

Integrated approach of incidental and intentional conditions: inevitable for successful vocabulary acquisition

Pendekatan terpadu antara pembelajaran insidental dan intensional: syarat mutlak keberhasilan pembelajaran kosa kata

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Abstract

Pembelajaran kosa kata pada pembelajaran bahasa kedua atau asing selalu mendapat perhatian khusus dari para peneliti dan pengajar. Berbagai eksperimen telah dilakukan dalam upaya menemukan metode yang tepat untuk dapat mengajarkan kosa kata secara optimal. Sejauh ini, berbagai riset yang telah dilakukan secara garis besar dapat diklasifikasikan ke dalam dua arus utama: pendekatan intensional dan pendekatan insidental. Masing-masing pendekatan ini dianggap memiliki kelebihan yang tidak dimiliki oleh pendekatan yang lainnya sehingga timbul keyakinan bahwa salah satu pendekatan perlu diprioritaskan di dalam proses pembelajaran ketimbang yang lainnya. Atas dasar pernyataan dari masing-masing kubu tersebut, artikel ini membahas ke dua pendekatan tersebut sekomprensif mungkin untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam. Kajian artikel ini menggunakan hasil beberapa riset yang telah dilakukan mengenai ke dua pendekatan tersebut sebagai dasar pembahasan. Hasilnya, disimpulkan bahwa ke dua pendekatan tersebut memiliki kelebihan dan kekurangan masing-masing. Karena kelebihan dan kekurangan tersebut, masing-masing pendekatan tidak hanya perlu saling melengkapi, melainkan juga saling membutuhkan karena masing-masing tidak dapat mendukung pembelajaran kosa kata yang berhasil bila diterapkan secara sendiri-sendiri. Dengan demikian, diperlukan upaya untuk mengintegrasikan keduanya supaya mendapatkan hasil pembelajaran kosa kata yang optimal.

Kata kunci: pendekatan intensional, pendekatan insidental, integrasi pendekatan

Introduction

Studies on how learners acquire vocabulary of a particular second language have established and identified two main distinctive directions. One is dubbed as intentional and the other is commonly called as incidental vocabulary learning. As the names suggest, the distinction over these two terms lies in the extent whether or not the learners afford intention on enhancing their vocabulary knowledge. The former constitutes a way in which learners do intend to learn the vocabulary and the later deals with the one where learners do not aim to learn words on purpose. As Read (2004) puts it, the distinction of the two lies on a concentrated attention and pedagogic context, distinguishing incidental from intentional acquired vocabulary as a by-product rather than main goal of the learners' primary learning activity. With an

approximate emphasis to that distinction, Schmitt (2008) suggests the involvement of specific goal as necessary element in differentiating the two approaches. The intentional approach entails a specific goal which usually involves an explicit focus for learning vocabulary.

While the distinction has been helpful for researchers to understand how vocabulary is acquired, the implication in pedagogic context seems to be enormous. Teachers and learners cannot exclusively employ each of these two processes separately. They may easily opt to favour one over the other but may not necessarily take one only and leave the other. As research has discovered that the approaches are not only complementary, but positively require each other for vocabulary acquisition. In line with this, they should intelligibly manage to incorporate the approaches in a way that positively benefits the learners the most. The two ways can be usefully incorporated into the learning situation as they can positively supplement and strengthen each other in order to work best serving successful vocabulary learning. This paper is going to discuss how that above claim is justifiable.

Method

The article starts with brief overviews of research conducted in the areas of the two approaches and develops discussion over how each approach benefits vocabulary learning. Then elaboration on the importance of combining the two follows on. It then concludes with suggestion that the two approaches should be usefully integrated and suggestion for teaching practice is outlined briefly.

Result and Discussion

Research on intentional vocabulary learning

Research on intentional vocabulary learning has been focusing on how explicit instruction aids learners. Such research includes deliberate decontextualized (e.g. Elgort, 2011) as well as contextualized (e.g. Peters *et al.*, 2009) teaching of vocabulary. Decontextualized refers to isolated vocabulary teaching which takes vocabulary out of context. It does not involve any other activities apart from learning words through, for instance, cards or word lists. As opposed to it, contextualized teaching aims to teach or learn vocabulary while trying to accomplish other primary goals such as understanding reading texts or comprehending talks. In such lessons, vocabulary can be deliberately included in the teaching prior to, during, or after the lesson activities. Learners are made aware that they are required to acquire certain words in concurrence with learning of the language skills.

