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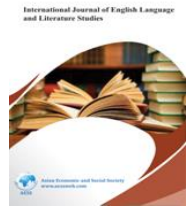

THE EFFECT OF TWO TASK TYPES ON LEARNING ENGLISH WORDS AND IDIOMS

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ABSTRACT

Learning new words or idioms in L2 is a complicated process involving a variety of sub-processes and tasks. This experimental study investigated the popular belief of many foreign language teachers that words learned with the use of two tasks- receptive and productive- are better retained receptively than words that are learned just receptively. Accordingly, the current study aimed to investigate the effects of two task types; namely, receptive and productive, on learning English words and idioms. For this purpose, 75 upper-intermediate EFL students were chosen and divided into three groups randomly. One group received a receptive task while in the second group productive tasks were implemented. The third group, however, learned the words with the combination of receptive and productive tasks. Immediate and delayed receptive and productive tests were given. The results revealed that although both tasks led to significant gains in the receptive tests, the productive task group significantly outperformed on the productive tests. However, the optimal learning happened in the third group where both task types were used. With regard to task types, findings are pedagogically helpful for not only EFL teachers, but also for EFL students.

Keywords: Task types, Learning words& idioms, Receptive task, Productive task, EFL learners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Receptive and productive vocabulary learning skill is related to your study of vocabulary. A few years ago, an experienced foreign language teacher told us that he always asked students to learn through both the receptive way and the productive way(i.e. from L2 to L1 and from L1to L2) even in those cases where the focus is on the extension of receptive vocabulary knowledge.

Interestingly, it is easy to develop your receptive vocabulary. You can study words independently, memorizing the definitions, the word forms, the collocations and different uses of the words in context. Your receptive vocabulary can grow and when you see a list of words to study in your class, you might recognize some of them already. That's great but do you use these words correctly when you speak or write? If you do, they have moved into your productive vocabulary. This is the goal of your vocabulary study in the language institute. You will see many new words in your reading texts or hear some in the listening exercises, but the words you study are the ones that you should try to use when you write or speak. Productive skills improve from stronger receptive skills. This semester, make the decision to do all you can outside of class and take advantage of your time inside of class, and you will improve both your receptive and your productive skills.

Definitions of terms

Receptive Vocabulary learning: Learning the meaning of an L2 word. Prototypically; learning a wordfrom L2 to L1.

Productive vocabulary learning: learning to express a concept by means of an L2 word. Prototypically; learning a word from L1 to L2.

Receptive vocabulary knowledge: knowing the meaning of an L2 word. Prototypically; beingable to translate a word from L2 to L1.

Productive vocabulary knowledge: being able to express a concept by means of an L2 words. Prototypically: being able to translate a word from L1 to L2.

Receptive vocabulary testing: testing a person's knowledge of the meaning of an L2 word. Prototypically: requiring a person to translate a word from L2 to L1.

Productive vocabulary testing: testing a person's ability to express a concept by means of a word. Prototypically: requiring a person to translate a word from L1 to L2.

Last but not least: the current study was concerned with the following research question:
Does learning words and idioms with a receptive and productive method result in better learning? Which outperforms the other?

2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

In spite of the fact that distinction between receptive and productive L2 vocabulary knowledge is beyond question (Melka, 1997), there are, to the best of our knowledge, only five experimental studies comparing receptive and productive L2 word learning including Griffin and Harley (1996),Waring (1997), and Scheneider *et al.* (2002). Schneider carried out three classroom experiments with Dutch speaking pupils learning French, German and English words, respectively. The experimental design in each of three cases consisted of two parts and each part made use of a different set of target words. For the first set of words, the sequence was; productive learning, receptive test and productive test. The main result was that receptive learning led to a substantial amount of productive knowledge, and productive learning led to a substantial amount of receptive

