A systematic review of L2 incidental word learning from spoken input

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Researchers still argue over exactly how much vocabulary learners may gain from incidental exposure to a second language. While this question has often been recognised in primary studies and reviews focusing on L2 word learning from written input, learning from spoken input has not received as much attention and was reviewed only once before (Ellis, 1994). This systematic review aims to bring together all literature on L2 incidental word learning from purely spoken input (i.e. not glossed, subtitled, etc.). Incidental learning was operationalised as learning being a by-product of activities not explicitly geared to vocabulary learning (Hulstijn, 2003).

A preliminary meta-analysis on pre-test to post-test gains suggests that auditory word learning under incidental circumstances is very well possible, even though uptake rates typically are low (see Schmitt, 2008: 349). In addition to quantifying the overall amount of learning as a function of testing moment (immediate/delayed) and mode of testing (productive/receptive), the effect of other factors was examined narratively, including: exposure frequency, word characteristics, modality (audio/video), interaction, and individual differences.

Research syntheses such as this one exist merely by the work done by many others. We could maximally benefit from this collaborative effort if all studies would report the data necessary to calculate effect sizes and to identify whether a study concerns incidental or intentional learning. Therefore, I will end with an overview of reporting practices in the field and make recommendations to ensure that researchers studying incidental word learning will not only contribute to current understandings, but also to future ones.

References


Keywords: vocabulary, meta-analysis, systematic review, incidental learning.