Even though this kind of teaching-learning approach is believed to work effectively (Schmitt, 2008), question lingers on the number of vocabulary teachers can explicitly teach and students can intentionally learn in the classrooms. Given the limited time allotted to learn a second/foreign language in schools and the students' capacity to learn within that time, teaching and learning vocabulary with

intentional approach only may not sufficiently help the students to acquire the minimally required number of vocabulary in order to be able to use the language communicatively.

Research on incidental vocabulary learning

The research on this approach is dominantly carried out in reading lessons with a main purpose of comprehending the text and eluding to direct the learners' attention to learning the vocabulary. The reading lessons encompass naturalistic (e.g. Waring and Takaki, 2003) and modified input (e.g. Gettys *et al.*, 2001; Akbulut, 2007) provision. In the naturalistic experiment, the researchers provide the target words in the text without applying any purposeful treatment whatsoever to them. While in the experiment of modified input provision, the researchers apply some modification to the target words to make them more salient by, for example, glossing the words in the text.

Investigation on this matter is not much conducted with skills other than reading. To the best of my knowledge, none has been carried out in speaking lessons but several studies have dealt with vocabulary learning through writing (e.g. Hulstijn and Laufer, 2001) or listening (e.g. Mason and Krashen, 2004) or combination of both reading and listening (e.g. Brown *et al.*, 2008). Unlike with other skills through which vocabulary is learnt receptively, through writing learners are required to put incidentally acquired words productively into practice.

Single approaches

Learners are to acquire a certain amount of vocabulary in order to be able to engage functionally in day-to-day communication. For spoken communication, it is commonly believed that with 2000 word families learners can deal sufficiently with this kind of daily conversation (e.g. Schmitt, 2000). In a recent analysis of modern spoken corpus, however, Adolphs and Schmitt (2003) discovered that the amount merely covers less than 95 per cent of daily talk. They then suggested that the amount of vocabulary should be more than that, i.e. around 3000 words. Therefore, for the purpose of becoming capable to communicate sufficiently, it is of highly importance that learners acquire that specified minimum number of words. If it is truly the case that learners need more than 2000 or around 3000 word families to meet the demand of daily conversation, appropriate approaches are thus needed to effectively and efficiently achieve that amount within the available limited time span of schooling system.

In a second/foreign language learning context where learners are constrained from sufficient exposure to the use of the target language outside their classrooms and given the limited time they can learn the language in the classrooms, efficient method for the vocabulary learning is of utmost necessity. In the limited time, the students are supposed to be able to gain the necessary number of vocabulary. For the sake of time efficiency and speed acquisition, intentional learning suits this purpose more than incidental learning. As Elgort (2011) found, deliberate learning is especially appropriate for speed acquisition of a particular number of target words. This intentional learning allows learners to concentrate

exclusively on the most needed words and to learn larger number of words with full effort and speed. These are the advantages that teachers and learners cannot benefit from incidental approach.

Incidental approach works with a different mechanism. According to the mechanism, learners are not supposed to exclusively attend particular necessary words and are solely expected to rely on unpremeditated gain through unplanned encounter (Read, 2004). If learners are not required to come across the target words by design as this method suggests, acquisition of those words can take a very long time. Hill and Laufer (2003) approximated that to acquire 2000 words language incidentally learners are supposed to read more than 8 million words of passages or around 420 novels. This obviously sends a disheartening message to language learners in that they would have to spend all their life before being able to engage a basic communication. It is therefore necessary not to be reliant on this method and turn to explicit approach instead for the purpose of acquiring the basic number of vocabulary with a faster process.

