The Relationship between Topic Interest and Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition: To What Extent is Dictionary Look-up Behavior a Factor?

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ABSTRACT

Research on the effects that interest may have on learning has been thoroughly analyzed and discussed in learning theory and L1 Research. Many of its features and sources have been identified and discussed in light of the educational and psychological theories that underpin its conceptualization (Renninger, Hidi and Krapp, 1992; Schiefele, 1999; Hidi, 1990; Ainley, Hidi and Berndorff, 2002). From this rich field of research, the concept of topic interest has been put forward as being a significant variable in learning outcomes (Hidi; 2001; Renninger, 2000). Topic interest can be defined as feelings associated with a certain topic and significance attributed to that topic by an individual (Schiefele and Krapp, 1996). Although topic interest has received an important amount of attention in learning theory and L1 reading comprehension, research assessing the extent of its influence in the L2 classroom has been scarce. The few studies that have investigated topic interest in L2 settings have focused on its influence on reading comprehension. It is of the researcher’s understanding that no published studies have linked the variable of topic interest to direct vocabulary learning. Thus, the main purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between topic interest and L2 incidental vocabulary learning. In addition, part of the main purpose of the study is to include the variable of dictionary look-up behavior, which will be added to the design in order to find and analyze resulting significant interactions.

Participants for the present study are 65 male EFL learners age 18-25 who are currently studying to obtain a technical degree in Mechanics and Automotive Engineering at a technological university in Chile. They were asked to read two texts already identified by students in the pilot study as being of high interest and low interest. They were allowed to use bilingual dictionaries and were asked to underline the words that they looked up. Twenty words previously identified as unknown by the participants were selected in order to assess incidental vocabulary learning (minutes after the reading task) and retention (two weeks later) in the two different reading conditions (high topic interest text and low topic interest text). Translation and multiple choice tests were chosen in order to provide different assessment measures. Results suggest that text topic interest indeed has an influence on how much vocabulary is learned and retained by learners. Significant
differences were found in the translation measure, while in the multiple choice measure it approached significance. Furthermore, dictionary use was found to be more valuable for vocabulary learning and retention when the words being looked up were part of the high topic interest text. Discussion of the results, conclusions and recommendations for pedagogy are also presented.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Research placing a focus on the relationship between interest and vocabulary learning in SLA has been scarce. Topic interest has usually been examined with respect to its relationship with prior knowledge and reading comprehension, but little attention has been given to its effects on incidental vocabulary learning or vocabulary retention. It is sensible to think that at least some of the cognitive processes involved in vocabulary language learning may very well be affected to some extent by interest. As will be seen in the literature review, topic interest is linked to second language learning through the analysis of a number of articles that analyze topic interest and its effects on reading comprehension. It was of the researcher’s understanding that there has not been consistent research linking topic interest and second language vocabulary learning. The present study seeks to contribute to that area.

Studies on dictionary look-up behavior have not considered the construct of topic interest as a variable; texts used in these studies are described by researchers as being interesting and appealing to learners without doing any effort to confirm this by asking the participants. The lack of an adequate operationalization of such an elusive concept may be one of the reasons why it has not been given enough attention in the SLA scene. The present study will have as its main goal to explore the variable of topic interest and understand the way in which it may have an effect on vocabulary learning and retention. To achieve this, it becomes essential to operationalize text topic interest within a particular framework, and take measures to confirm that learners are effectively reading two texts with different topic interest levels. It should be noted that interest is a highly individual, ever-changing cognitive construct that may prove to be quite difficult to grasp. However, the possible rewards that can be obtained once it is understood and manipulated may be of considerable value. In addition, dictionary use behavior is another important aspect of the study in that it can be related to the amount of processing learners do when looking up a
word and how much of this processing may account for incidental vocabulary learning and retention when learners are exposed to high and low topic interest texts.

In light of the research reviewed in the literature section it is necessary to clarify that in the present study the concept of incidental learning will be treated as part of the continuum line between incidental and intentional learning. In a classroom environment, incidental learning can be characterized by the intention learners have of committing the words to memory. Thus, learners may find themselves within an incidental learning environment when they focus on the meaning of a text, i.e., reading to understand a text; this is not the case when they must focus on form, i.e., memorizing a list of words. Incidental learning occurs when learning is not the main goal set by the learner (Hulstijn, 2001; Huckin and Coady, 1999; Gass, 1999). The design of the present study will be placed within an incidental learning situation in order to trigger more natural processes that foster topic interest.

1.2 Context of the study

The context selected for the present study was immersed within the Chilean educational system, particularly students seeking to obtain a technical degree in a particular subject (Mechanics) from a superior education institution. This particular type of student has very limited L2 skills (English), and is usually unmotivated to learn a second language because, according to their teachers, they do not see any relevance to it in their context. The researcher has been teaching EFL to students with this profile in the institution and has been able to confirm these statements by asking students about their feelings towards the English language and the lessons they must attend. These learners were chosen because of a number of reasons. First, in order to find learners with similar interests, the population for the study focused on students in a particular technical degree career. Second, teachers who are working with these students have had meetings with the researcher, and have reported their students’ lack of commitment to the lessons and a discontent with the texts that they are presented with. These textbooks are regarded by students as containing uninteresting stories about famous people they do not know, or do not relate to. Clearly, lack of interest in the texts may be a factor contributing to these
students’ lack of commitment. Therefore, positive results in terms of engagement and vocabulary learning could indeed be welcomed by teachers and administrators at this level. By fostering topic interest in environments where motivation may not be optimal, teachers can bridge the abyss that sometimes exists between lack of interest and learning in particular SLA settings.

1.3 Aims of the Study

The present study was conducted in order to explore the relationship between interest –topic interest in particular—and vocabulary learning and retention. As has been discussed above, the potential benefits that research on interest can have in the field of SLA and particularly in the area of vocabulary learning deserves to be investigated in light of what occurs in particular classroom environments. Thus, the aims of this study are as follows:

a) assess how topic interest can influence the way in which learners retrieve a word in an incidental learning environment.

b) explore the way in which learners use dictionaries and how this may be affected by topic interest.

c) examine any interactions found among topic interest, reading comprehension and prior knowledge measures.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Overview

In order to review the concept of interest and its different levels researched in the literature, it will be conceptualized as a variable in learning drawing from psychology, as it has been widely investigated in learning theory. The constructs of individual, situational and topic interest will be described and studies addressing a particular level of interest or their interactions will be reviewed. Then, L1 reading research will inform the influence of interest on reading comprehension, as it is one of the main areas of research to which it has been related. Similarly, topic interest will be linked to second language acquisition through the analysis of a number of articles that have sought to understand how text topic interest may influence L2 reading comprehension. The limited amount of research done on topic interest and L2 vocabulary learning will be reported, followed by a review of incidental vocabulary learning and dictionary use.

Incidental vocabulary learning needs to be placed in second language learning research, as the present study requires that the contentious distinction between incidental and intentional learning be clarified. For the purposes of the study, incidental learning is characterized by the degree of intention learners have of committing the words to memory; in other words, learners may find themselves within an incidental learning environment when they focus on the meaning of a text, i.e., reading to understand a text; this is not the case when they must focus on form, i.e., memorizing a list of words. Consequently, the use of a dictionary may or may not be part of an incidental vocabulary learning situation, depending on the learners’ intention. Finally, literature on dictionary use and its possible effects on L2 vocabulary learning will be reviewed. In this regard, there are studies that show a correlation between dictionary look-up behavior and vocabulary learning and retention. However, these studies have not taken into account learners’ reactions to the types of text they are being exposed to, in terms of learners’ topic interest.
2.2 The Relationship between Interest and Learning

2.2.1 Defining Interest

Psychologists and educators have always regarded interest as a key element in learning. One of the first and most influential contributors in this area was John Dewey. In 1913, Dewey stated that the role of interest differed to that of effort in learning. Effort may affect learning positively (and is indeed required in order to learn), but does not necessarily facilitate deep processing or personal engagement. Interest, then, is what mediates the relationship between effort and effective learning, i.e., learning that is not temporary, is the result of identification with the thing to be learned and does not require coercion (Dewey, 1913). After Dewey’s work, psychological research on interest halted for more than 50 years, mainly due to American Behaviorism, which disregarded the analysis of psychological constructs that could not be observed (Schraw, Flowerday and Lehman, 2001). In L1 educational research, Bernstein’s (1955) seminal work suggested that interest had an impact on reading comprehension. She asked 101 ninth grade pupils to read a high interest and a low interest story; then, they completed interest rating scales and reading comprehension questions, scoring significantly higher on the high-interest reading comprehension test. In the 1980’s, there were some renewed attempts to research interest, but reigning cognitive theories at the time did not regard it as an important component of the information processing system (perception, working memory capacity, representation of knowledge in long-term memory), as the operationalization and assessment of such a concept were deemed problematic (Schraw and Lehman (2001).

In the 1990’s, a number of empirical studies attempted to recognize the multifaceted nature of interest and place it within a research framework. Thus, interest was conceptualized as being individual or situational. Individual interest is characterized by an intrinsic desire to understand a topic related to personal preferences that persists in time (Renninger, Hidi and Krapp, 1992; Schiefele, 1999; Hidi, 1990). It is relatively stable, context-independent and is related to personal significance and positive emotions (Wade, 2001; Tin, 2006). An example of individual interest can be found in a student who has long had interest in the subject of dinosaurs, and reads many magazines and articles dealing with that topic. He also watches videos and television programs that feature dinosaur-
related stories, because he enjoys anything that is linked to them. It is believed that these characteristics may make individual interest a valuable ally in the learning process (Eidswick, 2009). On the other hand, situational interest is transitory and context-specific, and it emerges out of environmental or textual stimuli (Schraw and Lehman, 2001). The stimuli can be visual or auditory, and there are certain characteristics that may arouse this type of interest, e.g., textual coherence and comprehensibility, novelty, concreteness and personal relevance (Schiefele, 1999; Hidi and Baird, 1986). That is to say, learners who are not interested in Roman history may find a text with a related subject interesting depending on how much they can understand from it and how information is presented through the use of pictures, funny remarks, amazing facts, etc. Situational interest is regarded as ephemeral and malleable, i.e., it can be aroused and increased by the teacher in the classroom. This type of interest is particularly relevant to learning in classrooms with unmotivated learners who do not possess individual interests in the topics or activities done in their lessons (Ainley, Hidi and Berndorff, 2002; Bergin, 1999). However, arousing situational interest in learners may only be the first step, as it is short-termed and individual interest is necessary in order to sustain learners’ attention (Hidi and Baird, 1986). Hidi and Renninger (2006) have suggested that situational interest can sequentially develop into individual interest when effective social support is provided through the different stages by educators.

2.2.2 Topic Interest

There is another category of interest that shares characteristics of both individual and situational interest. **Topic interest** can be defined as feelings associated with a certain topic and significance attributed to that topic by an individual (Schiefele and Krapp, 1996). Situational and Individual Interest are said to contribute to topic interest, as they both assist cognitive processing (Hidi, 1990; Hidi, 2001; Schiefele, Krapp and Winteler, 1992; Ainley et al., 2002). The amount and quality of the contribution that individual and situational interest bring to topic interest will depend on the knowledge, experience and value attributed to a particular topic (Ainley et al., 2002; Renninger, 2000). The interdependent relationship between situational and individual interest and how that affects topic interest can be exemplified as follows. An individual who is not interested in physics might find a
text with a related topic interesting because of situational factors (e.g., it is new to the individual, it is coherently presented and appealing). Other individuals might find it interesting because they possess an individual interest in physics (e.g., persisting desire to know about the topic). It must be noted, however, that personal and individual factors interact with situational factors in order to foster topic interest or eliminate it, which can make a clear distinction between these contributing factors rather problematic (Bergin, 1999). Schiefele and Krapp (1996) differentiate topic interest from text-based interest, the latter being defined as “an emotional state aroused by specific text features” (p. 142). These specific characteristics of the text may be more related to situational interest. It can be seen that the different views on what topic interest is and how other types of interest contribute to its formation have made it a rather obscure concept.

The way in which topic interest has been traditionally measured involves correlating participants’ reported interest (by means of a response to a text title) with learning outcomes (Lepper and Cordoba, 1992). If topic interest is said to draw from situational interest and individual interest, the limitations of assessing it through a text title response become evident. By merely assessing topic interest with a text title, situational features of the text will fail to be noticed by learners, which may influence their real interest in the text topic. In addition, Ainsley et al. (2002) noted that the timing in which self-report rating measures are administered may affect participants’ responses. In order to avoid this, they asked 117 fourteen-year old students to read four expository texts. Participants’ responses were recorded and analyzed with the help of a computerized program in order to assess online interest and interactions among task choices, task outcomes, affective experiences and persistence with the text. After analyzing these measures, they concluded that both situational and individual factors contributed to topic interest, and that topic interest in particular influenced affective measures. These affective outcomes had an effect on persistence and learning. The use of more flexible measures like the ones used in Ainsley et al.’s (2002) study may facilitate the understanding of how situational variables affect topic interest after reading the text, especially when the intended analysis involves assessing constructs such as persistence. A text title may not always provide a clear idea of what the text contains in reality, and does not contain
sources of situational interest that may be required in order to create and nurture topic interest.

