Thesis Title A Comparative Study of Passive and Active Vocabulary

Knowledge of Prince of Songkla University and

South China Agricultural University EFL Learners

Author Miss Zhong Zhiying

Major Program Applied Linguistics

Academic Year 2005

ABSTRACT

The present study investigates relationships between three modalities of vocabulary knowledge (passive recognition, active recall and free active written) within two different learning contexts (i.e., Thai and Chinese contexts) and across the same two learning contexts. Bilingual Vocabulary Levels Tests were designed for determining passive recognition and active recall vocabulary sizes and a guided e-mail writing test was intended to find free active vocabulary size. Participants were university EFL learners at Prince of Songkla University (PSU) in Thailand (n=57) and South China Agricultural University (SCAU; n=85) who had nearly completed one-year Foundation English courses. SPSS 13.0, the VocabProfile, the Text Lex Compare and the FreqList were used to analyze the data. The main findings from each research question are as follows:

Research Question 1

- 1. For all the subjects (PSU n=57; SCAU n=85), it was found that **passive recognition** vocabulary knowledge in both groups was about 3,000 word families with PSU students having 3,021 word families and SCAU students 3,348 word families; **active recall** vocabulary knowledge was a little more than 1,000 word families with PSU students having 1,118 word families and SCAU students 1,456 word families; the average **free active written** vocabulary sizes were 86 word families for PSU students and 117 word families for SCAU students.
- 2. Two parallel groups were identified for the comparisons in the four research questions (PSU n=40; SCAU n=40). Significant correlations were found between **passive recognition** and **active recall** vocabularies of PSU students (.662**) and SCAU students (.557**). The correlations between **passive recognition** and **free active**

written vocabulary knowledge were different in the two learning contexts with significant correlation for SCAU students (.405**) and no significant correlation for PSU students.

Research Question 2

Significant differences were found between **active recall** and **free active written** vocabulary knowledge in the parallel groups across the learning contexts with SCAU students having 244 more word families in **active recall** test and 35 more word families in **free active written** test than PSU students.

Research Question 3

1. Active recall and free active written vocabulary knowledge increased at different rates with the shifts of the passive recognition vocabulary knowledge, which were similar in both PSU and SCAU learning contexts.

Significant differences were found in the **active recall** scores between the middle groups and the high groups in both learning contexts.

In contrast, no significant differences were found in the growth of **free active** written vocabulary knowledge between the low groups and the middle groups as well as between the middle groups and the high groups of PSU and SCAU students.

2. Compared across different learning contexts, significant differences were found between PSU students' and SCAU students' middle groups in **active recall** scores and between all low, middle and high groups in **free active written** vocabulary knowledge of PSU and SCAU students showing that SCAU students were better at their productive vocabulary knowledge especially in **free active written** vocabulary knowledge.

Research Question 4

For the **free active written** vocabulary knowledge of the PSU and SCAU students, significant differences were found in all word levels except the Off-list words level. On average, SCAU students have used 35 more word families than PSU students.

From a qualitative perspective, the findings are as follows:

(1) The average length of the texts produced by the two high groups was 282 tokens for SCAU students and 186 tokens for PSU students (excluding proper nouns).

- (2) Word frequency analysis showed on the whole, SCAU students used a greater variety of vocabulary. PSU students used less definite article "the" and the indefinite article "a" compared with SCAU students and native speakers.
- (3) PSU students used 302 word families that SCAU students did not use while SCAU students used 594 word families that PSU students did not use.
- (4) A number of unique words were influenced by the culture and geographical positions in both learning contexts.
- (5) As for parts of speech, SCAU students used a greater variety of conjunctions, propositions and pronouns. The result indicated that PSU students had not mastered the relative clause introduced by "which". Regarding adjectives, it was found that 92-97% of the adjectives that were used by PSU and SCAU students had a positive meaning.

In the completion of this thesis, I have received a great deal of support and assistance from many people. My deepest gratitude goes to my two supervisors, Asst. Prof. Dr. Adisa Teo and Asst. Prof. Dr. Chonlada Laohawiriyanon for their encouragement, energy, time and for their precious advice at all stages of writing of my thesis. In addition, my discussions with Professor Norbert Schmitt, Asst. Prof. Dr. Waraporn Sripetpun, and Mr. Zainee Waemusa were always stimulating and inspiring and I wish to thank them for their help. I also would like to express my appreciation to Asst. Prof. Sukanya Tanewang for her constructive comments and Mr. Gerald I Waxman for his editorial help and constructive comments.

My sincere thanks also go to Prince of Songkla University, Thailand, for offering me the President's scholarship to study at PSU. And I am also grateful to the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Department of Languages and Linguistics, especially Asst. Prof. Umpairat Sudhinont, and Asst. Prof. Dr. Monta Chatupote for their kindest help in various aspects. I also would like to express my gratitude to all the teachers who taught me in the Master courses including Asst. Prof. Dr. Patama Aksomjarung, Mrs. Phanida Suksrimuang etc. And I would like to thank my friends especially Professor Deng Zhaochun and Assoc. Prof. Ai Xianfeng for their help and I would like to thank my colleagues in South China Agricultural University for taking on extra work loads in my absence.

I am indebted also to the teachers and students who helped me collect the data especially Asst. Prof. Sukanya Tanewang, Asst. Prof. Dr. Nisakorn Charumanee, Miss Somreudee Khongput, Ms Lin Ruxin, Miss Zhou Suwen and Miss Chen Guohua. I would also like to thank the friends who have helped me with the translation of the instruments and the organization of the data collection, especially Wipawan Thongklieng, Karuna Satitsart, Jureeporn Malaelohid, Bayatee Dueraman, Supaluk Nangam, Jaruwan Nhuchauy, Teerisara Pholkerd, Jomjai Sudhinont, Sita Musikarangsri and Zhang Naifu. I also wish to thank all the subjects in my thesis.

Lastly, my warm and affectionate appreciation goes to my husband and my son and to my extended family for their constant support and understanding during completion of my thesis.