

CHINESE FANTASY NOVEL: EMPIRICAL STUDY ON NEW WORD TEACHING FOR NON-NATIVE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Giving additional learning materials such as Chinese fantasy novel to non-native learners can be strenuous. This study seeks to render empirical support on the usefulness of the use of new words in Chinese fantasy novel to enhance vocabulary learning among the non-native learners of Chinese. In general, the students agreed that they like to learn new words of Chinese fantasy novel with the mean of 4.01. The students agreed that learning new words from Chinese fantasy novel can help them to improve their Mandarin level with a mean of 3.95. Students were also positive on the helpfulness of the use of these Chinese new words in supporting their Mandarin learning. Students agreed that the Chinese new word learning materials were able to support their Mandarin learning with a mean of 3.979. Thus, this will give a hand in ensuring non-native learners might gain positive outcomes in the instruction process. Instructors who are interested in teaching new words from Chinese fantasy novel in specific to support additional learning might be able to get insights from this article.

KEYWORDS

Chinese Fantasy Novel; New Word Teaching; Non-Native Learners; Cognitive Theory; Bloom.

1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese fantasy novels are popular in the internet since the 90's as a new style of novel. Neologisms are especially useful in identifying newness, new phenomena, and cultural background or take on new ideas from the old and original words (Zhang, 2008). The productivity of coin words are generally found in Chinese fantasy novels, especially the web-based novels (Song, 2011). It can be said to be quite a striking feature of today's Chinese new words. These coin words however can be very much cultural bounded (Zhu, 2009; Long, 2011; Bai, 2012; Tang & Jiang, 2011). Vocabulary instruction for the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language has to be systematic and well-planned (Hu, 2010; Yu, 2011). The definitions of different levels of reading ability have rarely been operationalized for reading assessment in China, as well as in other countries teaching Chinese as a second or foreign language, whether it be a high-stakes large-scale test or a classroom assessment (Mi & Hyun, 2014). In order to use Chinese fantasy novel as reading materials for the learning of Chinese as a foreign language, reading support such as online dictionary skill, reading software use and module of teaching this reading skill has to be given to the students (Goh, 2010a; 2010b) prior to the introduction of Chinese fantasy novels in the Chinese classrooms. Students of learning Chinese as a foreign language need to have vocabulary support in the reading process (Goh & Saiful, 2013a; 2013b; Goh, Saiful, Hasiah & Norlina, 2012). The teaching approach has not to be arbitrary but systematic instructional approach has to be employed for effective instruction (Goh, 2013). Cognitive load theory (CLT) (Lee & Kalyuga, 2011) is an instructional theory that starts from the idea that the working memory of the students is limited with respect to the amount of information that students can take. Hence, the instructors who are keen to introduce new words from Chinese fantasy novel have to take specific attention in this aspect to yield positive gain of the new word instruction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Making sure that vocabulary acquisition occurs in the new word instruction is something that should not be ignorable. The cognitive domain involves knowledge and the development of intellectual skills. In vocabulary acquisition from the cognitive view ropes in the knowledge pertaining to the new word, as well as the intellectual understanding of how the new word can be used. Cognitive theories that related to vocabulary instruction thus have to be comprehended. Learning theory cannot be apart from motivational learning theory. Non-native learners have to be strongly motivated in ensuring that they are keen in vocabulary acquisition process (Lee & Wang, 2013). For new word cognitive instruction theory in Chinese fantasy novel, this is typically relevant. Studies have explored the effects of the potentially inefficient strategy on motivation (Platten, 2010). Another important related theory is affective theory in learning (Yan, 2013). Instructors have to understand the cognitive factor related to the affective aspect for effective vocabulary instruction. Second language vocabulary learning strategies have to be arranged in accordance to affective state of the learners (Zhang & Li, 2011).

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out with 210 MARA university students as participants. Data collected from the third and fourth semester students of Office Management Faculty. The learning instrument used in this study is a set of self-developed learning materials which encompasses around 70 new words of Chinese fantasy novels. Students accessed these learning materials which are uploaded in a management system called i-learn - <http://i-learn.uitm.edu.my/v2/>. In order to gather students' responses on the usefulness of the use of these learning materials, students were to answer an online questionnaire at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1MqNMWDqk3swM4voVKedED_jETBnkTWwEt9Rwczv6X8Q/viewform. First stage of the study was instructional phase. The research materials include slides of power point containing seventy Chinese fantasy novel new words. Second phase of the study was the assessment phase. Students were to answer 4 multiple-choice tests as to gauge their cognitive understanding of the new words learned. The purpose is to test students' cognitive understanding of the new words learned.

4. RESULTS

These were the results of respondents during the diploma semester. There were 114 (54.5%) of respondents taking Mandarin level 1 and 96 (45.5%) of respondents taking Mandarin level 2. As a whole, the students agreed that they like to learn new words in Chinese fantasy novel (mean = 4.01). They also agreed that learning Chinese new word in fantasy novel can help them to improve their Mandarin (mean = 3.95). Table below depicted aspects related to the helpfulness of the Chinese new word learning materials to support Mandarin learning. For all the 10 aspects, students were positive on the helpfulness of the use of these Chinese new word learning materials. As a whole, students agreed that the Chinese new word learning materials were able to support their Mandarin learning (mean = 3.979).