2.2.3 Interest and Learning Theory

Research in learning theory has found that interest can have an effect not only on the amount of information retained, but also on the quality of learning, as it has been found to facilitate emotional engagement and deeper text processing (Krapp, 1999; Schiefele and Krapp, 1996; Ryan, Connell and Plant, 1990). Moreover, positive effects have been found regardless of the difficulty of the text, the reading ability of the learners, or their age (Schiefele, 1996). The different levels of interest are important factors in reading comprehension and recall, as well as the way in which information is processed (Hidi, 2001, Alderson, 2000). Interest influences the deployment of specific learning strategies and how attention is allocated in the learning process (Hidi, 1990; Wade et al., 1993), and components of autonomy such as goal setting (Renninger, 2000) and affective experience (Hidi, Berndorff and Ainley, 2002). Hidi (2001) reviews a number of L1 studies showing evidence that individual and situational interest facilitates the comprehension, inferring and retention of text segments and passages read by children and college students. She reasons that interest may affect learning outcomes by facilitating learners’ engagement and automatic allocation of attention, which in turn influences the way in which information is understood and retrieved. In a series of studies carried out by Krapp (1999), Schiefele (1996, 1998) and Schiefele and Krapp (1996), interest was found to be significantly related to the comprehension of deep-structure concepts, recall of main ideas and higher degrees of cognitive associations. This suggests that interest may prompt learners go beyond the surface structure of a text and facilitate deeper processing strategies (Krapp, 1999; Schraw, Bruning and Svoboda, 1995).

In understanding the extent to which interest is related to learning, prior knowledge may play a part in the relationship. Indeed, the question whether learners achieve better reading comprehension scores because they know more about the topic or because of attentional and motivational factors has been addressed in the literature. Baldwin, Peleg-Bruckner and McClintock (1985) sought to separate the effects of prior knowledge and topic interest on reading comprehension. They asked 41 high-achieving seventh- and
eighth-grade students to complete an interest inventory and a 100-item prior knowledge test. With these data, four texts that had the required combinations of topic interest and prior knowledge were found (high topic interest-high prior knowledge; high topic interest-low prior knowledge; low topic interest-high prior knowledge and low topic interest-low prior knowledge). Multiple choice reading comprehension scores assessing performance on these combinations revealed significant main effects for both topic interest and prior knowledge. In addition, these two variables were found to have a cumulative effect on reading comprehension. Similar results are reported by Wade, Buxton and Kelly (1999), who found that the connections made between the information being processed and prior knowledge increased learners’ interest. It is uncertain, though, whether these findings are due to deeper processing strategies or automatic performance (Hidi, 2001). Furthermore, results from previous studies contradict these findings. Carrell and Wise (1998) reported that neither prior knowledge nor topic interest was highly significant in reading comprehension and that comprehension suffered most when neither of these factors was present. It should be noted that their findings may be restricted in terms of the limited range that was used in order to find participants that possess the required combination of characteristics (e.g., high topic interest-low prior knowledge, low topic interest-low prior knowledge). They acknowledge that the analysis might have produced different results if participants had possessed stronger interest and prior-knowledge profiles. Along the same lines, Schraw et al. (1995) identified six sources of situational interest, i.e., ease of comprehension, text cohesion, vividness, reader engagement, evocative emotional reactions, and prior knowledge. They reported that prior knowledge ratings were only marginally related to perceived interest (the actual feeling of interest) and unrelated to recall measures, which led them to state that prior knowledge alone was not enough to increase situational interest and subsequent learning. What seems sensible to conclude is that studies that have tackled the particular influence of prior knowledge on general comprehension and learning have not yielded similar results, and that this may be due to the problematic assessment of prior knowledge, in terms of its accurate operationalization. Furthermore, the difficulty in finding learners that share similar combinations of topic interest and prior knowledge profiles may hinder an accurate assessment of any interactions between them.
2.3 Interest and SLA

2.3.1 Interest and L2 Reading Comprehension

The study of interest has been firmly placed in educational psychology, but it has not been widely researched in the field of SLA (Eidswick, 2009). The few studies focusing on interest and second language learning have mainly been related to how learners process the information contained in the text and its outcome. In this respect, research has produced mixed results. Leloup (1993) set out to place interest as a primary variable in L2 reading comprehension and investigated the effects of text topic interest on the reading comprehension of 206 male and female high school students. He identified factors that could contribute to the differences on reading comprehension measures. Results showed that after ‘L2 ability’ (variable which seems to be more related to L2 proficiency, as it was assessed through a test of Spanish not described in the design) interest level was the next largest factor explaining the variance, followed by gender and background knowledge. It should be noted that Leloup operationalized interest as individual interest and not situational interest, i.e., not related to the features in the text that may or may not arouse interest in participants. As has been posited above, it is rather problematic to separate both types of interest, as they usually draw from each other and in turn influence topic interest. Relevant is also the finding with regard to the negligible effect of prior knowledge on reading comprehension. In order to assess background knowledge, Leloup selected a method of free association as the instrument that elicited participants’ responses, and noted the inherent difficulties in finding a ‘superior method’ that will ultimately measure prior knowledge. Along the same lines, Lee (2009) found significant effects for topic interest on the recall of ‘low-level’ information units assessed by means of a free recall measure. However, the procedures performed in order to determine when a piece of information was regarded as having a low-content value were not explained in the study. Lee concluded that L2 readers should be given texts and materials that are interesting and engaging in order to improve reading comprehension and recall of “smaller details” (p. 21). It may be hypothesized that these types of detail are more related to single word recall but not complete ideas. The present study will address this relationship by focusing on the learning
and retention of target words from two different texts (high topic interest and low topic interest) in an incidental learning situation.

Rather different findings to the ones reported by Lee (2009) were presented by Carrell and Wise (1998), who found no significant differences in the relationship between topic interest and L2 reading comprehension measures of 104 EFL students assessed through a multiple choice test. They acknowledge that their study was limited, among other issues, by the L1 heterogeneity of the learners involved in the study. Also, they note that differences in gender and reading comprehension ability may very well have influenced the results of the study. They concluded that more homogeneous groups (learners with the same L1) should be used in subsequent studies. Acknowledging the lack of research and conclusive evidence with respect to how interest influences L2 reading comprehension, Brantmeier (2006) analyzed situational interest as a predictor of L2 reading comprehension among 104 advanced second language readers of Spanish. She operationalized interest based on the distinction made by Schraw et al. (1995) discussed above. Through a number of testing measures including a written recall task and multiple choice items, she identified five potential sources of situational interest in L2 reading: cohesion, prior-knowledge, engagement, ease of recollection and emotiveness. As her participants were all advanced learners of Spanish at a private university, it can be argued that these learners are more sensitive to textual features such as cohesion, and that situational interest may be more aroused by these features than in the case of learners from beginning levels of instruction because they simply may fail to notice them. With respect to the relationship between situational interest and L2 comprehension, Brantmeier did not find that situational factors hindered or facilitated written recall. However, there are some observations to be made. In her study, only one text was used for data collection, which may not reflect the real interests of the learners. Also, the analysis of this particular type of interest may not say enough about the actual relationship between learners’ real levels of topic interest and learning. In order to grasp the complete impact of interest on learning, it may be necessary to contrast two texts as to compare how learners react to each of them, and to add individual interest as an important component that nurtures general interest.
Eidswick (2009) set out to assess whether the benefits of interest—consistently demonstrated in educational psychology research—could be confirmed within an L2 environment, particularly with respect to reading comprehension. The participants in the study were 56 students from one intermediate and two advanced classes, but were regarded as one group because of similar TOEFL scores. Participants identified their level of topic interest in a particular topic (Animals and pets) before and after reading the text via a six-point Likert scale. Reading comprehension scores and post-reading task interest measures showed no significant differences. There are certain observations that can be made regarding the measures. The text was collected before participants completed the reading comprehension test, which may have had an effect on idea recall. Also, the type of design chosen (between-subjects) did not allow for a true assessment of individual high and low topic interest. Eidswick’s explanation for his findings refer to an ‘increased cognitive load’ that second language readers may have, which negates any effects that interest may have on learning. This is a sensible claim, and further studies on interest should factor in the variable of reading ability, or adjust the level of the texts to be read. Finally, the significant difference found between measures of interest before and after the text was read may suggest that situational interest does indeed influence topic interest. Eidswick (2010) analyzed data from 23 sophomore students majoring in humanities. They had to rate eleven topics in terms of their interestingness and prior knowledge possessed, and subsequently read expository texts in specific combinations of those variables. Eidswick found significant correlations between interest and prior knowledge for three topics. Interestingly, these three topics were the only ones related to famous people. This finding underscores the relationship between sources of individual interest and overall perceived interest and prior knowledge. Eidswick also reported that learners scored higher on reading comprehension texts when both interest and prior knowledge were high, results that provide further evidence for the idea of both topic interest and prior knowledge having a cumulative effect on comprehension (Carrell and Wise, 1998; Bruckner and McClintock, 1985). However, this difference was not such when prior knowledge was low, which led him to reason that prior knowledge may provide a stronger influence on reading comprehension than interest, or that only when interest and prior knowledge were high, the interaction between them produced a stronger (and unknown) effect on reading.
comprehension. While these speculations are valid, it should be noted that the study did not identify learners in the low interest-high prior knowledge combination, which, as Eidswick notes, may be needed in order to provide a more accurate analysis. Interest was operationalized as ‘perceived interest’, or the anticipated interest that learners had in the text before reading it. A measure of interest carried out only before reading a text may be not enough to ascertain a more exact level of learners’ actual interest. Furthermore, for a study that sought to assess primarily interest and prior knowledge, the number of participants should have been increased in order to produce more powerful statistical results.

2.3.2 Interest and L2 Vocabulary Learning

If the literature on the relationship between interest and L2 reading comprehension has been scant, the question whether interest may affect L2 vocabulary learning from a reading text is even less present in the research. Joh (2006) explored the processes by which readers reconstruct the information contained in texts, analyzing how different factors i.e., background knowledge, strategies and interest influenced them. He asked thirty Korean EFL university students to read three expository texts and perform a recall task. The texts differed in textual organization and in the prior knowledge that participants reported for each of them. Interest was controlled by means of a Likert scale that categorized learners into a high or low interest group. In this study, the difference in the amount of recalled information between the low and high interest group did not reach statistical significance. Likewise, Joh found no significant correlations between topic interest and any of the other variables, and suggested that topic interest may be a variable that is quite independent from other constructs. He acknowledges that the group sizes in each condition were very different (n=5 in the high topic interest condition and n=25 in the low topic interest condition), and this may have biased the results, along with the reduced number of participants in the study. Furthermore, it is not clear whether learners read the texts within an incidental learning environment, which may have affected how words and ideas were committed to memory. In a study that tackled topic interest in particular, Lee (2002) sought to assess the effect of topic interest on dictionary look-up behavior and vocabulary learning. She asked sixty-seven Korean EFL university students to read two
magazine articles with topics that had previously been identified by them as being of high- and low topic interest. These participants were described as “middle-class, above-average students, and fluent L1 readers” (p. 41), though no evidence to support this is provided. Participants had to do the reading task at home and keep record of the number of words they looked up in three types of dictionary (electronic, monolingual and bilingual). Eighteen target words in each text were selected in order to assess vocabulary learning and retention through an immediate multiple choice vocabulary posttest administered on the day that participants returned the dictionary use records and a delayed posttest three weeks later. Two levels of L2 proficiency were identified within the sample by means of a modified form of the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency. The mean score in the test was used as a cut-off point in order to determine high and low levels of second language proficiency. A measure of prior knowledge (5-point Likert scale) was also included in the analysis, but only as a means of excluding participants who had higher or lower levels of background knowledge. The results reported by Lee suggest that higher interest lead to higher incidental vocabulary learning, as measured by the multiple choice test. Lee also reports that interest significantly affected the amount of times participants looked up words in the dictionary. However, in order to find this significance, the p value was set at .10, which may not be enough to support such claim. She also found that the total frequency of dictionary use for each text did not influence vocabulary scores. Again, the study could have included the number of target words looked up by the participants in order to perform correlations on those data and provide more accurate information regarding vocabulary retention of those specific words; it could be the case that participants had looked up an important number of words, but none of which were target words. This may indeed be a confounder in her results. Finally, although having participants read the texts and complete the dictionary records may have approached a truer form of incidental learning, it can posit some doubts on how reliable the data collected were; Lee acknowledges in her limitations that she could not ensure that the participants had done the reading tasks or completed the dictionary records by themselves. Overall, her results show that the relationship between topic interest and dictionary look-up may not be as intuitive as it seems, and that interest may indeed be a factor in vocabulary learning and retention.
2.4 Incidental Vocabulary Learning

2.4.1 Definition

The concept of incidental learning has had a place in L1 and L2 research, as well as in psychology. From L1 literature, the influential work of Nagy and Anderson (1984) showed that American high school students know at least between 25,000 and 50,000 (amount estimated through the analysis of a number of published materials used in schools), and that this amount of words cannot be learned through explicit vocabulary instruction solely, but instead, through a process involving repeated encounters adding to the total knowledge of the word. In cognitive psychology, incidental learning refers specifically to participants in a psychological experiment not knowing that they will be tested after a task (Hulstijn, 2003). In SLA literature, Schmidt (1994) suggests that incidental learning should refer to a situation where individuals learn ‘without the intent to learn’, or a situation where learning occurs ‘when the learner's primary objective is to do something else’ (p.16). It is the by-product, and not the target of a main cognitive activity (Hulstijn, 2001; Huckin and Coady, 1999; Gass, 1999). In pedagogical practice, it is commonly believed that a great deal of vocabulary learning in both L1 and L2 is acquired through incidental learning as the by-product of reading and listening activities not specifically designed to promote vocabulary learning (Hulstijn, 2003; Hulstijn, 2001). Hulstijn (2003) states that attention and noticing (Schmidt, 1990; 1994) are part of incidental learning, as noticing is considered necessary for acquisition to happen. In this respect, the difference between this type of learning and intentional learning, Hulstijn points out, lies in the attention processes not being deliberately focused in a learning goal. However, Gass (1999) notes that in pedagogical contexts teachers or materials may not be the only ones leading the focus of attention, as learners may have activate their own internal processes.