knowledge. In another study, American High school students were requiredto learn French words without any knowledge of French. The results on the receptive part of the test were about twice as high as those of the results on the productive part of the test. The best results on the receptive part of the test were obtained when the words were learned receptively, and the best results on the productive part of the test were obtained when the words were learned productively. However, productive learning led to a considerable amount of receptive knowledge and receptive learning led to a considerable amount of productive knowledge. In fact, the results of this brilliant experiment are qualified by the fact that the American students in question had no experience at all with the foreign language in question (French), which might have had more negative effect on productive learning and testing. In addition, the results were based on an immediate test, not on a delayed test. Actually, productive learning leads to a certain amount of receptive knowledge as well as the reverse, namely, receptive learning leads to a certain amount of productive knowledge. However receptive retention as a result of productive learning, in general, lags behind the receptive retention as a result of receptive learning with the exception of Scheneider *et al.* (2002). Likewise, the productive retention as a result of receptive learning, in general, lags behind the productive retention as a result of productive learning. All this information supports the combination hypothesis. In fact, productive learning partially overlaps with receptive learning, as a result of which additional productive learning might lead to an extra amount of receptive knowledge. On the other hand, productive learning partially differs from receptive learning So that adding a productive learning stage might lead to more extended processing and more varied processing, which in turn results in better retention. With regard to previously mentioned research in this field, most research studies on reception and production has focused on either receptive and productive vocabulary size or whether receptive knowledge is gained before productive knowledge. Surprisingly, there is very little research that compares receptive and productive learning. However, research on learning from word pairs suggests that the type of learning, receptive or productive, affects the type and amount of knowledge gained.

Degree of difficulty of receptive learning and productive learning: productive learning is more difficult than receptive learning. This is evidenced by the fact that in all experiments the mean scores on productive retention tests were lower than those on the receptive retention tests. Additional evidence comes from the facts that productive learning is more time-consuming than receptive learning (Waring, 1997) and that receptive learning trial is more advantageous and successful than productive learning trials.

Decay of receptive knowledge vs. productive: in this regard, Scheneider *et al.* (2002) data showed that the productive knowledge of words learned productively decayed faster than the receptive knowledge of words learned receptively. Accordingly, productive word knowledge is more prone to decay than receptive word knowledge.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

With regard to participants, 75 upper-intermediate Farsi native speaker students (both male and female) participated in this study. All the participants were English learners in different language institutes in Sirjan, Iran. The participants were randomly assigned to the following groups according to the purpose of the study. They were divided into three groups, each group with 25 students.

1. The receptive task group which was presumed to be instructed by receptive tasks.
2. The productive task group which was supposed to receive instruction through productive tasks.
3.The receptive plus productive group, which was supposed to receive both productive and receptive tasks simultaneously.

3.2. Materials

3.2.1. Recognition post-test

After the experiment, a twenty-five -item multiple choice recognition test was administered to test the participants' short-term memory regarding the instructed English words and idioms. The test was identical to the pre-test except that the number of target words had been reduced to the 20 which were learned in the experiment. One week after the treatment, the same testing procedure was gone through to test the retention of the learnt words in long-term memory. In order to eliminate test familiarity, the order of the items and distractors were changed for the delayed post-test.

3.2.2. Tests of vocabulary production

In the end of the instruction session, a production test was presented. Students were given the node words from the target words and were asked to say the English words and idioms, which they had learned in the treatment and their voice was recorded.

3.3. Procedures

The experiment consisted of a learning session followed by an immediate retention test and, three weeks later, an unannounced delayed retention test. The procedures for each class were identical. After administering the test of vocabulary unfamiliarity, there remained 75 participants and twenty words with which none of the students were familiar. The participants encountered each word along with its first language (L1) meaning followed by two example sentences. Later, in the receptive group, the students were given a receptive task in which each of the target words was presented in three new sentences, and the students were asked to read the sentences silently.