Table 1. The helpfulness of the Chinese new word learning materials to support Mandarin learning

No.	Statements	Mean	SD
1	I understand more about Chinese culture.	3.97	0.688
2	I increase Chinese learning motivation.	3.94	0.672
3	I read more in Chinese.	3.93	0.650
4	I improve writing skill.	3.94	0.201
5	I improve reading skill.	3.97	0.851
6	I expand vocabulary amounts.	4.01	0.121
7	I improve learning of Chinese in this course.	4.00	0.491
8	I recognize more Chinese characters.	4.03	0.162
9	I learn vocabulary more independently.	4.00	0.158
10	I carry out wide independent reading on my own.	4.00	0.170

The respondents were from level 1 and level 2. The students of different levels of Mandarin learning might have differing perceptions on the keenness and helpfulness of the use of new word learning materials to support their Mandarin learning. Students of level 1 were keener to learn new word (mean = 3.93) compared to students of level 2 (mean = 3.81). It was also found that students of level 1 were more agreeable ((mean = 4.01)) that learning new word in Chinese fantasy novel can help them to learn Chinese better compared to students from level 2 (mean = 3.90).

Table 2. Group statistics of two level Mandarin Language

Item	Mandarin level	Language	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Helpfulness	1		108	4.01	0.588	0.057
	2		91	3.90	0.790	0.083
Keeness	1		108	3.93	0.622	0.060
	2		91	3.81	0.906	0.095

By running t-test, it was found that for both helpfulness ($t = 1.106$, sig. value = $.0270 < 0.05$) and keenness ($t = 1.036$, sig. value = $.0302 < 0.05$), they were significant. These showed that students of level 1 were keener to learn new word in Chinese fantasy novel and agreed that by learning new words in Chinese fantasy novel can assist them to learn Chinese better.

Table 3. t-test for Equality of Means

Item	Equal variances assumes	t	Df.	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error
Helpfulness		1.106	197	0.0270	0.108	0.098
Keeness		1.036	197	0.0302	0.113	0.109

Students of level 2 were agreeable that the Chinese new words learning materials helped them to understand more about Chinese culture (mean = 4.02) compared to level 1 students (mean = 4.02). It was found significant ($t = -2.042$, sig. value = $.042 < .05$).

Table 4. Group statistics

Item	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Understand more about Chinese culture	1	108	3.86	0.538	0.052
	2	91	4.05	0.794	0.083

Table 5. t-test for Equality of Means

Item	Equal variances assumes	t	Df.	Sig.(2-tailed)
Understand more about Chinese culture		-2.042	197	0.042

5. DISCUSSION

The results of the questionnaires showed that students were affirmative on the use of new word learning materials in the Chinese fantasy novel to support their Chinese learning. It is agreeable with the view of Hu (2010) that various Chinese learning materials can be utilized to support Chinese vocabulary acquisition and expansion. However, the results of the test data showed students' new word cognitive of Chinese fantasy novel was above average (64.27%). Although this figure cannot be considered low, however, it implies that various learning activities using new word learning materials can be utilized in order to enhance the cognitive level of the learned new words.

Furthermore, the findings showed that students of level 1 were keener to learn new words in Chinese fantasy novel. Hence the use of new words in Chinese fantasy novel can be introduced in level 1. The result of this study also revealed that students of level 1 found that learning new word in Chinese fantasy novel was more helpful compared to level 2 students. Hence instructors have to find ways to improve the instruction process in order to make the learning materials more attractive and appealing to the level 2 students. All of these activities are designed and can be utilized as to encourage the students to manipulate the information and vocabulary gleaned from the learning materials. Focusing on meaning and doing something with the new words learned cognitively will certainly help reinforce vocabulary acquisition. Learner tracking is another area for the betterment of this study. We need to look more closely, as a step toward the use of students to the improvements of their learning outcomes. The IP (Internet protocol) numbers of learners' most often used computers and begin to track the learning tracking can assist us to understand the relationships between the active use of learning materials and the support of the learning gains. Better testing is another aspect that we can do for the betterment of the study. There appears to be no suitable standard instrument available for assessing gains in additional vocabulary acquisition. We plan to test changes in levels of partial vocabulary knowledge; measures that are sensitive to incremental growth may register acquisition at the level and pace of learners' self-study. Since the research finding was affirmative that in the learning of new word in Chinese fantasy novel, students were able to learn Chinese culture as well. Hence for the improvement of the learning materials as to render more comprehensive of Chinese culture, it is recommended that additional and systematic development and enriching of learning materials can be done. These include the introduction and presentation of Chinese weapons, Chinese traditional building, Chinese traditional costume, and etc.

6. CONCLUSION

The major objective in discussing the theories of new word acquisition among non-native learners is to come out with a theoretical framework to support the use of new word in Chinese fantasy novel in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language (see figure below). Thus, this will give a hand in ensuring non-native learners might gain positive outcomes in the instruction process. Instructors who are interested in expanding the vocabulary command to support additional learning as well as new word cognitive instruction might be able to get insights from this article. Many supplementary tools can be used along to make use of the instructional materials in a more positive manner. Instructor can use pinyin text to speech system (Goh, Saiful Nizam, Aileen Farida, & Mohd Suhaimi, 2013), for instance, to practice the sentences they have made using new word that they have learned in these instructional materials. This may espouse their productive learning skills such as speaking instead of enhancing their receptive skill through reading merely. Studies have to be carried out on the effectiveness for usability evaluation (Norlina, Hasiah, Goh & Yau'Mee, 2013). Hence, quantitative study on the usability of the instructional materials in supporting new word cognitive instruction has to be implemented. It serves as guidance for effective and systematic additional vocabulary instruction to support non-native learners in expanding their learning capacity.

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