2.4.2 Depth of Processing

Incidental learning can also be discussed in light of the ‘depth of processing’ theoretical framework proposed by Craik and Lockhart (1972), who argued that the chance for a new piece of information to be stored in long-term memory is not so much a function
of how much time it is held in short-term memory but rather of the type of elaboration with which it is initially processed. This processing is shallow when it involves the structural and phonological aspects of a word (how the appearance and the sound of a word are encoded), and deep when it involves semantic processing (meaningful analysis of a word, i.e. thinking derived from images and associations of a word). As a number of researchers have pointed out, the distinction between these two levels is rather problematic; how do we know when shallow or deep processing is taking place? In an effort to understand how these processing levels affect memory recall, Craik and Tulving (1975) conducted a series of experiments which led them to claim that it is elaborate encoding between the questions asked to a participant (ranging from shallow processing: was the word in capital letters? to deep processing: does the word fit in the following sentence?) and the target word that will enhance retention. However, what remains critical to retention is the quality of the encoding, because ‘a minimal semantic analysis is more beneficial than an extensive structural analysis’ (Craik and Tulving, 1975, p. 268). The abstract constructs of ‘levels of processing’ and ‘elaboration’ lacked the possibility of being defined in a concrete framework. However, Craik and Lockhart’s (1972) levels of processing theory and Craik and Tulving’s (1975) concept of elaboration evidenced the complexity of the encoding process. Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) acknowledge that there is a consensus among cognitive psychologists that the nature of the processing activities is the key element in memory performance. Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) adapted Craik and Lockhart’s framework and put forward the ‘involvement load hypothesis’, which suggests that the rate of incidental vocabulary learning and retention can be explained in terms of the mental effort, or ‘involvement’ required to complete a task. When this mental effort takes place, deeper semantic aspects of a word are activated and linked to previous knowledge.

2.4.3 Incidental Learning through Reading

Most of L2 incidental vocabulary learning is considered to occur when learners make an effort to understand new words they read or hear in context. However, Huckin and Coady (1999) point out that incidental vocabulary learning ‘may not optimally occur with an activity like extensive reading that allows the reader to bypass (…) precision and effort’ (p. 183). They argue that there are other factors influencing incidental learning, such
as context surrounding each word, the learner’s familiarity with that context and task demands. This seems a sensible claim; in order for a learner to learn a word, it must be correctly inferred first. Then, the question arises: How much vocabulary should one know in order to be able to infer meanings correctly? Text comprehension seems to be closely related to the amount of vocabulary knowledge possessed by learners. Laufer (1997) investigated the amount of word families – that is, words and their derivatives – a learner must know in order to understand a text and successfully engage in higher processing. She suggests that a necessary threshold level for transfer of L1 reading strategies on L2 reading comprehension is about 3,000 word families, or 5,000 lexical items, which accounts for a 90%-95% coverage of any text. When full comprehension is desired, learners must be able to know at least 98% of the words in the text, that is, 5,000 word families. Further evidence for this is found when lower level students guess and fail because of deceptive lexical items in the text (Huckin and Coady, 1999). From these findings, it is safe to state that vocabulary is a key element when reading comprehension is the goal. But, does understanding a text ensure learning and retention of the new lexical items found in the text? In other words, is input exposure enough?

An important insight into incidental learning through reading is the study carried out by Saragi, Nation and Meister (1978). They found that 20 native speakers of English read the novel A Clockwork Orange and remembered nadsat words (slang items mainly from Russian origin) better when their frequency was higher, though there are other factors that were found to influence learning, such as meaningfulness of the context and cognate words. Pitts, White and Krashen (1989), replicated the study, but this time, testing two groups of ESL learners. After they read two chapters of the novel, their incidental learning of the nadsat words was measured, finding that there were small vocabulary gains when compared to the control group. These findings led the researchers to claim that vocabulary can be acquired through this type of reading. More recently, Horst, Cobb and Meara (1998) also replicated the Saragi et al. study using another novel. They assessed incidental vocabulary learning of 34 low-intermediate Omanese ESL learners reading and listening to the teachers read aloud a simplified version of a novel. Learners were pre-tested and post-tested through multiple-choice and word association tests in order to assess their knowledge of 45 low and middle frequency words appearing in the test between 2 and 17
times. Again, small but significant gains were made. In terms of frequency, words occurring eight times in the text were remembered better; retention was also enhanced when words refer to concrete concepts, and when learners’ vocabulary size is at the 2000-word level. This last point suggests that sheer incidental learning through extensive reading may be less effective for low-proficiency learners, which is in line with Huckin and Coady’s caveat.

Day, Omura and Hiramatsu (1991) examined incidental vocabulary learning through sustained silent reading, which was defined as similar to extensive reading but shorter in length. In this study, 191 high school students and 397 university students were randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group read an adapted version of a short-story, while the control group did not have access to it. Both groups were administered unannounced multiple-choice vocabulary tests assessing retention of 17 low-frequency words; the results showed that learners who read the story made significant vocabulary gains when compared to those who did not read it. Although no long-term retention was assessed, the findings suggest that incidental vocabulary learning occurs through reading, as measured by a translation test.

As has been seen, most of the studies report small, but significant gains in vocabulary learning. However, there are factors that may hinder or boost its effectiveness. Context and type of tasks involved may play a part in promoting acquisition. This may explain why it has been difficult to find an optimal type and frequency of input exposure; it can also imply that extensive reading per se is not the only thing that a learner needs in order to acquire all of the vocabulary in a language. Task demands may play an important role in attention processes (Huckin and Coady, 1999) and cognitive involvement (Craik and Lockhart, 1972; Craik and Tulving, 1975; Laufer and Hulstijn, 2001). Other activities such as intensive reading may provide the necessary mental involvement and noticing processes that are seen as necessary to promote vocabulary learning. Hulstijn (2003) suggests that long-term retention of words will be ensured through frequent exposures, regardless of the characteristics of the first encounter. In the present study, it will be argued that factors such as topic interest may also have an impact on learning and retention of words when word frequency is controlled.
2.5 Vocabulary Learning and Dictionary Use

After testing high school students on incidental learning of L1 pseudo-words and L2 low-frequency words Hulstijn (1992) noted that ‘the retention of word meanings in a true incidental learning task is very low indeed’ (p. 122). Consequently, he and other researchers have attempted to assess the effectiveness of cues such as glossing and dictionary use in promoting understanding and retaining of meaning within an incidental learning environment, under the levels of processing and elaboration framework (Craik and Lockhart, 1972; Craik and Tulving, 1975) reviewed above.

2.5.1 Impact of Dictionary Use on Vocabulary

Vocabulary learning and reading comprehension at different proficiency levels are important aspects of research on dictionary use. In a study involving 112 learners of Spanish reading two texts in Spanish while using a dictionary, Knight (1994) found that students who had access to dictionaries and used them, retained more words than those who did not have any access. Knight suggests that low verbal ability learners (differentiated from high verbal ability learners by means of the American College Test verbal scores) are at a disadvantage when they are simply told to guess from context, because they depend more heavily on vocabulary knowledge. The results also suggest that although high verbal ability students learned more words than low verbal ability students, it is the low verbal ability learners who benefited most from dictionary use in vocabulary learning, making proportionally greater gains than higher level ability students. These findings provide some evidence for the effectiveness of dictionary use in low-proficiency level groups. Regarding comprehension, the high correlation between comprehension recall and number of words looked up for the low verbal ability group, according to Knight, suggests that dictionary use does not disrupt the flow of reading in short-term memory, but rather, enhances comprehension. She notes that when reading time is considered, low verbal ability learners benefited more from the time spent on the task than high verbal ability students, showing that comprehension is also enhanced by dictionary use in low-verbal ability groups. It should be noted that Knight based her distinction between low and high verbal ability learners on a median split of verbal scores on the
American College Test, and that this distinction may not be between high and low proficiency learners.

Dictionary use has also been compared to other visual resources such as glossing. Hulstijn, Hollander and Greidanus (1996) found that 78 advanced Dutch learners of French made more gains in retention scores when they were given marginal glosses than when given access to dictionaries. However, the results should not discourage dictionary use, as the researchers note that students in the dictionary group seldom used the dictionaries; when these students did look up a word, their chance of remembering its meaning was greater than the average retention in the gloss group. Hulstijn et al. warn that the number of times a word is encountered may not be enough in itself for a word to be learned, as incidental vocabulary learning of repeated words was found to be further boosted by marginal glossing and dictionary use. Furthermore, they identify factors that can prevent learners from benefiting from incidental word learning. Learners may fail to ‘notice’ the word, or may notice it but decide to ignore it. Incidental learning also is undermined when learners only pay attention to meaning and fail to connect it with the form because they do not do anything with it. They also point out that learners reading a text for global comprehension may have access to a dictionary, but do not necessarily look up all the words. Indeed, care must be exercised when interpreting these findings, as the type and length of text, type of dictionary tool, and affective factors may have an effect on learners’ look-up behavior. Another point that is not clarified in the study is the extent to which a word may or may not be ‘noticed’ by a learner. It is not clear whether failing to ‘notice’ a word implies failing to read that particular word or not being able to read a full sentence because the learner was not interested in doing so. Also, it is not clear whether this process of failing to notice a word is consciously carried out by the learner. If he/she decides to ignore a certain word and focus on other words, then some level of noticing must have taken place.

In general, the effectiveness of dictionary use in reading comprehension and vocabulary is reported in the literature (Hulstijn et al., 1996; Hayati, 2005; Knight, 1994); also, learners may need vocabulary knowledge in order to infer from the context. (Hulstijn,
1993; Knight, 1994; Laufer, 1997). This is why dictionary use can be beneficial for beginning level learners who do not possess a sufficiently developed lexicon.
CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to investigate whether topic interest can have an effect on dictionary use and consequently on vocabulary learning. The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1**: What is the effect of topic interest on vocabulary learning?
- **RQ2**: What is the effect of topic interest on vocabulary retention?
- **RQ3**: What is the influence of Dictionary Use on the relationship between Topic Interest and Vocabulary learning?
- **RQ4**: Do participants in the study consult dictionaries more when they read high topic interest texts?
- **RQ5**: What is the relationship among topic interest, prior knowledge and reading comprehension measures in this study?

The first two RQs focus on the direct effect of topic interest on incidental vocabulary learning and retention. These questions attempt to confirm the central hypothesis in this study which states that words in a high topic interest text will be better remembered than words in a low topic interest text. RQ 3 intends to explore the relationship between dictionary use and vocabulary learning in the two conditions created for the study (high topic interest-low topic interest). RQ4 seeks to assess whether dictionary look-up behavior is significantly affected by topic interest. Finally, RQ5 is an exploration of how different measures that may affect vocabulary interact in the study. This chapter characterizes the procedures involved in the study and the type of design chosen.

3.2 Overall Study Design

The present study has a within-subjects experimental design. The participants included in the study after a baseline proficiency test were 65 male EFL learners age 18-25 who were native speakers of Spanish and were currently studying for a technical degree in
Mechanic and Automotive Engineering and in their first semester of English at Technological University INACAP in Chile. The main study consisted of three sessions, with the second and the third session being carried out two and four weeks after the first, respectively. In the first session, a proficiency test and a vocabulary pre-test were administered in order to gather data regarding the proficiency level of the participants and target word knowledge. In the second session, participants were asked to read two texts already identified by students in a pilot study as being of high interest and low interest respectively, keeping in mind that there would be a reading comprehension test afterwards. They were told to underline the words they looked up so that the researcher could include those data in the analysis. Participants had access to bilingual dictionaries at all times during the reading task, and the activity was meant to be carried out in normal circumstances (part of class-time). Twenty words that were unknown by almost all of the participants were selected in order to test for vocabulary learning and retention (ten words in the high-interest text and ten words in the low-interest text). A recognition pretest had been administered to the participants two weeks before the study so as to confirm that the words were not known to the participants. Topic Interest and Prior Knowledge scales were administered in order to confirm that the selected texts topics were different in terms of interest and to provide further data for analysis. Immediate translation and multiple-choice vocabulary posttests assessed incidental vocabulary learning. In the third session, delayed vocabulary tests assessed vocabulary retention. A within-subjects design with participants reading a different text for each condition was chosen for the present study because by using this framework topic interest will not only be elicited by means of exposure to one text (which may not provide a clearer picture of what learners really find interesting and appealing). Instead two texts with different levels of topic interest will be read by the same learner, which will likely present more clues on how real topic interest exerts its influence on vocabulary learning and retention.

3.3 Participants

The targeted population for the study is formed by Chilean male beginning level EFL students in their first semester of English and studying to get a technical degree. In order to find a more homogeneous sample of participants who shared similar interests and
proficiency characteristics, the sampling frame was composed of students in their first year of EFL studying to get a technical degree in Mechanic and Automotive Engineering in a Chilean technical institution that awards technical as well as university degrees. They are currently in their first semester of an EFL compulsory course which is part of the Mechanics and Automotive Engineering program which usually takes two years. It must be noted that the participants are by no means high-proficiency EFL learners, as their normal lessons focus on grammar and vocabulary exercises from textbooks, and they seldom have the chance or the willingness to practice English outside the classroom. The participants possess at least basic reading skills in their L1 as measured by a compulsory national standardized test administered to all students who apply to the Technological University. They have similar L2 language proficiency as they are part of the same course level in the University. In addition, the C-test and the vocabulary pretest administered two weeks before the main study controlled for general proficiency level.

