Bilingual Dictionary Use and ESP Students' Vocabulary Enhancement: A Case Study of Iranian EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the contribution that using bilingual dictionaries might lead to different performance considering the recall and retention of vocabulary among ESP Students. For this purpose, eighty Iranian Chemistry and Physics learners studying at Islamic Azad University of Arak were asked to take part in an experiment. From this population, sixty intermediate students were selected on the basis of their TOEFL scores. They were all female and their age range was between 20-22 years old. Finally, the null hypothesis was accepted.

KEY WORDS: bilingual, ESP, EFL, vocabulary enhancement.

INTRODUCTION

Holley [3] and Carter and McCarthy [2] observe the role of vocabulary learning in foreign language education. While there exists a wide variety of ways to deal with vocabulary, the use of dictionary as the conventional method of instruction, in both first and second language learning, has been triggered. Laufer [4], believes that when word looks familiar but the sentence in which it is found or its wider context makes no sense at all, the learner should be encouraged to consult a dictionary. Consulting a dictionary during an independent reading helps readers to find the meaning of the difficult vocabulary, ascertain the meaning of the unfamiliar word based on contextual information. Luppescu and Day[5] conducted a study, which focused on the contribution to vocabulary learning of the use of bilingual dictionaries during reading by 293 Japanese university students studying EFL. The results of the study showed that the students who used a dictionary scored significantly higher on vocabulary tests than those who did not. In Yorio's [6] and Bensoussan et al's[1] study, when the students were put in a free choice of using bilingual or monolingual dictionaries, more than half of them showed a distinct preference for bilingual dictionaries.

The present research attempts to indicate the usefulness of the dictionaries by comparing two Groups of Students majoring in Chemistry and Physics, which may have an effect on vocabulary recall and retention of intermediate language proficiency level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A total number of 80 Iranian B.A. students majoring in Chemistry and Physics at Islamic Azad University of Arak participated in this study. All the students were adults, females, and differed in terms of age. On the basis of their scores on TOEFL, sixty subjects whose scores ranged between half a unit of standard deviation above and below the mean were selected to account for the homogeneity of the population at intermediate proficiency level. Then they were divided into two groups (each 30) of Chemistry and Physics.

In the first phase, the subjects took the TOEFL. The rationale behind this phase was twofold. It was decided to choose a homogeneous group of subjects to begin with. Moreover, due to the purpose of this study only the intermediate proficiency level subjects were selected.

The reason for including a second phase, i.e. the vocabulary test given to subjects two weeks prior to reading, was to validate the target words in the text, which were indeed unknown. Then 60 subjects were put into two groups: Chemistry and physics. Later, a 30 item teacher –made test of vocabulary based on their textbook (pre-requisite English) was made. Its reliability and validity was checked in a pilot group. It was used as a pre-test and post-test. In the treatment period, there was a focus on vocabulary learning using a bilingual dictionary in both groups. They were not told in advance that there would be any kind of test.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To compare the differences between the two sample groups' means a t-test was conducted. The t-value for the effect of bilingual dictionaries was not significant, because the t-observed value was less than the t-critical one. They were 1.26 (P<.05, t-critical = 1.96).

Narenji 1998 stated that “Overall, using a dictionary apparently has a significant effect on people's performance on the vocabulary test”. Although there was a slight difference between both groups' performances in three vocabulary tests, i.e. immediate recall, delayed recall and retention, it was not significant.

CONCLUSION

Concerning the research question, the major finding of the study indicates that there is no significant difference between the ESP students (students of Chemistry and Physics). The present study provides guidance for teachers in the hope that they will make useful contributions to the issue of vocabulary learning in foreign language situation, Iran. In the course of this study many questions have risen some of which are included here with the hope that they will be pursued and investigated.

To begin with, similar studies can be done on other proficiency levels, namely elementary and advanced. This study can be done with a special focus on the difference between different dictionary types (monolingual and bilingual). The same study can be replicated with another ESP students.

REFERENCES