Mason and Krashen (2004) confirmed the notion that explicit/intentional vocabulary study helps learners gain larger number of words than the implicit one. They found that learners who received story-only lesson gained much less vocabulary than those who received story-plus-study lesson. Even if they concluded that calculation of words learned per minute showed the story-only group learned the words more efficiently than the story-plus-study group, their research procedure was somewhat questionable. Both groups in their experiments were equally shown the target words prior to the listening lessons. The same treatment made the vocabulary learning in the story-only lesson to be fairly more intentional rather than naturalistic or incidental since it could have made the learners aware that they are expected to learn the words. Had the story-only group not seen the target words and been solely expected to do listening comprehension, the result of their study might have been different. It might have presented finding that intentional learning generated more efficiency with a larger vocabulary gain. Thus, intentional learning overpowers incidental learning in term of time efficiency and the number of vocabulary gain.

In addition to speedier pace for acquiring larger number of focused words, the intentional approach is also more suitable than incidental to beginner learners. Basic amount of vocabulary garnered through intentional approach can later provide strong assistance for them to learn vocabulary incidentally. On the contrary, it is almost unlikely that beginner learners procure new words incidentally when they have none or little storage of vocabulary. In a study with a reading comprehension lesson, Swanborn and De Glopper (2002) found that low-ability learners hardly learned any new words while those of higher ability managed to learn 27 per cent of unknown words from the text they were assigned to. This means that learners with greater pool of vocabulary have much more possibility to learn new words incidentally than those with less vocabulary collection. It is because in order to be able to infer meaning from a text – an incidental way, a learner needs to know majority of the words in the text. Nation (2001) argued that

learners should know at least 19 of every 20 words (95%). With that minimum number of vocabulary required to possibly infer new words from a context, beginner learners are unlikely to acquire new words. Hence, incidental learning cannot be effectively employed to beginner learners before they are in a possession of a certain amount of vocabulary. It is intentional approach, therefore, that can play the significant role to bridge the gap by supplying prerequisite words. Simply put, intentional learning serves faster route with a bigger gain of vocabulary which later makes incidental learning possible to take place.

Nevertheless, the nature of L2/FL learning which provides the learners with only limited time in the classrooms creates hands-on problems for teachers and learners if they expect to exclusively apply intentional approach. There is in fact far higher amount of vocabulary they should encounter and is available to be acquired than that they can teach or learn through the explicit approach. In this case, incidental learning can take over the role and offer beneficial effect for further vocabulary acquisition when the learners are actually supposed to focusing on learning something else. They can obtain a certain number of words as by-product (Read, 2004) of other primary goals when doing such other activities as reading text or listening to stories. They do not need to fully pay an explicit attention to and specifically aim at vocabulary learning, yet they subconsciously can take up some of them. This way, Hulstijn (2008) suggested, language learners acquire a bigger amount of vocabulary than by explicit intentional teaching in the classrooms. It is because vocabulary acquisition can continue to take place regardless of time and goals of particular language lessons and could even go on to occur beyond classrooms for huge amount of vocabulary available.

In spite of the suggestion that incidental learning is helpful for further enrichment of learners' vocabulary, incorporating this approach into classroom can be challenging for both teachers and learners in that acquisition of this kind has been found to have not profitably derived equally from among all four language skills. The way how learners incidentally acquire much vocabulary, particularly in L2/FL environment, often occurs more through written text (Grabe, 2004). Any language learning obviously does not only deal with reading lessons but also covers other skills so that allotted time and effort must be shared among them. Nevertheless, only has much less finding about the approach been revealed through the other skills; reading plus writing (e.g. Hulstijn and Laufer, 2001), listening (e.g. Vidal, 2003; Mason and Krashen, 2004) or combination of both reading and listening (e.g. Brown *et al.*, 2008). In the studies, it has been discovered that incidental learning purely through the skills apparently does not offer very substantial benefit for learners. Vidal (2003), for instance, found that learners simply acquire small amount of vocabulary from listening to academic lectures and can even only maintain half of them after 4-8 week time. Worse still, it is found that none of lexical items' meaning can be stored in mind after 3 months (Brown *et al.*, 2008). Teachers then can only expect learners to learn words more effectively

through reading and not incline to hope for more fruitful incidental vocabulary teaching through the other three skills.

