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研究之三附件: 论任务对无意词汇习得的影响:
检验投入量假设

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**Effects of Task on Incidental Vocabulary Learning
By Adult Chinese Learners of English
—Testing the Involvement Load Hypothesis**

Dissertation

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The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diptoma in any institutions of higher learning and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Abstract

This study investigates, within the framework of the Involvement Load Hypothesis, how task features affect the effects of language learning tasks on incidental learning of English vocabulary by adult Chinese EFL learners. It tests the Involvement Load Hypothesis with a view to find in what respects and to what degrees the Hypothesis predicts the effectiveness of task on incidental vocabulary learning, to find the ways to modify and improve the Hypothesis, and to broaden and deepen knowledge about task, an important unit of analysis in both second language pedagogy and research, and vocabulary learning, a central issue in language learning..

Six language-learning tasks, which were different in amount and distribution of the involvement load, were designed to investigate the effects of a) the involvement load as a whole and b) the individual components of the involvement load. One hundred and forty-seven first-year students from Nanchang University, who were divided into 6 task groups equivalent in English proficiency, performed these tasks. The experiment was conducted in a period of 3 weeks. A pretest, an immediate posttest, and two delayed posttests (arranged one week after the treatment, one in decontextualized situation, and the other in contextualized situation) were administered. The results were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The results showed that tasks with higher involvement load did not necessarily lead to better retention. The effects of task on learning are constrained by the limited capacity of human processing. The study also found that the three components of the involvement load, need, search, and evaluation were not the same in effect on improving retention. More components were suggested to be added to the construct of involvement load.

The above findings suggest that, as a first attempt to bring the two strands of task research and vocabulary learning together and build a framework for the relation in between the two factors, the Involvement Load Hypothesis still calls for a lot of amendment, and that the Hypothesis has value in theoretical perspectives, but is subject to a lot of constraints in implementation.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research orientation

This study investigates, within the framework of the Involvement Load Hypothesis, how task features affect the effects of language learning tasks on incidental learning of English vocabulary by adult Chinese learners. It tests the Involvement Load Hypothesis with a view to find in what respects and to what degrees the Hypothesis predicts the effectiveness of task on incidental vocabulary learning, to find the ways to modify and improve the Hypothesis, and to broaden and deepen knowledge about task, an important unit of analysis in both second language pedagogy and research, and vocabulary learning, a central issue in language learning.

1.2 Defining task and incidental vocabulary learning

Task Task has been defined both as a unit in the communicative classroom pedagogy and in second language acquisition research. In the former case, the communicative function of task is stressed, as in Long (1985, quoted in Long & Crookes, 1993), who restricted the term *task* to describing a section of classroom practice which involves second language learners in carrying out language-based interactions which relate to something they might have to do, using the second language, in the world outside the classroom. Nunan's (1989: 10) definition of task is "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form".

Other researchers are more tolerant, like Breen (1984, cited in Crookes & Gass, 1993b: 4), who considered anything done in the classroom a 'task' and Crookes, who defines task as "a piece of work or an activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course or at work (1986, quoted in Long & Crookes, 1993). In the latter case, "task" should be an activity, carried out by the learner, be it meaning-focused or form-focused.

Following Laufer & Hulstijn (*ibid*), task is defined in the present study as "an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or

understanding language (i.e. as a response)” (Richards *et al.*, 1985, cited in Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001: 16). By removing task from the narrow communicative definition, we hope task can be studied more completely and foreign language classroom behaviors and procedures can be described in a truer picture.

Incidental vocabulary learning Incidental vocabulary learning is defined as learning of vocabulary as a “by-product” (Hulstijn, 2001: 271) of doing something else, the gaining of vocabulary knowledge when the learner is engaged in a listening, reading, speaking, writing, or communicating activity. It refers to the “learning without an intent to learn, or as the learning of vocabulary when the learner’s primary objective is to do something else, e.g. to communicate” (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001: 10).

1.3 Rationale for the present study

The last several decades have witnessed a transition in second language pedagogy from grammar-based or function-based syllabus to task-based approach. There have been a number of theoretical arguments put forward in favor of task-based approaches to second language pedagogy (Crookes & Gass, 1993a, 1993b; Long & Crookes, 1992; Nunan, 1989; Robinson, 2001; Skehan, 1998). Task-based approach is said to be more sensitive to the process of second language acquisition (Skehan, 1998). Tasks provide the necessary comprehensible input for second language learners as well as feedbacks about the inter-language in negotiation tasks. More importantly, task features can be manipulated to tap specific language forms (Robinson *et al.*, 1995). A focus on a particular form may be associated with the nature of a particular task which, as a result, makes targeted noticing more likely to occur (Schmidt, 1990).

Although since the 1980s the issue of task and language learning has been empirically investigated (see, for example, the two collections of papers co-edited by Crookes and Gass in 1993), so far it was the interpretation or explanation of the collected data that posed the greatest difficulties for the researchers, largely due to the complicated relationships that exist among the task type, task requirement, and language skills (which, in turn, involves a

particular mode of cognitive processes). Previous research on task focuses mainly on grammar and communicative competence, little research has been done on effects of task features on vocabulary learning (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993). Nor is there any attempt to build a model or framework to explain these effects (Meara, 1997).

Thus, the major problem facing researchers when looking into the effects of task on vocabulary learning is to establish a model that explicitly delineates the possible relationships among the key constructs involved in task on one hand and foreign language learning on the other. Only then is it possible to adequately explain the observed learning behaviors of the learner.

