The Implications of Glossing on Vocabulary Learning among Sudanese EFL Learners

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Abstract: *This study aims to investigate the role of different gloss types in vocabulary learning among Sudanese EFL learners. Specifically, it examines the effectiveness of both L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English) glosses in vocabulary learning among Sudanese EFL learners. The participants in the study consisted of 80 first-year students randomly selected from Sudan University of Science and Technology. The participants were enrolled in a general English language course that spanned two semesters. All participants were native Arabic speakers. Data collection involved a three-section test. Section one presented a non-glossed text, section two included L1 (Arabic) glosses, and section three featured L2 (English) glosses. Participants' scores in each section were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation. The results revealed that both Arabic and English glosses significantly enhanced vocabulary learning compared to the condition with no glosses. Furthermore, no significant difference in vocabulary acquisition was found between the use of Arabic and English glosses.*

Keywords: vocabulary learning, glosses, Sudanese EFL Learners,

INTRODUCTION

Second language and foreign language readers often face difficulties with comprehension due to encountering numerous unfamiliar words. It has been noticed that most Sudanese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners are often frustrated by a large number of unfamiliar words in reading materials, especially when they have relatively poor vocabulary knowledge. They face significant difficulties when dealing with unfamiliar words without any aid or devices that help them explore the meaning. Dictionaries have been the traditional reference for finding meaning and can be conveniently used for word lookups for native speakers. However, for foreign language learners, their use of a dictionary can be time-consuming while reading. If the vocabulary item to be looked up is required for understanding purposes, interrupting the reading process can lead to the loss of the text's meaning or even loss of interest and motivation to continue reading. Glossed texts might be a useful alternative to resolve this problem.

This study aims to investigate the implications of different gloss types on vocabulary learning among Sudanese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. It examines the effectiveness of both L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English) glosses on vocabulary learning. Furthermore, it explores the broader implications of glossed texts for linguists, academics, and materials developers in the design of language learning courses. This study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What is the effect of using different gloss types on vocabulary learning among Sudanese EFL learners?

2. Is there a significant difference in vocabulary learning when using L1 and L2 glossing among Sudanese EFL learners?

Conceptual Background

Nation (2002:174-175) defined gloss as "a brief definition or synonym of unknown words provided in text in L1 or L2." Watanabe (1997) argued that glosses are considered as valuable tools that facilitate reading in a foreign language. Ko, (2005) and Nation (2002) explained that using the gloss is easier and minimizes the interruption of reading flow compared to using a dictionary that is time-consuming and interrupts the reading process. According to Schmitt (2000), guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words is challenging unless readers have a strong grasp of most words on the page. According to Ko (2012), second language learners, unlike native speakers, struggle with accurate guessing due to their limited vocabulary and overall language proficiency. Nation (1990) explained that glossing is a technique where unfamiliar words or ideas are defined or explained to readers while they are reading to understand the text. Lomicka (1998) stated that glosses, usually found in the margins of a text, are typically provided for unfamiliar words. This helps readers avoid constant dictionary use, which can disrupt their reading flow and comprehension of the second language text. Watanabe (1997) argued that glosses are helpful tools that make it easier to read in a foreign language. Nation (2002) suggested that glosses empower learners to read independently. According to Yanagisawa et al. (2020), reading texts with glosses is more effective for vocabulary learning than reading non-glossed texts.

Many studies have been conducted to test the effect of L1-glossed text, L2 -glossed text, and non-glossed text. For example, Schwartz & Jenkins (1985) explored the effects of different types of glosses (L1, L2, and contextual) on vocabulary learning. Their study suggested that L1 glosses were more effective for immediate comprehension, while L2 glosses might be more beneficial for long-term retention. This highlights the need to consider the specific learning goals when choosing the type of gloss. De la Fuente (2002) investigated the impact of L1 and L2 glosses on the learning of different aspects of vocabulary knowledge (form, meaning, and use). The study found that both types of glosses were effective, but L2 glosses were particularly helpful for learning the form and use of new words. This is important for Sudanese EFL learners who need to develop both receptive and productive vocabulary skills. Liddicoat & Crozet (2001) investigated the effects of L1 glosses on incidental vocabulary acquisition in French. Their findings indicated that L1 glosses facilitated comprehension and vocabulary learning, supporting the notion that providing meaning in the learner's native language can be beneficial, particularly for lower proficiency learners. This is relevant to the Sudanese context where Arabic is the L1. Miyasako's (2002) research compared the effectiveness of different gloss types in vocabulary learning. He tested six groups of Japanese high school students: L2 (English) multiple-choice glosses, L1 (Japanese) multiple-choice glosses, L2 (English) single glosses, L1 (Japanese) single glosses, no gloss, and a control group. The study concluded that L2 glosses were more effective than L1 glosses for immediate vocabulary retention. Hulst & Laufer (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on incidental vocabulary learning and concluded that glossing, especially when combined with other strategies, can be effective. This reinforces the idea that glossing should not be considered a standalone technique but integrated with other vocabulary learning activities. Krashen (1989), in his work on comprehensible input, argued that glossing can make input more comprehensible, leading to vocabulary acquisition. This aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of glossing as a tool for enhancing comprehension and facilitating vocabulary acquisition. Nassaji (2006) examined the role of learner proficiency in the effectiveness of glossing. The study indicated that glossing was particularly beneficial for lower-proficiency learners, as it provided them with the necessary support to comprehend the text and learn new vocabulary. This is highly relevant to the Sudanese EFL context where there is a wide range of proficiency levels. Knight (1994) explored the influence of learner strategies on vocabulary learning with glosses. The study showed that learners who actively engaged with the glosses and used strategies such as guessing from context and elaborating on the meanings of new words were more successful in acquiring vocabulary. This emphasizes the importance of training

