I I don't remember having seen this word before.
 - II I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means.
 - III I have seen this word before, and I think it means__ (synonym or translation)
 - IV I know this word. It means __ (synonym or translation)
 - V I can use this word in a sentence: _____ (Write a sentence)
- (If you do this section, please also do Section IV.)

After the test, each was assigned another sheet of paper with the target words in the passage. They should report their knowledge of the target words prior to the experiment. Words which were reported known prior to the experiment would not be regarded as vocabulary achievement gained from the performing of tasks.

The Delayed Posttest

The delayed posttest was administered one week after the immediate posttest, which was also in the format of Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) of Wesche and Paribakht (1996). However, the ten target words in the delayed posttest were arranged in different order to avoid the effects of memory of word order in the immediate posttest.

The Revised Vocabulary Knowledge Scale

Wesche and Paribakht's scoring scales often failed to describe vocabulary acquisition process accurately (Schmitt, 1998), which was also confirmed by some researchers such as McNeill (1996). In order to better capture the vocabulary acquisition process, the researcher in this study revised the

scoring scale as in Table 1

TABLE 1
The Revised Scoring Scale



RESULTS

To address the research question which type of glossing can better facilitate incidental lexical learning in the process of reading and retelling, we turn to independent samples T- test to make comparison between Task 1 and Task 2.

The results of independent samples T-test for the immediate posttest can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3.

TABLE 2
Group Statistics for the Immediate Posttest of Task 1 and Task 2

Task	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.00	30	29.8833	9.50198
2.00	30	32.7000	8.11724

Note: The total score is 50.

TABLE 3
Independent Samples T-test with Equal Variances Assumed

Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means			
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
.768	.384	-1.234	58	.222	-2.81667

As the independent samples test shows, there is no significant difference in task effects between Task 1 and Task 2 in the immediate posttest ($t = -1.234$, 2-tailed sig. = .222) although Task 2 has yielded more word gains than Task 1. Thus, it can be inferred that in the process of reading and retelling bilingual glossing and multiple-choice glossing do not significantly differ from each other in their effects on immediate word gains in this study. Results for independent samples T-test in the delayed posttest can be seen in Table 4 and Table 5.

TABLE 4
Group Statistics for the Delayed Posttest of Task 1 and Task 2

Task	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.00	30	17.2333	8.45957
2.00	30	23.3000	7.73773

Note: The total score is 50.

TABLE 5
Independent Samples T-test with Equal Variances Assumed

Test for Equality of Variances			T-test for Equality of Means		
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
.031	.860	-2.898	58	.005	-6.06667

As can be seen in Table 4, significant word losses have taken place for both tasks in the delayed posttest compared with the immediate posttest. As is shown by the results of independent samples T-test in Table 5, significant difference between bilingual gloss group and bilingual multiple-choice group on the delayed posttest can be found ($p < .05$). Other factors being equal, it can be inferred that multiple-choice glossing is superior to bilingual glossing in its effects on lexical learning in the delayed posttest in the process of reading and retelling.

DISCUSSION

As revealed by the results of the study, reading and retelling with glosses have produced rather satisfactory word retentions. The relatively high vocabulary gains in this study can attribute to multiple factors, for example, the adoption of bilingual glosses, the increased exposures to target words and the use of productive oral tasks. It adds support to the hypothesis that reading-plus tasks have better facilitative power on lexical learning than reading-only.

This study confirmed the effectiveness of multi-choice glossing. The reasons for the superiority of multiple-choice glossing may be that learners in this condition had to infer word meanings from linguistic context using various knowledge sources and contextual clues. What's more, they need to compare the inferences with the context in which the target words were embedded in order to check whether the inferences were appropriate or not. The use of multiple choices glosses was another chance for the target words

to be noticed by the learners, that is to say, more attention was likely to be allocated to target words with multiple-choice glossing. However, in the bilingual glossing condition, learners did not need to guess word meanings since word meanings were provided in bilingual glosses. So it was possible for them to ignore certain explanations when their attention was focused on comprehension of the text and after-reading activities. In the studies of Hulstijn (1992) and Watababe's (1997), learners' guesses of target word meanings were not checked and wrong inferences might have influenced their performance in the vocabulary achievement tests and finally no superiority of multiple-choice glosses were found. However, in the efforts to solve the problem by providing correct answers to learners' inferences, still no significant difference between the two types of glossing in the immediate posttest was found. A possible explanation is that learners in the bilingual glossing condition had access to correct definitions both in L1 and L2 and the access to bilingual glosses may help consolidate the memory traces left by the target words and short-term memory did play a role in their performance in the immediate posttest. However, this effect did not last into the delayed posttest, in which multiple-choice glossing showed obvious advantages.