The sample was taken from seven classes sharing the characteristics mentioned above at Technological University INACAP. Students below or above the 18-24 year-old range were not included in the experiment. A total of 109 students in seven classes were willing to participate in the experiment. After excluding participants who did not meet the requirements explained in the procedures section below, 65 participants signed the consent form and were part of the main study. Then, a final sub-sample of 55 participants that possessed the characteristics required by the study was included in the statistical analyses.

3.4 Materials and Testing Instruments

3.4.1 Topic Interest Survey

A topic interest survey (Appendix 1) was conducted two weeks before the main study in order to obtain information on the types of texts that are interesting and appealing to the participants in the population. The participants in this survey were twenty-four students who were part of the study sample. They were given 20 minutes to read eight short paragraphs including different text topics, and rank them from 1 (most interesting) to 8 (least interesting). The researcher explained to the participants that the interestingness of a test should be thought of in terms of how seductive and engaging the topic of the text
was. The topic ranked 1 by most of the participants (41.7%) was selected as the high-interest topic (*How to Buy a Used Car*), while the topic ranked 8 by most participants (37.5%) was chosen as the low-interest topic (*Understanding the Stock Market*). Moreover, the frequency table showed that a 54.2% of the students in the survey ranked *How to Buy a Used Car* between 1 and 2 in the scale, and that a 54.2% of the students ranked *Understanding the Stock Market* between 7 and 8. The eight texts were adapted from internet articles and covered a relatively wide range of topics. A title and a short paragraph for each text topic were used in this survey, as participants were expected to be part of the study. Table 1 shows frequency results for the eight topics surveyed.

Table 1. Frequency Table for the Topic Interest Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Utility Cycling</th>
<th>Mobile Phones</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>History of the Guitar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>8.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<table>
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<th>Recycling</th>
<th>Used cars</th>
<th>Gardening</th>
<th>Stock Market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>12.5%</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.2 Selected High and Low interest Texts

The high topic interest text talks about ways in which a used car can be inspected in order to assess its condition and avoid a bad purchase. The low topic interest text reviews basic concepts that are related to the stock market and its functioning. In order to ensure their comparability the selected texts were adapted from internet articles and modified according to the level of the participants. Words that were regarded by two of their teachers as being too complex or too technical for their level were excluded or replaced with more suitable synonyms, and the grammar of the texts was kept as simple as possible in order to minimize possible comprehension difficulties arising from it. In addition, both texts were made comparable with respect to style and literacy genre (i.e. narrative). The final versions of the texts were 284 and 286 words long, respectively. Furthermore, an abstract word count (nouns, verbs and adjectives) was carried out. Thirty abstract words in text 1 and thirty-two in text 2 confirmed the similarity of both texts in this respect, thus reducing the possibility that the number of abstract words may have a different effect on topic interest in both texts. The final versions of the texts can be found in the reading task sheets (appendix 2).

3.4.3 English Proficiency Test

A modified version of a C-test was administered to the 109 students from the population two weeks before the reading task in order to assess their overall linguistic ability and select a group of participants with similar proficiency. The C-test administered was adapted from a text about food. Beginning with the second sentence, every seventh word was partially deleted totaling twenty words to be completed. Participants were given 15 minutes to complete the C-test. C-tests are regarded as measures of general proficiency in a language, as significant correlations have been found between scores achieved on a C-test and multi-factorial models of assessment (Eckes and Grotjahn, 2006). The C-test administered to the participants can be found in appendix 3.

3.4.4 Vocabulary Pretest

After corrections to Text 1 and Text 2, forty words were selected by the researcher and a teacher of the students (twenty in each text) in terms of their difficulty, as these
words were thought to be unknown to the participants in the population. Two weeks before the reading task, a written recognition test with the forty items was administered to the participants in order to select ten unknown target words in each text. If participants did not know the direct translation, they were allowed to write down a definition in Spanish. Students also had the opportunity of reporting if they had never seen the word before by circling the word “no” next to each item. However, because participants were not consistent in reporting this for every item, this measure was not considered in the analysis. The scoring system in the recognition pretests (and vocabulary posttests) was dichotomous; an answer considered correct by the researcher, i.e. correctly translated or defined, received one point. A definition was considered correct when it provided a suitable explanation of one or more meanings of the word. Incorrect words, incorrect definitions and blanks received zero points. Participants were given twenty minutes to complete the recognition test and were asked to supply the Spanish translation for as many words as they could. The test can be found in appendix 4.

3.4.5 Target Words

In each of the two texts in the study, ten words were selected as target words in order to assess participants’ incidental vocabulary learning and retention. The vocabulary pretest showed that these target words were practically unknown to the participants in the study (99.36% unknown). The texts were further modified in order to have these target words appear only once in order to control for word frequency. The target words included in the study were three verbs, six nouns and one adjective in each text, and can be found in Table 2. The selection of words was done taking into account the vocabulary pretests results and also the avoidance of cognate words. It must be noted that a high number of participants did not know the target words. This situation was expected, given the participants’ low L2 proficiency level.
Table 2. List of Target Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High topic Interest Text</th>
<th>Low Topic Interest Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to average</td>
<td>to allow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to appeal</td>
<td>to earn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to regret</td>
<td>to issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flaw</td>
<td>profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attempt</td>
<td>reward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gambler</td>
<td>broker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dent</td>
<td>amount</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sight</td>
<td>ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rust</td>
<td>holder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smooth</td>
<td>available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.6 Interest Ranking Scale

After the participants read each adapted text in the study, they were asked to work on 3 sheets containing an interest ranking scale, a reading comprehension test and a prior knowledge scale, in that order. These three sheets were handed to the participants at the same time, and the researcher explained the procedures for each instrument. Participants were given 20 minutes to complete them for each text. The first sheet was the interest ranking scale. The participants were asked to rank the text they had just read on a 5-point Likert Scale. The scale ranged from not at all interesting (1) to very interesting (5). Participants were given a time limit of 5 minutes to circle the number that matched their interest in the text. In line with the instructions given in the pre-study phase (topic interest survey), the researcher remarked that the interestingness of a text could be measured by thinking of how engaging, appealing and relevant to them it was. This was done in order to confirm topic interest preferences for the participants in the study and also to exclude participants whose preferences were not in line with the trend evidenced by the topic interest survey two weeks before the study. For the purpose of the study, the main goal of which is to assess how topic interest can affect vocabulary learning, only participants showing a measurable preference for the high topic interest text over the low topic interest text were included in the analysis. Thus, from the 65 participants who completed the reading tasks and tests, data for analysis was taken from 55 participants. The procedure
adopted in order to do this will be explained in the results chapter. The topic interest scales for both texts can be found in appendix 5.

3.4.7 Reading Comprehension Test

After the interest ranking scale was done, participants were asked to turn to the second sheet and complete a three-question reading comprehension test designed to assess their understanding of both texts and to provide further data for analysis. An L1 multiple choice comprehension test was used as the measure of reading comprehension. Some researchers have argued that free recall tasks produce richer evidence for the understanding of reading processes (Bernhardt, 1991). Other authors question the use of such measures, as these results may be influenced by memory constraints (Alderson, 2000). Therefore, due to the nature of the present study and time constraints in terms of the amount of time required to complete the reading tasks, scales and posttests, a multiple choice measure was chosen. The L1 of the participants was chosen so that participants could focus specifically on reading comprehension, preventing L2 from hindering the comprehension process. Consequently, they were allowed to check the texts if they deemed it necessary. The comprehension questions sought to assess general understanding of each text and/or paragraphs, as learners’ focus was not deliberately directed to form. The target words in each text were neither essential nor necessary in order to correctly answer the questions. Participants were given a time limit of 10 minutes for the reading comprehension test. Each text’s version of the reading comprehension test can be found in appendix 6.

3.4.8 Prior Knowledge of Topic Scale

In order to assess background knowledge of the text topic, the third sheet was another 5 point Likert Scale inventory. Participants were given a time limit of 5 minutes to decide how familiar they were with the topics of the texts to which they were exposed. If their prior knowledge of the topic was little, then they had to circle number 1. If they consider that their prior knowledge was vast in the topic, then they had to circle number 5. This was done in order to assess participants’ perceived prior knowledge and to provide data for further qualitative analysis. The prior knowledge scales for both texts can be found in appendix 7.
3.4.9 Vocabulary Posttests

Unannounced immediate post-tests (immediately after the prior knowledge of the topic scale) and delayed posttests (two weeks after the reading task) were administered in order to assess target word incidental learning and retention, respectively. A vocabulary recall test (Appendix 8) and a multiple-choice vocabulary test (Appendix 9) were chosen as suitable testing measures, because they must be sensitive to any word knowledge development, which can be achieved through a more sensitive measure of receptive learning. In the vocabulary recall test, participants were required to write down the meaning of the twenty target words. In the multiple choice vocabulary test the three distracters for each item consisted of words from different semantic fields, but from the same part of speech, i.e. verbs, nouns or adjectives. The participants were given fifteen minutes to complete each of the posttests. The ordering of items for both recall and multiple-choice posttests was different so as to avoid any order effect.

3.4.10 Bilingual Dictionary

Bilingual dictionaries were selected for the reading task in the present study, as research has suggested that lower proficiency-level learners benefit more from them. Hayati (2005) notes that low-proficiency level learners have more problems when using a monolingual dictionary, as their lack of vocabulary may affect comprehension. This situation is worsened when monolingual dictionaries have definitions which may confuse learners even more (Amritavalli, 1999). However, Laufer and Hadar (1997) warn that a one-word translation in a bilingual dictionary ‘can be misleading, especially when there are semantic incongruencies between the two languages’ (p. 189). They conducted a within-subjects study with 122 EFL Hebrew high school and university students in two groups (pre-advanced and advanced) using lists of entries taken from a monolingual, a bilingual, and a ‘bilingualized’ (combination of both L1 definitions and translation) dictionary. When both groups were compared in their scores in these two measures, no significant differences were found between them. However, when the results were accounted for in terms of minimum, average and maximum scores, it was found that learners with minimum scores (regarded as ‘unskilled’ dictionary users because they did not benefit from the dictionary information) benefited more from bilingual dictionaries than learners with
average scores (average users) or maximum scores (good users), with the monolingual dictionary producing the worst results in comprehension and correct use of the target words. These findings may provide evidence further evidence for the use of bilingual dictionaries in low-proficiency groups, if these learners are regarded as *unskilled* dictionary users. These studies suggest that low proficiency learners do better with a bilingual dictionary, and have more problems when using a monolingual one, as their lack of vocabulary may affect comprehension.

3.5 Procedure

3.5.1 Topic Selection Procedure and Pilot Study

Two weeks before the main study, the topic interest survey was done with a group of students who could potentially be participants in the study in order to obtain information about which two topics were considered to be of high and low interest. Once the two topics were identified, a pilot study of the reading task and the tests was conducted one week before the main study. The pilot study session was done with participants from the population who would not be part of the study. Thus, the researcher was able to tackle issues related to the amount of time necessary for the participants to do the reading task and complete the different pretests and posttests, and the arrangement of tasks, scales and tests.

3.5.2 Main study

3.5.2.1 First session

In the first session, 109 students in seven EFL classrooms were asked to be part of the study, read the information sheet and fill in the consent form (Appendices 10 and 11, respectively). They were told that the study sought to understand the importance of topic interest and dictionary use in second language development and that they would be required to read two articles and answer some reading comprehension questions about them afterwards. Also, they were told that the researcher would need to assess their current proficiency level. Then, the C-test and the recognition test were administered. The C-test results showed that from the total of 109 students, 79 scored between 4 and 10 points and
fell within the 18-25 age range required in order to homogenize the sample. These were the students that took part in the main study.

3.5.2.2 Second Session

The second session was conducted two weeks after the first session. All the 109 participants were meant to take part in the study as it was being carried out during class time, but as stated above, only data from the 79 students with similar language proficiency would be assessed. Due to participants’ absences and delays the number decreased to 65. Participants were given twenty minutes to read each of the two texts already selected by the group of students in the topic interest survey, which was considered by the researcher and the pilot study to be enough time to read a text below 300 words. If a participant finished his reading task before the twenty minutes, he was asked to turn over the sheet and remain seated until everyone had finished. Half of the participants first read text A (high topic interest) and then text B (low topic interest). The other half read text B first and text A afterwards, in order to counterbalance exposure to the texts. During the reading task, each participant was provided with an Oxford Pocket bilingual dictionary (2005) and was instructed to underline each looked-up word. This was the selected type of tracking measure, as the participants were young adults who could be trusted to follow instructions. The written instructions read explicitly that they could access the dictionary if they deemed it necessary, and that they had to underline every word that they looked up. In addition, the researcher reminded the participants twice to underline the looked-up words in each reading task. Prior to the reading task, the researcher checked that the bilingual dictionary contained entries for all the selected target words, and that these entries provided accurate translations that referred to the meanings present in the two texts. When participants finished reading each text, they were told to stop using the dictionaries, and were given twenty minutes to complete the corresponding interest ranking scale, reading comprehension test and prior knowledge scale. After these procedures were completed for both texts, dictionaries were collected and a 5-minute video with football mistakes was shown to the participants in order for them to remove vocabulary items being kept in short-term memory. It must be pointed out that participants were not aware that they would take any vocabulary tests, but they could not leave the room, as the entire study was carried out
during class time. Thus, after the video, the unannounced immediate recall and multiple choice vocabulary tests were administered in order to assess incidental vocabulary learning. Finally, when this part of the study was finished, the researcher thanked the participants for their cooperation and gave them his e-mail address in order to give them the impression that it was the end of the study. This was done in order to prevent participants from memorizing the target words or looking them up in a dictionary after the session, which could affect the scores of the delayed posttests two weeks later.

