

TAIPEI

北市大語文學報

【外國語文領域】

第 10 期

臺北市立大學

人文藝術學院・英語教學系
中華民國一〇二年十一月印行

**UT JOURNAL
OF
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**
【 Foreign language and literature 】
NUMBER 10

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November, 2013

ISSN 2074-5605



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GPN 2009800685

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刊期頻率：本刊為半年刊

出版年月：中華民國一〇二年十一月

創刊年月：中華民國九十七年十二月

編輯者：北市大語文學報編輯委員會

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編輯助理：巫郁茹

封面題字：施隆民教授

發行者：臺北市立大學人文藝術學院

地址：10048 臺北市中正區愛國西路1號

電話：(02) 23113040-4613

傳真：(02) 23753492

印刷所：聯華打字有限公司

地址：臺北市中正區延平南路48號6樓

ISSN：2074-5605

GPN：2009800685

Nature and Dialogue: The Conflict-ridden Authoritative Discourse of Alexander Pope¹

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Abstract

Alexander Pope in “An Essay on Criticism” glorifies Nature as the ultimate guide for art and criticism. This universal and unchanged guide supposedly shines on the whole world and has been exerting her influence from the past to the present; she bestows “[l]ife, force, beauty” to all people and remains “the source, and end, and test of Art.” However, the self-contradiction in Pope’s discourse on Nature is too obvious to be neglected. This research, based on Bakhtinian dialogism, concentrates on three aspects which illustrate Pope’s problematic arguments about Nature: (1) the prevalence of men of little learning: since everybody is assumed to receive the grace of Nature, it turns out to be ironic that men of little learning prevailed in contemporary England and could resist the universal impact of Nature; (2) the critical rules and poetic license: Pope regards the critical rules as “Nature methodized,” and therefore those rules must be universally applicable; however, Pope also recognizes their limited applicability as well as the necessity of poetic license, which can supplement the critical rules and must be treated as a part of the rules—paradoxically, poetic license can be used rarely, not universally, and the above-mentioned supplement indicates the insufficiency of the critical rules; (3) the problem of canonization: in Part III of “Essay,” Pope canonizes some critics from Aristotle to William Walsh; nevertheless, his praise of Walsh does not correspond to modern evaluation of this minor critic; moreover, canonization usually blurs or belittles the heteroglossia in a literary work and tends to invite the single-voiced interpretation. Despite his authoritative tone, Pope usually presupposes a dialogic context in his poetry rather than isolating himself from society. His complaint of those men of little learning, his recognition of the limited applicability of critical rules, and the problem of canonization all originate from his interaction with contemporary society, not from the guide of abstract, transcendental Nature.

Keywords: Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Criticism”, Nature, Mikhail Bakhtin, Dialogue

¹ This article is revised from the second chapter “Dialogue, Heterogeneity, and the Embarrassing Status of Nature” of *Essay on Criticism: The Manifestation of the Dialogic Artistry of Alexander Pope* by the author.

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From harmony, from heavenly harmony
 This universal frame began:
When Nature underneath a heap
 Of jarring atoms lay,
And could not heave her head,
The tuneful voice was heard from high
.....
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
The diapason closing full in man.
(Dryden, "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day." 1-6; 14-15)

All nature is but art unknown to thee,
All chance, direction which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good;
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right.
("An Essay on Man" 1: 289-94)

INTRODUCTION

Pope's Praise of Nature

"Nature" occupies the supreme status in Alexander Pope's discourse. While Dryden indicates the creation of the universe at the hand of Nature, Pope emphasizes the power of Nature with regard to literature and criticism in "An Essay on Criticism." With universality and transcendence, she prevails as the sole, absolute, and ultimate standard of creativity and critical judgment:

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame
By her just standard, which is still the same;
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchanged, and universal light,
Life, force, and beauty must to all impart,
At once the source, and end, and test of Art.³ (68-73)

Nature is deified: she shines eternally as the alpha and omega of Art, and *must* bestow "[l]ife, force, and beauty"—the essential elements of creativity—on all artists and

³ All quotations and paraphrases from Pope in my discussion, unless marked specifically, come from "An Essay on Criticism."

critics. This episode “is Pope’s statement of the old idea that as God gives being to beings, so He makes causes to be causes, and thus grants to them the ability to participate in His power” (Mason 152). This “must” bears the universal significance that determines the lifelong development of all writers and critics: they *must* follow Nature in their career; otherwise, they will decline and fall in both creativity and morality. Her universality is not allowed to be denied or doubted: all people have “the seeds of judgment in their mind” because Nature sheds “a glimm’ring light” on them (20-21); “Art from that fund each just supply provides, / Works without show, and without pomp presides” (74-75). In addition, the concept of Nature presumes “an ordered hierarchical conception characteristic of both the universe (the great chain of being) and of society” as well as of literature and literary theory (Jackson, “Teaching” 108).

