

Project: An Investigation of Strategies and Methods in Learning Chinese Vocabulary by Non-Chinese Speaking Students in Hong Kong

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Abstract:

This project aimed to investigate the use of strategies in incidental learning of Chinese vocabularies by Hong Kong Non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students. It helps capture a comprehensive picture of lexical processing strategies used by second language (L2) learners and their effectiveness in vocabulary learning. The investigation intended to provide empirical evidence to the design of pedagogical plans and training methods targeting NCS students. We conducted intervention studies and questionnaire surveys to identify strategies that NCS students used in reading tasks, and to evaluate their use of Chinese dictionaries. We found that in reading, students inferred meanings of unfamiliar words using a combination of linguistics cues and methods. Low frequency of dictionary use was also recorded. Results revealed a minimal role of dictionary use in acquiring new vocabulary by the NCS students, who were mainly beginners or intermediate learners. A follow-up delayed experiment revealed rather low rates of word retention, which suggested that most of our NCS students may have skipped recognizing unfamiliar words or used minimal efforts in such process. We propose that strategy training should be provided to NCS students, especially those at advanced beginning and intermediate levels. The training could focus on developing awareness of strategy use and on fostering incidental vocabulary learning in extensive reading. Supportive measures for Chinese dictionary use, including pedagogical instructions and development of Chinese dictionaries designated for L2 learners, are urgently called for.

Keywords:

Chinese as a second language; lexical processing strategies; Non-Chinese-speaking students; reading and writing; use of dictionaries; vocabulary learning