3.5.2.3 Third Session

Two weeks after the participants did the reading task and completed the immediate posttests, they were administered unannounced recall and multiple choice vocabulary tests with the same target words in order to assess vocabulary retention. As mentioned above, the order of the items differed from the immediate posttests. The researcher administered the posttests during class time (first thirty minutes in each class). Teachers for each group were warned not to teach or mention the twenty target words during the two weeks between the reading task and the posttests. Table 3 shows the entire procedure of the study through the different stages.
## Table 3. Study Procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Topic Interest Survey (Appx. 1)</td>
<td>Two weeks before main study.</td>
<td>Group of participants in the study (n=24)</td>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>Selection of high and low interest topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pilot Study</td>
<td>One week before reading task</td>
<td>A group of students from the same population, but not part of the sample</td>
<td>60 min.</td>
<td>Confirming feasibility of procedures and time limits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. (Main Study)</td>
<td>First Session: Two weeks before the reading task</td>
<td>All the participants in the study</td>
<td>45 min.</td>
<td>-Assess general proficiency. -Assess target word knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Information Sheet and Consent form (Appx. 10 and 11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- C-Test (Appx. 3).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Vocabulary translation pretest (Appx. 4).</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Second Session: Reading task, scales and Immediate Posttests</td>
<td>All the participants in the study</td>
<td>125 min.</td>
<td>-Assess and confirm content interest and Prior Knowledge. -Assess Reading Comprehension -Assess incidental vocabulary learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reading Task (Appx. 2).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interest Ranking Scale (Appx. 5).</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Prior Knowledge Scale (Appx. 7).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reading Comprehension Test (Appx. 6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Immediate Recall Vocabulary Test (Appx. 8).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Immediate Multiple-choice Vocabulary Posttest (Appx. 9).</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Third Session: Two weeks after reading task.</td>
<td>All the participants in the study</td>
<td>30 min.</td>
<td>Assess vocabulary retention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Delayed Recall Vocabulary Test.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Delayed Multiple-choice Vocabulary Test.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.6 Method of data Analysis

Table 4 shows how the different data were analyzed in order to answer each research question. This study had topic interest as the independent variable, which had two levels, high topic interest and low topic interest. The dependent variable in RQs 1, 2 is Vocabulary learning. Dictionary use is the dependent variable in RQ4, as this question seeks to understand the role of topic interest in dictionary look-up behavior. RQ 4 assesses the extent to which dictionary use affects the relationship between topic interest and vocabulary learning. RQ’s 3 and 5 required that a number of correlations be performed on the data so as to find significant interactions.

With respect to the method of data analysis, two paired t-tests (one for the recall vocabulary test and one for the multiple choice vocabulary test) were used for RQs 1 and 2, which sought to assess the effect of topic interest on vocabulary learning and retention, respectively. Similarly, a paired t-test was used to answer RQ 4, which dealt with the effect of topic interest on dictionary look-up behavior, which was operationalized as the total number of words looked up in each condition. RQ 3 required a number of correlational analyses in order to explore the nature of the relationship between dictionary use and vocabulary learning and retention in the two conditions. In order to assess specific interactions, dictionary use was assessed in terms of number of words looked up, number of target words looked up and number of target words looked up that were remembered. Finally, RQ 5 called for correlational analyses that sought to identify any relationships between topic interest, prior knowledge and reading comprehension measures.
Table 4. Variables and Method of Data Analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Method of data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the effect of Topic Interest on Vocabulary learning?</td>
<td>Topic Interest (TI). Two levels: High TI-Low TI.</td>
<td>Vocabulary Learning. Two measures: -Recall Vocabulary Test -Multiple-choice Vocabulary Test</td>
<td>Two paired t-tests, one for every DV measure Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is the effect of Topic Interest on Vocabulary Retention?</td>
<td>Topic Interest. Two levels: High TI-Low TI.</td>
<td>Vocabulary Learning. Two measures: -Delayed Recall Vocabulary Test -Delayed Multiple-choice Vocabulary Test</td>
<td>Two paired t-tests, one for every DV measure Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is the influence of Dictionary Use on the relationship between Topic Interest and Vocabulary learning?</td>
<td>Correlation variables: Frequency of Looked-up words, Frequency of Looked-up Target Words, Frequency of Looked up Target Words Remembered and Vocabulary posttest scores</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spearmen rho Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do participants in the study consult dictionaries more when they read high topic interest texts?</td>
<td>Topic Interest. Two levels: High TI-Low TI.</td>
<td>Dictionary Use</td>
<td>Paired T-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is the relationship among topic interest, prior knowledge and reading comprehension measures in this study?</td>
<td>Correlation Variables: Topic Interest scales, Prior Knowledge Scales, Reading Comprehension Tests.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, Spearman rho.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.7 Ethical Issues

Prior to the research undertaken for the present study, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Oxford Central University research Ethics Committee (Ethical approval can be found in Appendix 12). All the participants were required to read the information sheet that included all the aspects involved in the research. It was made clear that they could withdraw from the study at anytime without any consequences. Furthermore, the researcher informed the participants the kind of information and data that was being asked of them, and what he was going to do with it. Finally, the researcher reminded the participants that they could contact him should they have any doubts regarding their participation in the study.
CHAPTER 4

Results

4.1 Overview

The purpose of the present study was primarily to identify the variable of topic interest as having a significant effect on vocabulary learning and retention. (RQ’s 1 and 2, respectively). In addition, it sought to analyze interactions among the different dictionary use records and vocabulary learning and retention in two conditions (high topic interest and low topic interest (RQ 3). Also, the question whether the number of dictionary look-ups was affected by topic interest was addressed (RQ4). Finally, a number of correlations were performed to ascertain the relationship among topic interest, prior knowledge and reading comprehension (RQ5). This chapter will present the analyses of the data collected in the study. Descriptive data will be reported and discussed when necessary, as well as inferential statistical procedures. It must be noted that in order to find participants who truly regarded the high topic interest text as being more interesting than the low topic interest text, the analysis only took into account participants who had completed the Topic Interest Scale and had ranked the high topic interest text at least one level above the low topic interest text. E.g., if a participant had ranked both texts as 3 in the Likert scale he was excluded from the analysis; only when a participant had ranked the high topic interest text as 4 and the low topic interest as 3 he was included. Thus, from the 79 participants who were part of the study, 55 were found to share similar combination preferences for the texts and as such were included in the analysis. All of the 55 participants included in the analysis completed the immediate posttests. Three of these participants were absent in the delayed posttest measures; therefore, vocabulary retention analyses were performed with 52 participants.

4.2 Descriptive Data for the Posttests

Tables 5 reports descriptive data for the immediate and delayed translation tests, while table 6 does it for the multiple choice test measures. Means, standard deviations, range and theoretical maximum score by interest level are reported. In order to answer
research questions 1 and 2, which attempt to assess the effect of topic interest on vocabulary learning and retention, parametric and non-parametric tests were performed on the data. Non-parametric tests were run when data did not have normal distribution. Such was the case of immediate and delayed translation tests. A number of participants did not score any points on these tests. These low scores were expected because the reading task was done in an incidental learning situation and learners were part of a beginner’s course. Nonetheless, this caused a floor effect in those measures, which may have obscured the appearance of a bigger effect size.

The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was performed in cases where data were not normally distributed. When this occurred, parametric paired t-tests were run with the same data and showed similar results.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Translation Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Immediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Max</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Topic Interest Text</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.982</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Topic Interest Text</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.488</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Multiple Choice Vocabulary Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Immediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Max</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Topic Interest Text</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.989</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Topic Interest Text</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.840</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Immediate Posttests Results

The data collected for the immediate translation posttest were deemed non-parametric, as it was positively skewed. Then, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was performed and showed that the high topic interest text produced a statistically significant change in vocabulary learning as measured by an immediate translation test (Z=4.112, p < 0.01). Additionally, a paired t-test was also run in this case and showed that the difference between the two means was statistically significant (t= 4.949, p < 0.01).

Regarding immediate multiple-choice test results, a paired t-test showed no significant differences between the means (t=1.735, ns), suggesting that the influence of type of text on immediate multiple choice scores did not reach significance at the 0.05 level.

4.4 Delayed Posttests Results

Delayed translation posttest data were not parametric. Thus, a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test showed that the means for the delayed posttests in each of the two conditions were statistically significant (Z=-3.035, p < 0.01). Again, a paired t-test was performed with these data and a significant difference was found likewise (t=3.117, p < 0.01). Data for the delayed multiple-choice test results were analyzed by means of a paired t-test which showed that the score difference between the high topic interest and the low topic interest conditions approached significance (t=1.797, p= 0.078).

4.5 Relationship among Topic Interest, Frequency of Dictionary Use and Vocabulary Test Scores.

In order to assess the extent of the influence of dictionary use on vocabulary learning and retention in each condition (RQ 3), a series of Spearman correlation tests were performed with different levels of data. At this point it becomes necessary to point out that the use of a correlational design to answer this question was favored against a regression analysis because of the exploratory nature of the study. The interactions that can be identified from this type of research can pave the way for subsequent studies that can focus on these interactions and establish causality. Table 7 presents the correlations between the number of words looked up, i.e., high topic interest (HTI) and low topic interest (LTI), and
the vocabulary test scores (total scores, HTI and LTI). Results elicited no significant correlations in any of the combinations.

Table 7. Spearman rho Correlations between Overall Frequency of Words Looked up and Vocabulary Test Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vocabulary Test Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HTI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTI text words looked up</td>
<td>-0,038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTI text words looked up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another series of correlations was performed between the number of target words looked up and the vocabulary test scores. This analysis differs from the first set of correlations in that only looked-up target words were considered. This was done so as to provide a more accurate analysis regarding the relationship between target words looked up and target word scores. Interestingly, moderate significant correlations (from .41 to .54) were found between a) the number of HTI target words looked up and the HTI immediate translation target word scores, b) between the number of HTI target words looked up and HTI multiple choice immediate posttests and c) between the number of HTI target words looked up and HTI multiple choice delayed posttests. Conversely, no significant correlations were found on the LTI condition. The significant correlations reported here show that the relationship between target word dictionary look-up and vocabulary learning and retention is stronger when learners are reading a high topic interest text. Results can be seen in table 8.
Table 8. Spearman rho Correlations between Frequency of Target Words Looked up and Vocabulary Test Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary Test Scores</th>
<th>HTI</th>
<th>LTI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immediate</td>
<td>Delayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTI text target words</td>
<td>.449**</td>
<td>.224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>looked up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTI text target words</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>looked up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

The last series of correlations was performed so as to provide a more specific analysis of the relationship between target words looked up in a dictionary and vocabulary scores on target words that were effectively looked up. This analysis differs from the former one in that vocabulary scores only took into account target words that had been previously looked up. In this analysis, then, vocabulary scores only reflect this post hoc measure. Results in table 9 elicit a number of significant correlations in every measure. Of the 8 correlations analyzed, 5 were found to be significant at the 0.01 level: a) the correlation between the HTI text looked-up target word frequency and the HTI immediate translation posttest scores (.48); b) the correlation between the HTI text looked-up target word frequency and the HTI immediate multiple choice posttest scores (.81); c) the correlation between the HTI text looked-up target word frequency and the HTI delayed multiple choice posttest scores (.73); d) the correlation between the LTI text looked-up target word frequency and the LTI immediate multiple choice posttest scores (.53); and e) the correlation between the LTI text looked-up target word frequency and the LTI delayed multiple choice posttest scores (.59). The significant correlation at the 0.05 level was between the HTI text looked-up target word frequency and the HTI delayed translation posttest scores (.34). Indeed, there are differences in the strength of each relationship. High significant correlations were found between HTI looked-up target words and scores on HTI
looked-up target words in the multiple choice tests. In general, results show that looked-up target words significantly correlate more with test scores on looked up target words in the high topic interest condition than with the text in the low topic interest condition, and that the former correlations are consistently stronger than the latter. A remarkable correlation of .81 between the HTI text target words looked up and the HTI immediate multiple choice posttest scores was found, which reflects how powerful the interaction may be in the high topic interest text condition.

Table 9. Spearman rho Correlations between Frequency of Target Words Looked up and Number of Remembered Target Words Looked-up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary Test Scores (Looked up Words Remembered)</th>
<th>HTI</th>
<th>LTI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immediate</td>
<td>Delayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTI text target words looked up</td>
<td>,487**</td>
<td>,346*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTI text target words looked up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level
**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

4.6 Effect of Topic Interest on Frequency of Dictionary Use

The effect of topic interest on dictionary use (RQ 4) was assessed by means of a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, seen in table 10. The means and standard deviations of the amount of look-ups for both conditions are very similar. Thus, results showed no significant differences between the two means.
4.7 Relationship between Topic Interest, Prior Knowledge and Reading Comprehension.

Descriptive data for the reading comprehension tests in the HTI and LTI conditions are presented in table 11. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test performed on both means reported statistically significant differences between them. Paired T-tests reported the same significant difference, and can be found in table 12.

Table 10. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for the Frequency of Dictionary Use between High and Low Topic Interest Texts (n=55)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Topic Interest Text</td>
<td>10,05</td>
<td>7,588</td>
<td>-0,052</td>
<td>0,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Topic Interest Text</td>
<td>10,31</td>
<td>7,249</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for the Reading Comprehension scores between High and Low Topic Interest Texts (n=55)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Theoretical Maximum</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Topic Interest Text</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.836</td>
<td>-5.305</td>
<td>0,000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Topic Interest Text</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.861</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.01

Table 12. Paired T-test for the Reading Comprehension Scores between High and Low Topic Interest Texts (n=55)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Theoretical Maximum</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Topic Interest Text</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,309</td>
<td>8,091</td>
<td>0,000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Topic Interest Text</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.01
Correlational analyses performed among topic interest (as measured by the topic interest scales), prior knowledge (as measured by the prior knowledge scales) and reading comprehension (as measured by the Reading Comprehension Multiple-choice tests) are presented in table 13. Overall, reading comprehension scores did not correlate with topic interest or prior knowledge measures. Interestingly, significant correlations were found a) between high and low topic interest text ratings and b) between low topic interest text ratings and prior knowledge measures for the low topic interest text, the latter being rather modest. The analysis of these findings, along with the other results presented in the chapter, will be reported in the next section.