Despite the apparent superiority of multiple-choice glossing, the researcher also found that wrong inferences of target words did occur as claimed by the participants in the after-test interview. What has caused wrong guessing on the part of learners? Previous research has identified various factors that were likely to affect success in lexical inferencing. For example, Nation (2001) found 98% coverage of known words in the reading material was optimal in order for successful guessing from context to occur. In other words, the ratio of known words and unknown words in a given text is likely to affect guessing from context or we can say too many unknown words in the surrounding context will influence successful guessing of the target words. Hence, learners' vocabulary size level will play a part in this regard. Even though the ratio of known words to unknown words is around 98%, individual learners with different vocabulary size might find certain un-glossed words would create an obstacle for the text comprehension. Based on

previous studies, Nassaji (2006) identified several factors that have been shown to affect lexical inference, such as the nature of the word and the text that contains the target word, the degree of the textual information available in the surrounding context, the learners' ability to make use of the textual and extra-textual cues etc. Paribakht and Wesche (1999) identified eight knowledge sources that learners draw on when guessing word meanings from context, namely, word knowledge, sentence-level grammatical knowledge, word morphology, punctuation, discourse, homonymy, word associations and cognates, among which sentence-level grammatical knowledge was most often used. Hence, we might infer that sentence-level grammatical knowledge is important for successful inference from context.

From the above analysis we can see there are various factors that might influence successful guessing from context, which indicates the necessity to provide feedback to inferences if multiple choices glossing are used. But learners should be discouraged from consulting the answers without paying sufficient attention to the choices.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study, the effects of bilingual glosses and bilingual multiple-choice glosses were compared. Results demonstrated that the multiple-choice glossing group outperformed the bilingual glossing group both in the immediate posttest and the delayed posttest. Although the difference in the mean scores in the immediate posttest was not significant, obvious advantages of multiple-choice glosses over bilingual glosses could be found at significant level in the delayed posttest. This study gives support to the hypothesis that inferred meanings are better remembered than given meanings. Multiple-choices glossing serves to put learners in a problem solving condition, and is likely to help learners develop their inferencing ability and eventually reading ability, in addition to its role on lexical learning. It may also help develop autonomous reading. If multiple-choices

glossing is to be used, teachers and researchers need to study how to design multiple choices in order to put them to best use. Correct answers also need to be provided to avoid wrong inferences. Only in this way can learners get feedback from the answers and make further adjustment to the understanding of the context in which the new word is used. It should be noted that multiple-choices glossing involves learners' inference of word meanings. Hence, it might be necessary to help learners develop lexical inferencing strategies. Multiple choices glossing has not been commonly used in English textbooks as well as other types of reading materials. Although its effects still need to be testified and learners' reactions toward it can be further investigated, at least it is an alternative to single glossing or bilingual glossing.

THE AUTHOR

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APPENDIX A

Treatment Text

New Year Resolutions (新年的决心)

The New Year is a time for resolutions. Mentally, at least, most of us could compile formidable lists of 'do's' and 'don'ts'. The same old favorites recur year in year out with monotonous regularity. We resolved to get up earlier each morning, eat less, find more time to play with the children, do a thousand and one jobs about the house, be nice to people we don't like, drive carefully, and take the dog for a walk every day. Past experience has taught us that certain accomplishments are beyond attainment. If we remain inveterate smokers, it is only because we have so often experienced the frustration that results from failure. Most of us fail in our efforts at self-improvement because our schemes are too ambitious and we never have time to carry them out. We also make the fundamental mistake of announcing our resolutions to everybody so that we look even more foolish when we slip back into our bad old ways. Aware of these pitfalls, this year I tried to keep my resolutions to myself. I limited myself to two modest ambitions: to do physical exercises every morning and to read more of an evening.