To make the most of those skills, learners can only get considerable advantage when learning activities are combined with focused vocabulary exercises or other skills. They obtain much more vocabulary merely when reading is joined with focused vocabulary exercise or writing (Hulstijn and Laufer, 2001), listening with focused exercise (Mason and Krashen, 2004), or reading with listening (Brown *et al.*, 2008). Even so, the nature of combined methods employed in this type of research is inherently problematic for so-called incidental learning. In Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) study, for example, learners were directed to practice and use the words they encountered in reading texts into writing exercise. Although they were not explicitly taught the words before writing, the fact that they were clearly focused on using them for sentence completion or composition after reading task turned the learning process into more intentional rather than maintained in incidental mode. Hence, were teachers supposed to adopt entirely incidental approach to successfully learn vocabulary, they then could only adopt it through reading or less effectively through listening lessons.

Integrated approaches

While research finding suggests that most vocabulary is procured through reading, only adopting this skill to help learners with incidental vocabulary learning might not yield efficacious outcome. With this mode, reservation emerges as to how long the learned vocabulary can be retained in the learners mind. For example, in their research, Waring and Takaki (2003) found that relying upon a mere incidental learning through reading leads to very small amount of vocabulary acquisition as well as very short term retention and leaves most of the words unlearned. As such, it can turn out to be risky for learners to depend upon reading since they will find it difficult to collect a large number of words and can solely keep a small number in their mind for long time.

That particular problem might chiefly stem from the learners' limited contact with the target words in the texts because words are more likely to be learned after some encounters. Words which appeared more frequently were more likely to be acquired (Waring and Takaki, 2003; Kweon and Kim, 2008). Also, words with more frequency are more resistant to decay, but words encountered less than 8 times were totally lost after 3 months (Waring and Takaki, 2003). Thus, for the sake of maintaining the words in mind, it is particularly important that learners meet particular words for a certain times in the reading text.

Even though it is claimed that learners bump into words for many times in order to more effectively retain the target words, in practice the result does not show immense significance. Waring and Takaki (2003) found that when learners ran into words for more than eight times, they could only preserve 1 out of 25 new words in the reading texts. If this is the case, sole reading lesson apparently does

not provide large advantages for vocabulary gain. In line with this, Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) argue that mere reading activity is not sufficient for vocabulary learning. They believed that there are three other factors influencing the durability of the learned vocabulary; need, search, and evaluation. These three factors refer to condition whether the learners feel the need to learn the words, whether they would want to search for information about the words, and whether they employ the knowledge about the words into use. Learners who are induced to all of the factors were evidenced to have remembered words better than those prompted with fewer factors (Hulstijn and Laufer, 2001).

Upon condition for possession of all three factors as requirements for long retention, it can be strongly assumed that the once called incidental condition has turned to be somewhat intentional. Having to include the three factors as prerequisite for successful acquisition means that learners are intentionally driven to unequivocally attend the target words rather than being led to pick them up as by-product. It does not solely contain learning a word at a glance but also implicate the learners' explicit focus and concentrated attention. These features of focus and attention characterize intentional learning approach (Read, 2004; Schmitt, 2008). Learning for meaning, in this case by using reading lesson, but incorporating the three factors into the tasks for the purpose of increasing their vocabulary knowledge clearly comprise a combined both incidental and intentional approaches. Learners are not told and made aware to learn certain words, yet they are directed to attend and, to some extent, use them in their tasks in order to maximally remember the words.

That circumstance also applies to a certain degree to many research treatments of incidental learning through reading comprehension lesson. This is especially true with most research in computer assisted language learning situation where targeted words are given special enhancement. For example, researchers glossed or annotated the target words and investigated if those enhancement techniques help learners acquire vocabulary more successfully (e.g. Rott *et al.*, 2002; Akbulut, 2007). Annotation of this kind makes the target words appear more salient to the learners and if clicked, the glossed words would present pop-up definition, pictures, or video from which the learners can figure out the meaning of the highlighted words. The problem with this treatment is that it will consciously attract the learners' attention and raise their awareness which might eventually push them to consider the words as very important. As a result, they will consciously attend the words and would to a certain degree want to learn the words purposefully. If it did happen so, the learning process would not genuinely represent incidental approach anymore and would instead turn to be semi-intentional learning on the part of the students.