Table 13. Spearman rho Correlations among Topic Interest Scales, Prior Knowledge Scales and Reading Comprehension Measures (n=55)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HTI Text Scale</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.414**</td>
<td>.216</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.137</td>
<td>.292*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTI Text Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-.275</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.376**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTI Text Read. Comp. Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>-.157</td>
<td>-.185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTI Text Read. Comp. Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-.067</td>
<td>0.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTI Prior knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTI Prior Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

5.1 Research Question 1: What is the effect of topic interest on vocabulary learning?

In order to ascertain differences on translation posttest scores attributable to topic interest, paired t-tests were performed on the data. For the immediate translation test, the difference between the means was found to be significant at the 0.00 level. The type of text that participants were reading did indeed affect the learning of new vocabulary. It is necessary to point out that neither of the means reached 1.0 (on a 10-point scale); indeed, the amount of vocabulary learning that can be achieved in an incidental learning situation may be not much, as learners are not focused on memorizing words. Moreover, repetition of words was controlled in the study, i.e., the target words appeared only once in the texts. Even though the reading tasks were carried out within this environment, a significant difference was found in L2 vocabulary learning based on interest in text topic.

With respect to immediate vocabulary scores as measured by a Multiple Choice test, the difference between the two means reported by the t-test did not reach significance. The reasons for these findings may be explained in terms of the nature of the testing instrument. A multiple choice test with the alternatives written in the L1 of the learners may be more sensitive than a translation test when the goal is to assess any level or degree of learning that may take place. On the other hand, there are a number of situations that may have hindered proper data collection on this measure and affect its reliability. The researcher advised participants not to provide answers by guessing. However, and as the researcher noticed in the classroom, this cannot be controlled. Learners may give answers without proper thinking, because they know they are not being tested to pass the course, or because they are unmotivated. It may be the case that the testing instrument contained too many words, and this made learners skim through the items. Nonetheless, the direction of the mean difference was expected; in other words, learners did better on the text they found more interesting, though it was not significant at the 0.05 level.
Results on both conditions showed that topic interest has an influence on the number of words learners may learn in an incidental learning situation, findings that are in line with Lee (2009), and Lee (2002). The fact that this difference was only significant at the 0.05 level in the translation measure but not in the multiple choice measure may suggest that learners did not give each item enough time, which could have interfered with more accurate data collection. Nonetheless, these findings suggest that scores on immediate translation tests were superior in differentiating between the two conditions in the study.

5.2 Research Question 2: What is the effect of topic interest on vocabulary retention?

Results of the paired t-test for the delayed translation test administered two weeks after the reading task were very similar to the ones reported for the immediate translation test. Again, the number of words retained in an incidental learning situation was expected to be low. Nonetheless, the difference between the means was significant at the 0.01 level. Learners did not forget the translation of the few words that they had learned two weeks before, and the difference between the two conditions remained stable, results that are comparable to Lee’s (2002) findings.

The difference between vocabulary scores on the delayed multiple choice test assessed by means of a paired t-test approached significance. Although it did not reach significance, it went in the expected direction. This expected direction was also reported for the immediate multiple choice test. In general terms, then, it can be said that vocabulary retention was also significantly related to the interest that participants had in the text, as measured by a delayed translation test. Delayed multiple choice test scores did not reach significance at the 0.05 level, results that mirror the immediate multiple choice test scores. Consequently, the findings suggest that delayed translation tests represented better the differences in vocabulary retention in the two conditions.
5.3 Research Question 3: What is the influence of dictionary use on the relationship between topic interest and vocabulary learning?

Research question 3 sought to assess how several types of dictionary look-up measures were related to actual vocabulary learning in the two conditions (high topic interest and low topic interest) present in the study. Therefore, a number of correlations were performed in the data collected. The first set of correlations performed (table 7) showed no significant interactions between the number of words looked up in a dictionary by participants and any of the vocabulary test scores for each condition. This analysis was performed in order to see whether the overall number of words looked up in each condition would be related to scores on vocabulary tests. The inexistent correlations in this respect suggest that the total number of words that participants decided to look up in the dictionary each time was not related to vocabulary learning in any condition. This finding was somewhat expected, because the vocabulary tests assessed learning and retention of twenty target words. Participants may have looked up an important number of words in the texts, but may did not look up the target words. The next set of correlations performed considered the number of target vocabulary that participants had looked up and its interaction with vocabulary scores (table 8). Particularly relevant here is the finding that the number of target words looked up by participants correlated with vocabulary scores in the high topic interest condition (3 of 4 measures correlated), but not in the low topic interest condition, where no significant correlations were found. These findings suggest that when participants used their dictionaries to look up words they remembered them more when the text to which they belonged was interesting to them. The moderately significant correlations reported might be partially explained in terms of participants not using the dictionary to provide a response, but instead, making use of different strategies, i.e., inferring meaning. In the last series, the chance of this situation taking place is importantly reduced, as only remembered target words that were previously looked up were considered (table 9). Significant correlations were found on all the high topic interest measures. In the low topic interest condition there were some significant correlations but only for the multiple choice measure and were not as strong as the ones found in the high topic interest condition. These findings suggest that learners remembered more words
previously looked up when they were reading texts that were interesting to them. The strength of the association is indeed increased when they read interesting texts.

5.4 **Research Question 4: Do participants in the study consult dictionaries more when they read high topic interest texts?**

Research question 4 sought to assess whether there is a significant difference between the number of words looked up in each condition (high topic interest and low topic interest). The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test (table 10) performed on the number of words looked up by participants in each condition showed no significant differences between them, thus suggesting that topic interest was not found to have an effect on the number of words that participants looked up in a dictionary. The mean number of words looked up in each condition was surprisingly similar, which may suggest that topic interest did not affect the dictionary look-up behavior of these learners, in that particular environment. However, as the analysis for RQ 4 suggested, when learners were reading the high topic interest text the impact of dictionary use on vocabulary retention was remarkably superior. When these two findings are analyzed together, there is room to reason that the number of words that learners look up in a dictionary may not in itself explain vocabulary learning in the two conditions. What may be causing the difference is what occurs when a learner looks up a words form a text he or she is interested in. This idea is in line with the L1 studies conducted by Krapp (1999) and Schiefele and Krapp (1996), who found that interest can have an effect on emotional engagement and deeper text processing.

5.5 **Research Question 5: What is the relationship among topic interest, prior knowledge and reading comprehension measures in this study?**

Research question 5 attempted to identify relationships between the variables of topic interest, prior knowledge and reading comprehension. Noteworthy is the significant difference found between reading comprehension measures in both conditions. The paired t-test results (table 12) suggest that participants in the study comprehended more the high topic interest text, results that are in line with Leloup’s (1993) findings. It could be argued that learners did not want to read the low topic interest text and as a result did not
understand the text. However, the number of words that participants looked up in both texts was very similar, which shows that learners allocated a similar amount of effort for each text. Yet reading comprehension was found to differ significantly depending on the type of text being read, with reading comprehension being increased in the high interest condition. The divergent results reported by Carrell and Wise (1998) may be due to having a heterogeneous group of participants take part in the study. The present study reduced this possibility by identifying a particular sample from the population and performing statistical analysis only after a number of selection procedures were applied.

In addition to the previous analysis, a number of correlations were performed on the variables of topic interest scales, reading comprehension scores and prior knowledge scales so as to find any significant interactions. Results showed that when participants rated the How to buy a Used car text as being interesting, they also rated the Understanding the Stock Market text in a similar way. This moderate correlation found may imply that participants who were motivated to read did not regard the low topic interest text as being totally uninteresting. Another significant but weaker interaction was found between the LTI scale and the LTI prior knowledge scale. Conversely, no significant correlations were found between the HTI scale and the HTI prior knowledge scale. This suggests that learners who rated a topic as being uninteresting also had some background knowledge on the topic. This finding is quite interesting, as it shows that prior knowledge may be more related to interest ratings when the text topic is not appealing to learners. Reading comprehension measures did not interact with any of the other variables in the correlation design.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Implications

6.1 Conclusion

The present study intended to explore the way in which text topic interest influence vocabulary learning and retention, as well as dictionary look-up behavior. A secondary goal was to examine the relationship between dictionary look-up behavior and vocabulary learning and retention when learners read more interesting and less interesting texts. In order to answer the research questions posited, a number of data collection measures were administered. After reading two texts previously identified as being of high and low interest (How to buy a used car and Understanding the stock market, respectively), participants had to complete topic interest and prior knowledge rating scales along with a reading comprehension test. Immediate and delayed (two weeks later) translation and multiple choice vocabulary tests were administered in order to assess vocabulary learning and retention of twenty unknown target words (ten in each text). The findings can be summarized as follows.

First, interest in text topic was found to be a significant factor depending on the type of test assessing vocabulary learning. The translation measure proved to be superior in demonstrating this effect. When learners were required to provide an L1 translation, topic interest significantly increased vocabulary learning and retention. However, this difference did not reach significance when learners completed multiple choice tests, though the direction of the effect was expected. One of the reasons why this difference did not reach significance in the immediate and delayed multiple choice measures may probably be the significant, albeit low correlation found between high topic interest text ratings and low topic interest ratings. This may mean that in some cases although learners had preferences for one text over the other in terms of interestingness, none of them was really uninteresting. It should be noted that in order to find participants with a specific combination of interests (a high interest in the How to buy a Used Car text, and a low topic interest in the Understanding the Stock Market text) the difference between the two texts in the topic interest scale had to be at least one level above the other. Nevertheless, the
positive impact that topic interest had on the performance of these learners cannot be overlooked.

Second, the analysis of the present study showed that the relationship between dictionary look-up behavior and vocabulary learning and retention can be mediated by topic interest. In general, participants remembered more words that were previously looked up when they were reading a high topic interest text, which suggests that the effect that dictionary use can have on vocabulary learning and retention may be influenced by the interestingness of a text. In addition, the strength of the relationship between the target words looked up and the target words remembered was stronger when they were reading texts that were interesting to them, and it was weaker or totally inexistent when they were reading low topic interest texts. Thus, it can be concluded that the effects of dictionary use on vocabulary learning and retention are increased when learners read a high topic interest text.

Third, whether a text is considered interesting may not influence the way in which learners use dictionaries when reading it. However, it is necessary to exercise caution before making any statements on this respect. The way in which the reading tasks and tests were administered may pose a serious threat to the ecological validity of the study. Participants may have felt that they had to look for a similar number of words on each text as part of an experiment, even though the researcher made it clear that they did not have to look up words if they did not feel the need. The surprisingly similar mean number of words looked up in each conditions may reflect this issue.

Fourth, reading comprehension was significantly higher in the high topic interest condition, which confirms that topic interest may also influence how learners understand a text. Also, there is a certain amount of evidence to state that when some learners regarded a text as being interesting, they did not rate the low topic interest text as being totally uninteresting. This interaction, albeit moderate, may imply that motivated learners might find appealing features in uninteresting topics. Finally, learners who were more interested in the low topic interest text may have had more background knowledge of it. However, as this interaction was reported in a correlational design, direction of causality cannot be established. What can be stated is that this effect did not occur in the high topic interest
text. Interested learners may have been interested in the *How to buy a used used car* text even though they did not know much about the topic.

### 6.2 Limitations

The present study has tried to remain vigilant of all the possible shortcomings that may have occurred in the design or during the data collection procedures. It must be noted that this study only approached the construct of interest in the reading component and the ways in which it affected vocabulary retention; other activities and processes may need other types of processing. Indeed, interest is indeed a very elusive concept, and in order to operationalize, the present study selected two texts that were regarded as being of high topic interest and low topic interest. Furthermore, topic interest rating scales were administered after the reading tasks so as to confirm topic interest preferences. However, it was found that participants who were interested in the high topic interest may have not found the other topic completely uninteresting (correlations in table 13), which may have obscured the appearance of more considerable differences. More efforts need to be made in order to separate two texts by means of topic interest preferences in a within-subjects design.

Researchers expect participants to perform to the maximum level of commitment in the tasks they are given. However, when the variable that is intended to be assessed is the one that may influence that commitment, there are ecological validity issues that can indeed affect results. If a researcher asks a participant to read a text, will that interfere with the actual interest that the learner has in that text? When learners are part of a within-subjects experiment condition, they may feel the need to commit to the task in similar ways, i.e., if they are motivated by the situation, they will commit to the tasks similarly in both tasks; conversely, if they do not want to read because they are unmotivated, they may react similarly to both texts. These issues may also have interfered with the topic interest differentiation that was intended in the present study.

In terms of the procedures used, the low scores obtained by participants in the translation measures may be in part due to the number of words that the translation test contained (twenty). The researcher found that some participants sometimes wrote down the wrong translation for a word; however, that translation would have been correct if it had
been used for another word in the test. A more limited number of words in the test might have reduced these events and produced increased scores. Another limitation in this respect is related to how participants underlined words that were looked up in the dictionary. It is not possible to check that they actually underlined all the words. Similarly, the study design did not include a measure of the type of interaction that learners had with the dictionary in terms of how much time they spent looking for a word, or if they really found the correct translation for it.

The present study intended to present some early connections between topic interest and vocabulary learning and retention, as well as establishing a relationship between dictionary look-up behavior and topic interest. Although findings suggest that topic interest may be linked to vocabulary learning and that dictionary use is more effective when reading high topic interest texts, no causal relationships can be made until more research is conducted.