In the productive group, the participants encountered the words in the same sentences as the receptive task. However, the node word was provided alone and the students were required to find the appropriate collocate from the list of words provided and read the words aloud as they filled in the blanks. The students were monitored and controlled by the researchers to ensure that they

pronounced the words in each sentence. The answer key was later provided for the students to check their answers. After the treatment, the students were given a production test and a recognition test. In order to test the participants' long-term as well as short-term memory regarding the instructed items, similar testing procedures were practiced one week after the instruction.

3.3.1. Scoring and coding procedures

As it was mentioned earlier, after the treatment sessions, a productive test and a recognition test were given. The recognition test consisted of twenty multiple-choice items. For the purpose of scoring this test, each correct response was given one point, and a zero point was given to the items with no answer or a wrong answer. As for the productive test, each correct response was given two points.

3.4. Design

Three types of learning (receptive, productive, receptive +productive) were combined with two types of testing (receptive or productive) between subjects design (see table 1). Retention tests were administered immediately after learning just to give pupils the idea that the experiment had finished.

Table- 1. Design of the experiment

Learning	Immediate Learning	Delayed test
Receptive	Receptive	Receptive
Receptive	Productive	Productive
Productive	Receptive	Receptive
Productive	Productive	Productive
Receptive + Productive	Receptive	Receptive
Receptive +Productive	Productive	Productive

4. RESULTS

Table- 2. Descriptive Statistics for the immediate receptive test (1)

Method	Mean	S. Deviation	N
Receptive Task	18.2766	1.6721	25
Productive Task	18.9466	1.7740	25
Receptive+ productive tasks	18.5214	1.5021	25

According to Table 2, the scores of the groups on the four tests were compared. The descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and number of participants) of the scores for the immediate test measuring the receptive knowledge of English words and idioms are reported in table 2.Accordingly, the results show that both groups demonstrated large gains in knowledge with very little difference between the scores in both groups.

Table- 3. Descriptive Statistics for the immediate productive test

	Mean	S. Deviation	N
Receptive Task	18.6601	1.5121	25
Productive Task	18.222	1.9101	25
Receptive+ productive tasks	18.214	1.5041	25

Table 3 presents the results of the immediate productive test. With regard to this table, the similarity between the groups can be substantiated. It is crystal clear that the two groups obtained similar results.

Table- 4. Descriptive Statistics for the delayed receptive test

Method	Mean	S. Deviation	N
Receptive Task	18.6601	1.5121	25
Productive Task	18.222	1.9101	25
Receptive+ productive tasks	18.5014	1.642	25

According to table 4, the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) of the scores for the delayed test measuring receptive knowledge of English words are clarified. Figures show that the two groups of the study had a similar performance on the delayed test of receptive knowledge. The last two series of scores are related to the students' scores on the delayed test of productive knowledge that the results of them were mentioned in this table.

Table-5. Descriptive Statistics for the delayed productive test

Method	Mean	S. Deviation	N
Receptive Task	14.6601	1.5121	25
Productive Task	17.222	1.9101	25
Receptive+ productive tasks	15.214	1.8403	25

As table 5 reveals, it can be observed that the group of students who received productive task outperformed the receptive task group. In order to make the obtained descriptive statistics more meaningful, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed; the results will be shown in the following table. The independent variable was the type of learning task and the six tests, as described in table 6, were considered as the dependent variables.

Table- 6. Between Subjects effects

Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.
Receptive test 1	4.045	1	4.045	1.021	.095
Productive test 1	2.121	1	2.121	.322	.498
Receptive test 2	9.222	1	9.222	.542	.063
Productive test 2	83.112	1	83.112	43.22	.000
Productive +Receptive test1	82.22	1	82.22	.552	.021
Productive +Receptive test2	85.044	1	85.044	56.22	.000

The results showed that the difference lies in the delayed productive test (sig: .000). It can be concluded that the productive task group outperformed the receptive task; therefore, it is clear that there was a significant difference between the performance of the two groups of study in the delayed productive test in favor of the productive task group. Interesting enough, in productive + receptive group result shows that this group outperformed the others.

