

Individual Paper Session 26
Lexicon/Vocabulary
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Task of learning content vs. language from L2 text

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Task of learning from text is important for knowledge acquisition and language learning. Yet little is understood about the cognitive mechanism involved in the learning process. The present study investigates the effect of task (encoding and retrieval/output) on learning content vs. language from L2 text, and how it may interact with language competence and topic interest. EFL students (N=150) who major in nursing and nonnursing read stories about a patient and later wrote a recall protocol.

Data were also obtained from natives and proficient ESL students (N=100). Group 1 (the L1-only condition) were informed of a later L1 recall (and thereby encouraged to pay attention to content during encoding) and later produced L1 recall. Group 2 (the L1-L2 condition) were informed of L1 recall but later produced L2 recall (and thereby forced to produce L2 forms during retrieval). Group 3 (the L2-only condition) were informed of L2 recall (and thereby encouraged to pay attention to L2 forms during encoding) and later produced L2 recall. Each passage contained fifteen unfamiliar nursing-related target words, on which acquisition was measured with four tests (L2-form production in isolation, L2-form production in context, L2-form recognition, L2-to-L1 translation). Language proficiency and vocabulary knowledge were measured with TOEFL and the Nation's test, respectively. Statistical analyses were conducted to examine how language competence (general proficiency and vocabulary) and topic interest affect the learning of content (i.e., recall) and vocabulary under different task conditions.

Data analyzed so far indicate: 1) language competence, topic interest, and task all affect recall and vocabulary acquisition; 2) language(s) involved in encoding and retrieval/output affect the quantity and quality of recall and vocabulary acquisition; and 3) the relationship between recall and vocabulary acquisition (or the problem of learning content vs. language) differs as a function of topic interest, language competence, and task.