Sudanese EFL learners in effective vocabulary learning strategies. Ko's (2012) study investigated the impact of different gloss types (L1, L2, and no gloss) on incidental vocabulary acquisition in a second language. The results showed that L1 and L2 glossed texts have a more positive impact on vocabulary learning than non-glossed texts. Jacobs et al (1994) conducted a study with 85 English-speaking Spanish learners to examine the effect of different gloss types on vocabulary learning. Participants read a 613-word Spanish text with 32 words or phrases highlighted and glossed in either English (L1) or Spanish (L2) or not glossed at all. Participants were then given two vocabulary tests, one immediately after reading and another four weeks later. Results showed that both L1 and L2 glosses facilitated vocabulary learning more than no glossed texts. The study also showed that no significant difference was found when using L1 and L2 glosses. Chen (2002) conducted a study with 85 Taiwanese college students learning English as a second language. He divided them into three groups: one received Chinese glosses for target words in an English text, another received English glosses, and the third received no glosses. The text was 193 words long with 20 target words. The results showed that students with English glosses performed better than those without glosses, while there was no significant difference between Chinese and English glosses.

METHODOLOGY

This study involved 80 first-year students randomly selected from the Sudan University of Science and Technology. These students were enrolled in a general English course spanning two semesters. All participants were native Arabic speakers. Data collection utilized a three-section test. Section one presented non-glossed text, section two included L1 (Arabic) glosses and section three featured L2 (English) glosses. Each section contained unique content. The test consisted of three primary components:15 multiple-choice questions assessing vocabulary knowledge, a fill-in-the-blank exercise with 15 words provided in a box, and 10 questions on vocabulary matching. The study aimed to compare participant scores across the three test sections to determine if significant differences existed in vocabulary learning when encountering non-glossed text, L1-glossed text, and L2-glossed text. Mean and standard deviation were calculated for each section's scores to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table (4.1) Participants' Score in the Test

Results / Types of gloss	Success		Failure		Total		Mean	Standard Deviation
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Non-gloss	25	31.3	55	68.7	80	100	2.7	1.81
L1 gloss	50	62.5	30	37.5	80	100	3.5	0.3
L2 gloss	46	57.5	34	42.5	80	100	3.4	0.3

What is the effect of using different gloss types on vocabulary learning among Sudanese EFL learners?

The study's findings in Table 4.1 indicate that glossing positively impacts vocabulary learning among Sudanese EFL learners. A significant difference was observed between glossed and non-glossed sections regarding word meaning acquisition. Specifically, 62.5% of participants successfully passed the L1 glossed text in section 2, while 57.5% passed the L2 glossed text in Section 3. In contrast, only 31.3% passed the non-glossed text section. These results suggest that learning vocabulary through glosses, either in the native language (L1) or the target language (L2), is more effective than relying solely on context clues to infer word meanings. It is clear that guessing from context can be misleading and risky, as the context may not always provide sufficient clues. Participants found glosses to be more helpful as they provide a clear and

contextually appropriate meaning. The improvement of the results for glossing in this study might be attributed to the effects of input modification. Glosses, by highlighting target vocabulary with boldfacing and providing definitions, likely draw learners' attention to these unfamiliar words. This attention-grabbing presentation may have encouraged participants to actively notice the meaning of these words during reading. Noticing, which involves conscious attention, is crucial for language learning as it facilitates the conversion of input into intake, making the text comprehensible.

Is there a significant difference in vocabulary learning when using L1 and L2 glossing among Sudanese EFL learners?

Table 4.1 demonstrates that both L1 and L2 glosses significantly enhance vocabulary learning compared to the no-gloss condition. While both glossing methods were effective, no statistically significant difference was found between L1 and L2 glosses. The minimal difference between the two conditions (L1 M = 3.5, SD = 0.3; L2 M = 3.4, SD = 0.3) suggests that the primary benefit of glossing stems from providing accessible definitions, regardless of the language used. This accessibility streamlines reading by minimizing disruptions and enabling learners to quickly grasp word meanings within the context. The improved performance with both glossing conditions may be attributed to the prevention of "unlearning," a phenomenon where learners resort to random guessing in the absence of support. While statistical significance between L1 and L2 glosses was not always observed, the L1 gloss condition generally resulted in slightly higher scores (L1 M = 3.5, L2 M = 3.4). This finding aligns with Liddicoat & Crozet (2001) assertion that learners can leverage their L1 knowledge to enhance L2 vocabulary acquisition.

CONCLUSION

Glossing has potential as a valuable tool for vocabulary development among Sudanese EFL learners. However, more research is needed to understand its specific implications within this context. By addressing the research gaps identified above, educators can make informed decisions about implementing glossing strategies to support vocabulary acquisition and enhance EFL learning outcomes for Sudanese students. Research should move beyond simply demonstrating the effectiveness of glossing to exploring *how* and *why* it works, and how it can be best implemented in the unique context of Sudanese EFL classrooms.

Future Research

For further research, attention should be directed towards investigating and exploring the entire syllabuses to determine if glosses are used or even understood by educators and tutors. Additionally, more concrete evidence is needed to support the effectiveness of teaching with glosses in both first and second languages.

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