6.3 Implications for Pedagogy

The educational implications that arise from these findings may affect the way in which textbooks are written or how teachers select texts for their students when a pedagogical purpose such as vocabulary learning needs to be achieved. If learners are more interested in a text because of the topic that is being described or discussed, the chances of learning and retaining more vocabulary are increased. In addition, increasing topic interest in the texts may influence the engagement that unmotivated learners may give to the task. Textbooks that are created to reach a wide audience may not always contain topics that are appealing and interesting, especially when they are being sold worldwide and utilized in different countries. Therefore, it may be incumbent upon teachers to modify texts so as to increase the topic interest of his or her classroom. This can be done by conducting small polls among the students, or by simply by talking to the students in the classroom. Even though topic interest assessment can be problematic in terms of its operationalization, students will always have their preferences ready when a teacher decides to ask them about the topics they find appealing.
Situational interest seems to be advocated in educational contexts because, unlike individual interest, it can be manipulated. However, in the SLA classroom, the possibilities for individual interest can be broadened, as texts can contain almost any topic available. Also, the goals may not refer to the learning of facts or important ideas in the text, but tackle specific goals such as the learning of important vocabulary. It is the task of teachers and educators to provide enough and varied reading materials in order to arouse topic interest and then maintain it through situational features.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Topic interest has been shown to contribute to learning. However, the way in which it does it is not clear yet. To further understand how interest actually triggers mechanisms that positively affect the learning process, it may be necessary to go beyond the psychological measure of interest by means of rating scales, and focus on what happens through the reading process by means of recall protocols or online measures of interest (Ainsley et al., 2002), and assess how it affects vocabulary in specific measures such as paragraphs in a text. Children and adults that possess individual interests seem to focus their attention and be more persistent in the tasks they undertake (Hidi, 2001). In further research, persistence should also be factored in as a variable in the equation, in order to assess how much time is given to each text and paragraph and how that affects vocabulary learning. Finally, as research has shown, it may be necessary to assess how interest has an effect on learners at different levels of proficiency. Once the elusive concept of interest can be identified and manipulated by means of more valid instruments, research on its influence in L2 learning will possibly be increased, in terms of understanding how it occurs, how it influences L2 learning and how it can be fostered in specific SLA environments.
REFERENCES


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Tin, T., 2006. Investigating the nature of "interest" reported by a group of postgraduate students in an MA in English language teacher education program. System, 34, 222-238.


The Relationship between Topic Interest and Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition: To what Extent is Dictionary Look-up Behavior a Factor?

APPENDICES

Containing testing materials, information sheets and consent study forms

Accompanying the dissertation submitted in part-fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition

Trinity Term, 2010
Appendix 1

Topic Interest Survey

Encuesta de Selección de Tópico

1. Lea y comprenda los ocho párrafos pertenecientes a distintos tópicos de interés. Puede hacer uso del diccionario si lo necesita. *(Read and understand the eight paragraphs from different topics of interest. You can use the dictionary if you consider it necessary).*

2. Ubique los ocho textos dentro de una escala de ‘1’ (Muy interesante) a ‘8’ (Para nada interesante). Es decir, el tópico del texto que encuentre más interesante debería tener el número 1, mientras que el tópico menos interesante debería tener el número 8. La escala debe medir el interés general que usted posee en el tema, no la dificultad del texto. *(Rank the eight paragraphs on a scale from ‘1’ (very interesting) to ‘8’ (not at all interesting). That is, the topic of the text that you find most interesting should be ranked number 1, while the topic that you find the least interesting should be ranked number 8. The scale is supposed to measure the level of general interest that you have in the topics, and not the difficulty of the text)*

| 2. The Future of Mobile Phones / El Futuro de los Teléfonos Móviles: ¿Cómo serán los teléfonos móviles del futuro? |
| 4. The History of the Guitar / La Historia de la Guitarra: Describiendo la guitarra en sus inicios. |
| 5. Recycling batteries / Reciclando Pilas: ¿Por qué debemos reciclar las pilas? |
| 6. How to buy a used car / Cómo comprar un auto usado: Consejos para no equivocarse de auto. |
| 7. The Benefits of Hydroponic Gardening / Los Beneficios del Jardín Hidropónico |
| 8. Understanding the Stock Market / Entendiendo la Bolsa de Valores: ¿Cómo funciona la bolsa de valores? |
### a. Utility Cycling / Ciclismo de Utilidad

Utility cycling is a broad term used to refer to cycling as a means of transportation. It is used to refer to students using cycles to go to schools, postmen using bicycles to deliver mail, delivery boys using bicycles to deliver groceries or office-goers using bicycles to go to work. In fact, any cycling that is not done for recreation, sport or pleasure can be considered utility cycling.

### b. The Future of Mobile Phones / El Futuro de los Teléfonos Móviles

Mobile technology has transformed our lives in almost every way, and the potential for future developments in mobile phones even over the next 10 years is huge. Some experts predict that the mobiles of the future will become remote controls for our whole lives. The technology involved in mobile phones and mobile communications has developed so rapidly over the last few years that the possibilities for the future seem limitless.

### c. Do Opposites Attract? / ¿Los Opuestos se Atraen?

It is pretty common knowledge that opposites attract. According to a University of Iowa study, researchers found with very strong evidence that people tend to marry those who are similar in attitudes, religion and values. They also found that these were the main reasons why people got married. However, it is similarity in personality that appears to be more important in having a happy marriage.
d. The History of the Guitar / La Historia de la Guitarra

The guitar is a plucked stringed musical instrument that probably originated in Spain early in the 16th century, deriving from the guitarra latina, a late-medieval instrument with a waisted body and four strings. The early guitar was narrower and deeper than the modern guitar, with a less pronounced waist. It was closely related to the vihuela, the guitar-shaped instrument played in Spain in place of the lute.

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e. Recycling batteries / Reciclando Pilas

We use batteries to power any number of household items: remote controls, cameras, flashlights and portable power tools, among others. And as we do with other items that we no longer need, it's tempting to just throw used batteries in the trash, but that would be a mistake. The metals found in batteries include mercury, lead, cadmium and nickel. If batteries are not recycled, these metals can pollute the environment.

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f. How to buy a used car / Cómo comprar un auto usado: Consejos para no equivocarse de auto.

Before you think about which car to buy, you will need to know how much you want to spend. With more choice than ever, choosing your perfect car can be a bewildering process. Make sure you spend some time thinking about what you need from your car. Think about what the car will be used for, how many passengers you will need to carry regularly, and how much money you will spend on fuel, tax, insurance, service and repair.
g. The Benefits of Hydroponic Gardening / Los Beneficios del Jardín Hidropónico

Hydroponic gardening is a method of growing plants in a soilless environment. It has several advantages over soil gardening. The growth rate on a hydroponic plant is 30-50 percent faster than a soil plant, grown under the same conditions. Hydroponic plants also have fewer problems with bug infestations, funguses and disease. In general, plants grown hydroponically are healthier and happier plants. Hydroponic gardening also offers several benefits to our environment.

h. Understanding the Stock Market / Entendiendo la Bolsa de Valores

Most people think that the stock market is only for the rich and famous. However, everyone invests in some way or another. The money you have in your savings account is invested by the bank. Understanding the stock market begins with knowing what stocks are. Stocks are ownership in a certain company or different companies and the more shares you own in a company, the more dividends you earn when that company shows a profit.
Appendix 2
Reading Task

Ejercicio de Comprensión de Lectura (Reading Comprehension Task)

1. Lea y comprenda los dos textos que se le entregarán. Dispondrá de 20 minutos en cada texto. Si termina antes, por favor espere en su puesto. (Read and understand the two texts that will be handed to you. You will have 20 minutes to read each text. If you finish early, please remain seated.)

2. Podrá usar el diccionario para buscar las palabras que no conozca. Cada palabra que busque en el diccionario debe ser subrayada en el texto. (You will be allowed to use the dictionary and look up words that you do not know. You must underline every word that you look up in the dictionary).

3. Después de los 40 minutos correspondientes, recibirá un test de comprensión de lectura junto con una escala de interés y una escala de conocimiento previo. Dispondrá de 15 minutos para completarlos. (After the corresponding 40 minutes, you will take a reading comprehension test along with an interest scale and a prior knowledge scale. You will have 15 minutes to complete these).
How to buy a used car? Evaluating the car condition

¿Cómo Comprar un Auto Usado? Evaluando la Condición del Auto.

When you buy a used car you feel like a gambler: there is no guarantee that the car is accident-free and was properly maintained. The car may have engine problems that are not obvious at first sight. You need to check the general condition of the car and test-drive it before buying it so you will not regret your decision later.

- **Exterior Checks**
  Inspect the exterior of the car to confirm that it is well-maintained and that any flaws on the exterior have been considered in the price. Never view a car in the rain or at night; you will not be able to evaluate the condition of the car effectively. Check for dents and scratches on the car exterior and any obvious signs of re-painting or rust.

- **Interior Checks**
  First of all, you should check the condition of the engine. Any serious frontal accidents usually leave a mark on the engine. See if the cockpit and instrumentation appeals to you. Different colors on doors and panels can indicate that the car was repaired after an accident. Also, check the distance the car had traveled to date. A petrol car should average a distance of 12,000 km/year, while a diesel car should average about 15,000 km/year.

**Test Drive**

Your final test for a used car is a test drive. Here are some factors to consider:

- Check the efficiency of the ignition system. The car should start at the first attempt without any problems.
- See if the brake pedals, clutch, and the gear shifts are smooth and synchronized.
- Check for any strange noises or vibrations coming from the car engine or other parts while driving the car at different speeds.
Understanding the Stock Market / Entendiendo el Mercado de Capitales

Most people think that the stock market is only for the rich and famous. However, everyone is part of the stock market in some way or another. For example, your bank invests the money you have in your savings account. Here you can find information that will help you to understand how the stock market works.

Stocks and Shares

Stocks are ownership in a certain company or different companies. You can buy and sell stocks on stock exchanges. These are located all over the world, and the most famous one is in New York City. You can buy stock in two ways. You can buy shares in a company when it puts the stock for sale on the primary market or you can buy shares through a broker on the secondary market. But, what is a share? A share is a document that allows the holder to possess a part of the company that issues the shares and also to receive monetary benefits.

How the stock market works

The stock market is really just a big, automated superstore where everyone goes to buy and sell their stock. The more shares you have in a company, the more money you earn when that company makes a profit. When this happens, investors obtain ‘dividends’ as a reward. Dividends are in the form of checks that represent the investor's share of the money made by the company or as more shares, enabling the investor to make more money over the years. When investors buy shares of a stock, it reduces the amount of shares available to other investors so the price goes up. If more and more people sell their stock in a company, the stock price goes down.
Appendix 3
English Proficiency Test (C-test)
Test de Evaluación

Nombre: _______________________________________________

El siguiente texto contiene 20 palabras a las cuales les falta la segunda parte.
Lea el texto y complete lo que falta en cada palabra. (The following text contains 20 words
that are missing the second half. Read the text and complete the missing part for each
word).

Energy and Food

Many professional sports teams have recently added a new member to their
organization: a nutritionist. Athletes now understand that food can aff________
performance. You do not ha________ to be an athlete to notice t_______ effect. If you
have never skipped break________ and then tried to clean the ho________, you know
that you need food f__________ energy. Here are some tips to incr__________ your
physical performance.

Eat enough food. Yo_______ body needs a number of calories ea_______ day. If
you are too thin y______ will feel tired and you will b_______ more likely to get sick. It
i____ also necessary to read the labels o_______ food products so you can see h______
nutritious they are. Try to avoid fo_______ that is high in simple carbohydrates, o______
in other words, sugars. Complex carbohydrates gi_______ the body the necessary ‘fuel’ to
wo________, and you can find them in fru_______, vegetables, rice and other food made
fr______ grain.
Appendix 4
Recognition Test
Test de Traducción

Nombre: _______________________________________________

Escriba la traducción, o la definición de las siguientes palabras. Si está seguro que nunca ha visto la palabra, encierre en un círculo la palabra ‘no’ que aparece al lado de cada ítem.
(Write the translation or the definition for the following words. If you are sure that you have never seen the word, circle the word ‘no’ next to each item)

1. unseen ________________________________ No
2. gambler ________________________________ No
3. ownership ________________________________ No
4. saving ________________________________ No
5. dent ________________________________ No
6. guarantee ________________________________ No
7. to entitle ________________________________ No
8. to invest ________________________________ No
9. engine ________________________________ No
10. faulty ________________________________ No
11. to earn ________________________________ No
12. to allow ________________________________ No
13. to average ________________________________ No
14. sight ________________________________ No
15. to enable ________________________________ No
16. to issue ________________________________ No
17. smooth ________________________________ No
18. to regret

19. located

20. supply

21. flaw

22. rust

23. to purchase

24. available

25. leak

26. oil

27. profit

28. another

29. to appeal

30. until

31. reward

32. however

33. attempt

34. first

35. amount

36. broker

37. clutch

38. shift

39. account

40. holder

No
Appendix 5
Topic Interest Scales

Nombre: ________________________________________________

Escala de Interés

Por favor encierre en un círculo el número que más se acerca al interés que tuvo en el texto que acaba de leer. Por ejemplo, marque el número 1 si el texto no fue ‘para nada interesante’, o el número 5 si fue ‘muy interesante’. (Please circle the number that comes closest to the interest that you have in the text you have just read. For example, circle number 1 if the text was ‘not at all interesting’ or number 5 if it was ‘very interesting’).

Título del Texto: How to buy a used car? / ¿Cómo Comprar un Auto Usado?