The potential for incidental learning to provide a convenient way of enriching vocabulary with a larger gain beyond classroom limitation does not necessarily gives assurance that it deserves better position in the language teaching after the learners acquired the basic amount. Despite beneficial function it gives for promoting acquisition of very large number of words inside and outside the classrooms, the

snag of having a lot of vocabulary through this method is that the vocabulary gained is of receptive one. Barcroft (2007) who compared experiments of two groups of learners to identify if retrieval makes difference for productive impact found that those who were given opportunities to retrieve the words they had been exposed to demonstrated higher productive vocabulary learning than those who were just given exposure of the words. This finding puts forward that students who acquire incidental vocabulary only are of less capable to produce the gained words into practice.

This shows that pure incidental exposure does not prove sufficient for learners to put the words into productive usage. Learners need to have chance to tweak the receptively acquired words into productive ones by intentional activities targeted specifically at studying or utilising the words. Those who obtain reading comprehension lessons plus focused vocabulary exercises significantly outperformed those with reading lessons only, even though the later groups took repeated lessons with other thematically related texts (Min, 2008). Moreover, the words gained from learning activities plus focused vocabulary tasks are also found to have longer life span in the learners mind (Laufer, 2003). With additional activities of vocabulary exercise on top of main learning activities, learners take advantage of securing more knowledge and more ability to productively use the acquired knowledge.

After incidental learning condition, explicit instruction by teachers can lend helpful support for learners to push for productive usage as well. The teaching can more significantly increase productive use of the newly learnt vocabulary in composition compared with direct writing practice after reading exercises only, although the newly learnt and productive vocabulary suffers relatively substantial loss after sometime (Lee, 2003). The reduction of the number of retained words in this situation might stem from the absence of focused vocabulary exercises before writing practice. In the research, to find out the impact of the instruction on productive use, Lee's study only compared two conditions; one experiment received only reading comprehension treatment and the other received reading comprehension plus explicit instruction without any focus on vocabulary exercises. The absence of vocabulary focused exercise may likely have brought about significant loss in retention for the newly learnt words. This denotes that reading plus explicit instruction only is not sufficient to preserve significant number of words in mind over long period of time and it is therefore essential to combine the two techniques with focused vocabulary exercise on consideration that when combined, several effective techniques will better develop both productive use and retention. Lee and Muncie (2006) found that when learners are subjected to multimode exposure to vocabulary and activities, they make a higher increase use of the target vocabulary and maintain improved learning durability than when they are exposed to the lexical items only.

Conclusion and suggestion

Conclusion

This paper clearly does not deal with all issues related to both routes of vocabulary acquisition, yet it presents essential, though partial, arguments supporting the notion that there should be no dichotomy over the approaches. None of the approaches better suits successful vocabulary acquisition on its own for entire process. Either approach excels over the other in a particular circumstance in that they work effectively and efficiently for different purposes. One way can serve superb method in a particular circumstance when the other cannot, but fails to provide decent help for optimal vocabulary learning in other condition when the other can. For this reason, each can fill in the gap and substitute the role which the other misses to do, and vice versa. In other words, they require and supplement each other in order to be able to serve an optimal achievement of vocabulary acquisition. So, in a pedagogic context they should not be singly used, but instead should be teamed up to accomplish the expected outcome. Teachers and learners can take advantage of the two paths as they offer different benefits as well as drawbacks.

Suggestion

1. For beginner learners, teachers need to intensively teach the most needed vocabulary, i.e. the basic 3000 word families, through intentional teaching-learning activity in their classroom. Teachers should incorporate the non-basic word families into their teaching materials and expose their students sufficiently with the vocabulary through incidental condition for the sake of enriching the learners' vocabulary possession. It is essential to make sure that the non-basic vocabulary to reappear in the materials several times over a certain period of time that the vocabulary can be well retained in the learners' mind.
2. It is useful to assign the students to do some reading at home in order to make vocabulary learning continue to occur outside the classroom. As such, the learners would pick up some vocabulary incidentally. Yet, it is important to get the students want to know about unfamiliar words available in the text, search for information about them, and evaluate their understanding of the words. That way, the reading activity would somewhat involve intentional vocabulary learning on the part of the students.
3. It is helpful to include some focus vocabulary exercises along with reading activities that the students can better retain the incidentally acquired vocabulary.
4. It is recommended that teachers use the non-basic vocabulary in productive activities. By having productive activities, the students will not only keep the incidentally acquired words receptively, but they can also use them productively.

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