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Learning words both receptively and productively leads to a similar level of receptive retention as learning just receptively. As a second explanation, we may conclude that the fact that the productive learning leads to a certain amount of receptive knowledge does not necessarily imply that adding productive learning or receptive learning leads to a higher or more stable receptive retention. With regard to the combination method and productive retention, the conclusion is similar. On the other hand, productive learning leads to a noticeable amount of receptive retention, a finding that is also in line with earlier research in this field. However, the amount of retention was only half of that as a result of productive learning. Therefore, productive learning leads to a better productive retention than receptive learning. Interesting enough, productive knowledge does not, in all cases, include receptive knowledge, as is often assumed. As the immediate test followed productive learning, the receptive learning was lower than the productive retention.

Regarding the degree of difficulty, productive learning is significantly and substantially more difficult than receptive learning. Based on the results obtained from statistical analyses, it was substantiated that both tasks were effective methods of teaching vocabulary and idioms. In fact, despite the qualitative differences in terms of the type of instruction, the receptive and productive tasks both seemed to be effective in promoting the immediate retrieval of target words. It is possible that the amount of processing that took place during both tasks was enough for the learners to achieve good results on the immediate post-tests, both recognition and production tests. However, considering the productive knowledge of the collocations, although the two groups gained almost similar results in the immediate post-test, the mean score for the receptive task and the productive task was18.2766 and18.9466, respectively, there was found a significant difference between the performances of two groups in the delayed production test. It is possible that the productive tasks allow for deeper processing of the words by helping the learners to establish more productive meaning-form connections. Based on some studies (Schmitt, 2000), it can be claimed that the way learners process information in Hulstijn and Laufer (2001), retention and learning of unfamiliar words depends upon the degree of involvement which is operationalized by the three factors of need, search and evaluation in processing the words and when involvement is higher, better retention will happen.

In this study, while learners in the receptive group had to read the new words and idioms in the three sentences provided for each word, it is fair to say that the three factors of need, search and evaluation were stronger in the productive tasks leading to more involvement of the learners and consequently more learning. It is worth mentioning that a comparison of the participants' scores on

the receptive and productive tasks revealed that the scores on the productive tests were lower than those on the receptive tests. These findings are consistent with the previous studies stating that recognition tests lead to better performance than recall test, e.g. Postman *et al.* (1984), and Jourabchi (1994). As Ellis (1995), Glover (1989), and McDaniel and Mason (1985) found before, selecting the correct response is much easier than producing a response from memory. put in a nutshell, even though the inherent qualities of the two task types, namely the receptive task and productive task, may not, as shown by immediate tests, have a different impact on the vocabulary learning of students in the short term retention, they seem to have different effects on the long term retention. To sum up, if words are learned receptively, then learners are likely to gain significantly more receptive knowledge, whereas productive learning leads to larger gains in productive knowledge. This provides a possible explanation for why a learner's receptive vocabulary may be larger than his or her productive vocabulary. Given that vocabulary learning is predominately receptive, learners are more likely to gain receptive knowledge than productive knowledge. Findings also show that the productive + receptive task is much more effective.

5.1. Pedagogical Implications

The most important aim and challenge of every research is the capability of putting the findings of research into practice. It is up to the researchers, textbook writers, and in service programs for teachers to inform foreign language teachers of the recent findings of the researchers in the field. Otherwise, the findings of research are of little value. This research project can have some pedagogical implications for teachers. In other words, it showed that commonly used tasks for teaching individual words and idioms can be easily altered to effectively teach collocation. The findings of this study have some implications for researchers as well. This study examined the effects of two task types on learning words and idioms. Participants in the receptive group encountered target words in three glossed sentences, and participants in the productive group completed another task in which they had to fill in some blanks using the same sentences read by the receptive group. The results showed that there was no significant difference between the two tasks on the immediate tests of receptive and productive knowledge. However, analyses of the participants' scores on the delayed test of production indicated that participants in the productive task group significantly outperformed those in the receptive group.

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