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PRAMARN SUBPHADOONGCHONE: LEXICAL GUESSING IN A SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT: A CASE OF FIRST-YEAR MAHIDOL SCIENCE STUDENTS. THESIS ADVISORS: BOOSAKORN VIJCHULATA, Ph.D. MICHAEL TREPIAK, M.A. 89 p. ISBN 974-664-780-6

The purposes of this study are 1) to investigate the first-year Mahidol science students' lexical guessing ability, 2) to examine the predictive power of each type of lexical guessing tests--a test of words in a modified context and a test of words in a natural context--on reading ability, 3) to compare the opinions towards vocabulary learning of students with high and low lexical guessing ability, and 4) to compare the degree of lexical guessing strategies used between the high and low lexical guessing ability students.

The subjects were 141 first-year science students selected from a population of 271 attending the Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, for the 1999 academic year.

The research instruments were 2 types of lexical guessing tests, a set of questionnaires asking the students about their opinions towards vocabulary learning and vocabulary guessing strategies used, and reading tests which were developed by the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University.

The data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics, Pearson's product moment and the t-test. The findings of the study were as follows:

1. The students' test mean scores obtained from the test of words in a modified context and that from the test of words in a natural context were 11.85 and 9.77 respectively.

2. The test of words in a modified context had a higher predictive power on reading ability than the test of words in a natural context. The correlation coefficient between the scores on the test of words in a modified context and reading scores was .795, whereas that of the scores on the test of words in a natural context and reading scores was .511.

3. There was no statistically significant difference in the opinions towards vocabulary learning in terms of learning vocabulary by memorization and learning vocabulary in context between the high and the low lexical guessing ability students.

4. There was no statistically significant difference in the degree of the use of lexical guessing strategies in terms of using wider context and using immediate context between the high and low lexical guessing ability students.

This study revealed that students need improvement in lexical guessing ability. Their major problems in guessing word meaning from context were derived from limited existing vocabulary knowledge and lack of grammatical knowledge. In addition, the test of words in a modified context has proved more effective for predicting the students' reading ability than the test of words in a natural context.