An all-night party on New Year's Eve provided me with a good excuse for not carrying out either of these two new resolutions on the first day of the year, but on the second, I applied myself assiduously to the task.

The daily exercises lasted only eleven minutes and I proposed to do them early in the morning before anyone had got up. The self-discipline required to drag myself out of bed eleven minutes earlier than usual was considerable. Nevertheless, I managed to creep down into the living-room for two days before anyone found me out. After jumping about on the carpet and twisting the human frame (my body) into uncomfortable positions, I sat down at the breakfast table in an exhausted condition. It was this that betrayed me. The next morning the whole family trooped in to watch the performance. That was really unsettling but I fended off the taunts (嘲笑) and jibes of the

family good-humouredly and soon everybody got used to the idea. However, my enthusiasm waned. The time I spent at exercises gradually diminished. Little by little the eleven minutes fell to zero. By January 10th, I was back to where I had started from. I argued that if I spent less time exhausting myself at exercises in the morning I would keep my mind fresh for reading when I got home from work. Resisting the hypnotizing (催眠) effect of television, I sat in my room for a few evenings with my eyes glued to a book, one night, however, feeling cold and lonely, I went downstairs and sat in front of the television pretending to read. That proved to be my undoing, for I soon got back to my old bad habit of dozing off in front of the screen. I still haven't given up my resolution to do more reading. In fact, I have just bought a book named 'How to Read a Thousand Words a Minute'. Perhaps it will solve my problem, but I just haven't had time to read it!

APPENDIX B

Bilingual Glosses for Task 1

1. **compile**: to produce a book, list, report, etc.
编写 (书、列表、报告等)
2. **inveterate**: 积习难改的; 有...瘾的。
3. **pitfall**: unexpected danger or difficulty.
危险; 困难; (尤指) 陷阱, 隐患。
4. **assiduously**: working very hard. 努力的; 勤恳的。
5. **creep**: to move slowly and quietly. 蹑手蹑脚地走。
6. **unsettling**: making you feel upset, or nervous. 令人不安的。
7. **fend off**: to defend yourself from sb or sth that is attacking you.
挡开, 避开。
8. **jibe**: say sth that is intended to embarrass sb or make them look silly.
嘲讽。
9. **wane**: to become weaker. 减弱。
10. **doze off**: go to sleep, especially during the day. 打瞌睡。

APPENDIX C

Multiple-choice Glosses for Task 2

Please find out the closest meaning to the words in bold type.
(请找出与黑体字最接近的含义)

1. compile:

- a) to produce a book, list, report, etc. 编写 (书、列表、报告等)
- b) to complain something. 抱怨
- c) to translate a machine program into a machine. 编译

2. inveterate:

- a) not serious. 不严重的。
- b) very dangerous. 很危险的。
- c) habitual and unlikely to stop. 积习难改的

3. pitfall:

- a) downfall. 落下
- b) a hidden hole in the ground. 陷阱
- c) unexpected danger or difficulty. 危险, 隐患。

4. assiduously:

- a) easily. 容易地。
- b) working very hard. 勤恳地, 投入极大热情地。
- c) unwillingly. 不情愿地。

5. creep:

- a) to move slowly and quietly. 蹑手蹑脚地走。
- b) to move very quickly. 快速地行走。
- c) to jump. 跳跃。

6. unsettling:

- a) making you feel moved. 令人感动的。
- b) making you feel happy. 令人高兴的。
- c) making you feel upset, or nervous. 令人不安的。

7. fend off:

- a) to protect. 保护。

b) to argue with sb. 与人争辩。

c) to defend yourself from sb or sth that is attacking you. 挡开, 避开。

8. jibe:

a) support. 支持

b) great care. 关心。

c) scornful remarks: 嘲笑, 奚落。

9. wane:

a) to become weaker. 减弱。

b) to become stronger. 加强。

c) to appear. 出现。

10. doze off:

a) to eat sth. 吃东西。

b) to fall into a light sleep. 打瞌睡。

c) to be widely awake. 清醒。