1 2 3 4 5

Para nada interesante Muy interesante
Nombre: ____________________________________________

Escala de Interés

Por favor encierre en un círculo el número que más se acerca al interés que tuvo en el texto que acaba de leer. Marque el número 1 si el texto no fue ‘para nada interesante’, o el número 5 si fue ‘muy interesante’. (Please circle the number that comes closest to the interest that you have in the text you have just read. For example, circle number 1 if the text was ‘not at all interesting’ or number 5 if it was ‘very interesting’).

Título del Texto: Understanding the Stock Market / Entendiendo el Mercado de Capitales

________________________________________________

1 2 3 4 5

Para nada interesante Muy interesante
Appendix 6
Reading Comprehension Tests
Comprensión de Lectura

Por favor marque la alternativa correcta acerca del texto que acaba de leer.

Texto: How to buy a used car? / ¿Cómo Comprar un Auto Usado?

1. La idea principal del texto se refiere a:
   a) el precio de los distintos autos usados.
   b) los problemas comunes entre el comprador y vendedor de autos.
   c) la revisión de un auto usado para evitar una mala compra.
   d) el proceso de compra-venta de un auto usado.

2. De acuerdo el texto, el chequeo exterior del auto involucra:
   a) revisar el auto en malas condiciones de tiempo.
   b) inspeccionar si el auto ha sido pintado de nuevo.
   c) preguntar al dueño acerca de accidentes anteriores.
   d) estacionar el auto en distintos lugares.

3. De acuerdo al texto, uno de los factores o situaciones que se deben considerar al realizar la conducción de prueba es:
   a) revisar desempeño del auto en camino y en carretera.
   b) la velocidad máxima alcanzada.
   c) la visibilidad del camino.
   d) revisar cualquier sonido proveniente del motor.
Reading Comprehension Test - How to buy a Used Car? (Translation)

Please circle the correct alternative for the following questions about the text you have just read.

1. The main idea of the text refers to:
   a) the price of several used cars.
   b) common issues between the buyer and car salesmen.
   c) checks performed to the used car to avoid a bad purchase.
   d) the process of buying and selling a used car.

2. According to the text, an exterior check of a car involves:
   a) checking the car in bad weather conditions.
   b) inspecting whether the car has been repainted.
   c) asking the owner about previous car accidents.
   d) parking the car in different places.

3. According to the text, one of the factors or situations that must be considered when test-driving is:
   a) check car performance in roads and highways.
   b) the maximum speed reached.
   c) the visibility of the road.
   d) check any sound coming from the car engine.
Comprensión de Lectura

Por favor marque la alternativa correcta acerca del texto que acaba de leer.

Texto: Understanding the Stock Market / Entendiendo el Mercado de Capitales

1. La idea principal del texto se refiere a:
   a) la forma en que ricos y famosos invierten en el Mercado de Capitales.
   b) consejos para conseguir ganancias en el Mercado de Capitales.
   c) comprender conceptos básicos relacionados con el Mercado de Capitales.
   d) conocer los distintos pasos para crear una empresa.

2. De acuerdo al texto, el Mercado de Capitales:
   a) en un principio fue creado para los ricos y famosos.
   b) se rige por las leyes de oferta y demanda.
   c) otorga muchas ganancias a quienes se arriesgan a comprar muchas acciones.
   d) es una gran tienda automatizada en donde todos venden sus acciones

3. De acuerdo el texto, las acciones bajan de valor cuando:
   a) existen pocas acciones para la venta en el Mercado de Capitales.
   b) un inversionista recibe dividendos.
   c) las empresas se fusionan y dejan de competir.
   d) los inversionistas venden sus acciones.
Reading Comprehension Test - Understanding the Stock Market

(Translation)

Please circle the correct alternative for the following questions about the text you have just read.

1. The main idea of the text refers to:

   a) how the rich and famous invest in the stock market.
   b) advice for making profit in the stock market.
   c) the understanding of basic concepts related to the stock market.
   d) the understanding of the different steps to create a company.

2. According to the text, the stock market:

   a) was initially created for the rich and famous.
   b) is governed by the laws of supply and demand.
   c) gives a lot of profit to those who risk and buy many shares.
   d) is a big automated store where everyone sells their shares.

3. According to the text, the shares go down in value when:

   a) there are few shares for sale in the stock market.
   b) an investor receives dividends.
   c) companies merge and stop competing.
   d) investors sell their shares.
Appendix 7

Prior Knowledge Scales
Escala de Conocimiento Previo

Por favor encierre en un círculo el número que más se acerca al conocimiento previo que poseía del tema que acaba de leer en el texto. Marque el número 1 si el tema del texto no le era ‘para nada conocido’, o el número 5 si le era ‘muy conocido’. (Please circle the number that comes closest to the prior knowledge that you have on the topic of the text you have just read. For example, circle number 1 if the topic of the text was ‘not at all familiar’ or number 5 if it was ‘very familiar’).

Título del Texto: How to buy a used car? / ¿Cómo Comprar un Auto Usado?

1 2 3 4 5

Para nada conocido Muy conocido
Escala de Conocimiento Previo

Por favor encierre en un círculo el número que más se acerca al conocimiento previo que poseía del tema que acaba de leer en el texto. Marque el número 1 si el tema del texto no le era ‘para nada conocido’, o el número 5 si le era ‘muy conocido’. *(Please circle the number that comes closest to the prior knowledge that you have on the topic of the text you have just read. For example, circle number 1 if the topic of the text was ‘not at all familiar’ or number 5 if it was ‘very familiar’).*

Título del Texto: Understanding the Stock Market / Entendiendo el Mercado de Capitales

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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Muy conocido</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8 Translation Posttest
Test de Vocabulario

Nombre: ____________________________________________________________

Escriba la traducción para las siguientes palabras.

1. to average _______________________________________________________
2. available _______________________________________________________
3. flaw ____________________________________________________________
4. to allow _______________________________________________________
5. attempt _________________________________________________________
6. profit __________________________________________________________
7. to appeal ______________________________________________________
8. reward _________________________________________________________
9. gambler _______________________________________________________ 
10. to earn ________________________________________________________
11. dent __________________________________________________________
12. broker ________________________________________________________
13. to regret _____________________________________________________
14. amount ______________________________________________________
15. sight _________________________________________________________
16. to issue ______________________________________________________
17. rust __________________________________________________________
18. ownership _____________________________________________________ 
19. smooth _______________________________________________________ 
20. holder ________________________________________________________
Appendix 9
Multiple Choice Vocabulary Posttest
Test de Vocabulario de Selección Múltiple

Nombre: ____________________________________________

Encierre en un círculo la alternativa correcta.

1. to earn
   a) entregar
   b) revisar
   c) ganar
   d) salir

2. dent
   a) empuje
   b) caída
   c) abolladura
   d) tiro

3. gambler
   a) jugador
   b) empresario
   c) consejero
   d) héroe

4. broker
   a) cajero
   b) jefe
   c) corredor
   d) apostador

5. reward
   a) consentimiento
   b) abono
   c) estreno
   d) recompensa
6. to regret  
   a) entregar  
   b) arrepentirse  
   c) acordarse  
   d) construir  

7. to appeal  
   a) contemplar  
   b) retribuir  
   c) atraer  
   d) juntar  

8. amount  
   a) forma  
   b) cantidad  
   c) puesto  
   d) respuesta  

9. profit  
   a) ganancia  
   b) decisión  
   c) conclusion  
   d) logro  

10. sight  
    a) puente  
    b) fuerte  
    c) vista  
    d) salto
11. attempt
   a) intento
   b) lugar
   c) rechazo
   d) movimiento

12. to issue
   a) respetar
   b) conocer
   c) emitir
   d) rescatar

13. to allow
   a) recibir
   b) permitir
   c) conseguir
   d) esperar

14. rust
   a) óxido
   b) dolor
   c) fricción
   d) cansancio

15. flaw
   a) discusión
   b) incendio
   c) imperfección
   d) cambio
16. ownership
   a) petición
   b) propiedad
   c) préstamo
   d) dinero

17. available
   a) preciso
   b) resumido
   c) disponible
   d) restaurado

18. smooth
   a) extraño
   b) concreto
   c) directo
   d) suave

19. to average
   a) promediar
   b) elegir
   c) restar
   d) concluir

20. holder
   a) creador
   b) vendedor
   c) constructor
   d) poseedor
Appendix 10
Information Sheet for Participants

The Relationship between Topic Interest and Language Learning

Information for Participants (Translation)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. It is important that you understand why you are being chosen for this project and what it involves. If you require more information before you decide to participate, please ask.

What is the purpose of the study?

The main purpose of this study is to investigate whether topic interest can have an effect on language development. The pedagogical implications that can be drawn from the results may affect the way in which teachers decide on which types of texts learners should be exposed to.

Why have I been chosen?

This study focuses on the language development of Chilean learners of English as a foreign language who have a certain level of proficiency. It is expected that the information obtained in this study will be generalizable to the population.

Do I have to take part? Are there any risks?

It is your decision to take part in the study. Every effort will be made towards protecting the confidentiality of your personal details and study results. Your name will not appear in the dissertation, and the data collected will remain unidentified. If you decide to participate, you will be helping those who try to understand how interest affects language development. This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. You can withdraw from the study at any time without any type of penalty.

What will happen to the results of this research?

The results of this research will form the basis of an Oxford Masters dissertation. If you wish to obtain a copy of the dissertation, please inform the researcher.

Contact for further information

Should you have any further questions about this research, please feel free to contact me, Marco Cancino, Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, UK OX2 6PY. marco.cancino@education.ox.ac.uk. Thanks for your help.
La Relación entre Tópico de Interés y Aprendizaje de la Lengua

Está siendo invitado a participar en un estudio. Es importante que entienda las razones de su participación y lo que esto implica. Si requiere más información antes de decidir participar, por favor hágalo saber.

¿Cuál es el propósito del estudio?

El propósito principal del estudio es investigar si el tópico de interés puede tener un efecto en el desarrollo de la segunda lengua. Las implicaciones pedagógicas a las que se lleguen pueden afectar la forma en que los profesores y administradores deciden qué tipos de texto usar con sus alumnos.

¿Por qué he sido elegido?

El estudio se enfoca en el desarrollo de la segunda lengua de alumnos chilenos que estudien Inglés como lengua extranjera que tengan un determinado manejo de la misma. Se espera que la información obtenida en este estudio sea generalizable a otros grupos.

¿Tengo que participar? ¿Cuáles son los riesgos?

La decisión de participar es suya. Los detalles personales y resultados que se obtengan se manejarán confidencialmente. Su nombre no aparecerá en la tesis, y sus datos no serán identificados. Si decide participar, estará ayudando a entender en qué forma el tópico de interés puede afectar el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua. Este proyecto ha sido revisado y ha sido aceptado por el Comité de Ética en Investigación de la Universidad de Oxford. Usted puede terminar su participación en cualquier momento si lo estima necesario, sin ningún tipo de penalizaciones.

¿Qué sucederá con los resultados de la investigación?

Los resultados de la investigación serán parte de la tesis para Magister en la Universidad de Oxford. Si desea una copia de la tesis, puede contactar al investigador.

Contacto para mayores informaciones

Si tiene dudas o consultas sobre la investigación, puede contactarme a mí, Marco Cancino, alumno del Departamento de Educación de la Universidad de Oxford. 
marco.cancino@education.ox.ac.uk. Gracias por su participación.
Appendix 11

Study Consent Form

The Relationship between Topic Interest and Language Learning

Study Consent Form (Translation)

This research study seeks to investigate whether topic interest can have an effect on language development. This is a MSc dissertation undertaken by Marco Cancino Avila, MSc candidate at the Department of Education, University of Oxford.

1. I have read and understood the information about this study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I have considered all the aspects involved with this research.
2. I understand that I can withdraw from the study without any consequences at anytime simply by informing the researcher of my decision.
3. I understand who will have access to identifying information provided and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.
4. I am aware of who to contact should I have questions following my participation in this study.
5. I understand that this project has been reviewed by and received ethical clearance through the University of Oxford Central University research Ethics Committee.

I agree to participate in this study.

Your Name: ___________________________________________

Date: _________________________________

Signature: _____________________________

Researcher: _________________________________________

Date: _________________________________

Signature ______________________________
La Relación entre Tópico de Interés y Aprendizaje de la Lengua

Hoja de Consentimiento

El propósito principal del estudio es investigar si el tópico de interés puede tener un efecto en el desarrollo de la segunda lengua. Esta es una tesis de Magister realizada por Marco Cancino Ávila, candidato para Magister del Departamento de Educación de la Universidad de Oxford.

1. He leído y comprendido la información acerca de este estudio y he tenido la oportunidad de consultar dudas. He considerado todos los aspectos involucrados con la investigación.
2. Entiendo que puedo retirarme del estudio en cualquier momento y sin ninguna consecuencia, simplemente informando al investigador de mi decisión.
3. Sé a quién contactar si tengo más preguntas acerca de mi participación en el estudio.
4. Entiendo que este proyecto ha sido revisado y aceptado por el Comité de Ética en Investigación de la Universidad de Oxford.

Acepto participar en este estudio.

Su nombre: ____________________________________________________________
Fecha: ________________________________
Firma: ______________________________

Investigador: ________________________________________________________
Fecha: ________________________________
Firma: ______________________________
Appendix 11

Ethical Approval

31/03/2011

Application Approval

Dear Mr Marco Cancino Avila,

Title: The Relationship between Topic Interest and Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition: To what Extent is Dictionary Look-up Behavior a Factor?

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly approval has been granted.

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project, which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application, you should submit details to DREC for consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Justina Kurkova

Research Office Assistant

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Department of Education
University of Oxford
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford OX2 6PY

Email: research.office@education.ox.ac.uk
Web: http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/