

The Study of Successful Vocabulary Inferencing Rate at Full Vocabulary Coverage

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Abstract

Suitable vocabulary coverage ensures basic reading comprehension but for L2 learners having a good size of vocabulary is not a readily obtainable goal. To cope with the difficulty, language instructors have promoted the importance of inferring the meanings of unknown words from context while reading and recommended specific teaching of inferencing strategies. While Schmitt and his colleagues (2011) required 98% vocabulary coverage for comprehending academic texts, Laufer's often cited study (1989) suggested that learners need to know 95% of the running words for reasonable comprehension of a text. Different vocabulary coverage ratios have been empirically supported by two types of studies, one being finding the relationships between vocabulary sizes and reading comprehension and the other being assessing accurate guessing rate of unknown words, and these studies were mostly tertiary in nature. The researchers of the current study designed a vocabulary inferencing test consisting of 78 questions and 99% of the lexical items used in the test were drawn from the K1 high frequency word list. Then, 1111 high schools students were recruited. Before they took the vocabulary inferencing test, they were screened by two Vocabulary Levels Tests (K1 and K2) to ensure their vocabulary ability to be sufficient. The participants were asked to use the context clue in the question to guess the meaning of an unknown word, presented in nonsense word form. The reliability of the instrument reached .93. The results showed that equal vocabulary coverage yielded different correct inferencing rates among the first-year, second-year, and third-year high school students. Factors other than vocabulary ability may have affected the performance of the students.