The Involvement Load Hypothesis proposed by Laufer & Hulstijn (2001) brings together these two strands of vocabulary learning and the use of tasks in language teaching and has provided an integrated framework for investigating the effects of task features on incidental vocabulary learning. It has proposed some concrete, operationalizable constructs for the explanation of the relationship between task and vocabulary learning. Yet so far few empirical studies have been conducted to test it; it still calls for further appraisal and attestation.

Therefore, it is in this sense that we view the present study as meaningful and indispensable. We set about to test the Involvement Load Hypothesis, to find whether and to what degree its assumptions are right, and in what ways it can be modified and improved as this is a very young and rough theory (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001). We hope in this way we can better our knowledge about vocabulary learning by Chinese learners of English.

We also hope that our work will benefit English teachers and English textbook writers in providing them guidance for selecting tasks for classroom use, and in organizing and sequencing tasks.

1.3 Key research questions

According to the Involvement Load Hypothesis, retention of words when processed incidentally, is conditional upon three factors in a task: *need*, *search*, and *evaluation*, which together constitute the “involvement load” of a task;

words which are processed with higher involvement load will be retained better than words which are processed with lower involvement load.

Thus, to solve these problems entails providing answers to the following key research questions:

- i. On the basis of Laufer and Hulstijn's hypothesis, exactly what predictions can be made about the effects of task types on the learning of L2 vocabulary by adult Chinese learners?
- ii. What are learning results of the adult Chinese EFL learners when performing each specific type of learning task? To what extent are the predictions supported by the empirical data?
- iii. To what extent can the observed learning behaviors be accounted for within Laufer and Hulstijn's theoretical model?

1.4 Overview of the thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters. They are: 1) Introduction, 2) Review of Related Literature, 3) The Study, 4) Results and Discussion, and 5) Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations for Further Research.

Chapter 2 gives a review of the related literature. Theoretical and empirical studies on task and incidental vocabulary learning are reported. A detailed introduction of the framework of the present study, the Involvement Load Hypothesis, is also presented here.

Chapter 3 presents the design of the study. First, the hypotheses are presented. Then, the design of the study is portrayed, which includes the design, the participants, the procedure, and the instrumentation. Finally, the scoring method and methods for analysis of the data are depicted.

Chapter 4 first reports the major findings of the study from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives in relations to the research hypotheses, then these results are discussed in the light of the Involvement Load Hypothesis and other related theories.

Lastly, Chapter 5 is devoted to the conclusions drawn from the present study. Furthermore, implications and limitations of the present study and suggestions for further research are discussed.

Chapter 2 Review of Related Literature

2.1 Overview

In this chapter the related theories and empirical studies were reviewed. Section 2.2 is devoted to task research. We reviewed the task-based approach, studies on task characteristics, and effects of tasks on L2 vocabulary learning. These studies are pertinent to our study because the purpose of our study is to look into the effects of task type on L2 vocabulary learning. In Section 2.3, some latest studies on incidental vocabulary learning, particularly those reflecting the new trends of studying incidental vocabulary learning in output tasks, negotiation, and dictionary use, were reported. In Section 2.4, we briefly touched upon the cognitive processes involved in language learning, which would provide the theoretical basis for the design of learning tasks, and also for explaining the observed vocabulary learning behaviors of L2 learners. Then in Section 2.5, we gave a detailed introduction of the Involvement Load Hypothesis, proposed by Laufer & Hulstijn in 2001, which would serve as the research framework of the present study. Finally in Section 2.6, results and findings from current related research were summarized and strengths and weaknesses of these studies were commented upon.

2.2 Tasks and Second Language Learning

2.2.1 Task-based language teaching

In recent years a number of theoretical arguments have been put forward in favor of task-based approaches to second language pedagogy (Robinson, Ting, & Urwin, 1995). In one sense task-based teaching appears to be a natural consequence of the communicative approach (Widdowson, 1978), since it focuses on providing learners with contexts for meaningful activities and practice in the procedural use of language, rather than on developing the learners' declarative knowledge of the component parts of a language in isolation from use - its rules of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary

meanings, etc. In another sense task-based teaching is also the outcome of research into second language acquisition processes, since it is now accepted, for example, that knowledge of a number of aspects of grammar are developmentally scheduled, and cannot be learned out of sequence (Ellis, 1989, 1994) thus raising problems for structure-based approaches to syllabus design, of either the linear or spiral type (Brumfit, 1984). Task-based teaching can provide comprehensible input, the necessity of which to second language learning has always been stressed by second language acquisition researchers. It also provides opportunities for a lot of negotiation for meaning, which provides feedback about the target language, and also can accommodate variation due to individual differences among learners (Skehan, 1998).

2.2.2 Research on task

Throughout the 1980s, language tasks evolved from a varied collection of instructional activities in second and foreign language classrooms to a foundation for instructional planning, i.e. task-based syllabuses. Along the way, researchers have found tasks to be useful tools for studying processes of second language acquisition (Berwick, 1993).

Tasks have long generated considerable interest among SLA researchers. Research on task mainly centers round building a framework of grading and sequencing tasks for task-based syllabus (Crookes & Gass, 1993a, 1993b; Nunan, 1989, 1993; Pica *et al.*, 1993; Robinson, 2001; Robinson *et al.*, 1995; Skehan, 1998). Studies in this direction have aimed to establish valid criteria for determining the difficulty/complexity level of tasks.

Robinson *et al.* (1995) proposed that task difficulty is influenced by three dimensions of task demands: cognitive load, planning time, and prior information. Skehan (1998) proposed a similar, but higher-ordered three-way distinction for the analysis of tasks, which was based on code complexity, cognitive complexity, and communicative pressure. Code complexity includes factors like linguistic complexity and variety, vocabulary load and variety, redundancy, etc. Cognitive complexity includes cognitive familiarity, which refers to familiarity of topic, discourse genre, and task, and cognitive