Strictly speaking, Pope never defines “Nature” in “An Essay on Criticism.” He merely compiles what he has learned from the classics, and affirms the necessity of learning from critical rules and canonized works. Perhaps, for Pope, she is too sacred and mysterious to be exactly defined and described, and her vague image in the “First follow Nature” stanza does not help very much in our understanding. Although Pope believes that she is “[w]hat oft was thought” (298)⁴, “Nature” has long been identified as one of Pope’s slipperiest terms (McCrea 178; Brown, Laura 66). From “An Essay on Criticism” to “An Essay on Man,” the variety of her roles—as the mysterious guide of art and unknown art/physical world, respectively—reveals merely some slices of the complicated meanings and significance of Nature.⁵ Lovejoy lists eighteen “senses of nature as aesthetic norm” in the neoclassical age (“Nature” 70) and he warns his readers that they may lapse into ambiguities if they are ignorant of these senses (69). Such an idea may be the source of its energy (Knuth 184), but the multiplicity of the meanings of Nature challenges the belief in “her just standard, which is still the same.”

⁴ The recognition of Nature as “what oft was thought” corresponds to Aristotle’s description of Nature: “That nature exists, it would be absurd to try to prove; for it is obvious that there are many things of this kind, and to prove what is obvious by what is not is the mark of a man who is unable to distinguish what is self-evident from what is not” (*Physics* 22). Perhaps for the same reason Pope never defines Nature in exact terms.

⁵ Aristotle points out multiple meanings of “nature” already found in ancient Greece: (1) the power of growth for animals and plants (*Physics* 22); (2) the principle of a living subject (*Physics* 22); (3) “the immediate material substratum of things which have in themselves a principle of motion or change” (*Physics* 23); (4) “the shape or form which is specified in the definition of the thing” (*Physics* 23); (5) “a cause that operates for a purpose” (*Physics* 35); (6) “the principle of motion and change” (*Physics* 37). His “physics” deals actually with “philosophy” in the modern sense; hence “nature” in his discourse bears obvious philosophical senses. Nevertheless, Pope explores the significance in guiding wit and judgment on the one hand, and identifies her as God on the other—the former is slightly indicated in *Poetics*, while the latter is alien to Aristotle. In addition, Aristotle never attempts to simplify and purify the meaning(s) of nature—he exposes her heterogeneity and multiplicity. This negates the monologic image of Popean Nature: “One clear, unchanged, universal light.”

The Heterogeneous, Dialogic Cultural Background in the Neoclassical Age

Neoclassical literature is usually treated as blatantly didactic, stubbornly authoritative, and impossibly insipid. Bakhtin describes the thought of the Neoclassical Age as “cold rationalism,” “official, formalistic, and logical authoritarianism,” and “the didactic and utilitarian spirit” with “narrow and artificial optimism” (*Rabelais* 37); this age seemingly approved authoritative, didactic, and serious discourse. “In the new official culture there prevails a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness” (*Rabelais* 101). Official culture “is founded on the principle of an immovable and unchanging hierarchy in which the higher and the lower never merge” (*Rabelais* 166). The Enlighteners had “an abstract and rationalist utopianism, a mechanic conception of matter, a tendency to abstract generalization . . .” (*Rabelais* 116). This culture, which extolled reason and science, was fundamentally held to be hostile to imaginative art and literature. So influential and oppressive were reason and science that even the major neoclassical writers—including Dryden, Pope, and Johnson—speak in their works like *reasonable* and *authoritative* teachers who tend to persuade their readers with *reasonable* arguments to follow the *authority*. Imagination and artistic expression were supposed to obey the guidance of critical judgment, the manifestation of “cold rationalism” and “logical authoritarianism.” Bakhtin’s negative comments basically correspond to our stereotypical understanding of the neoclassical culture.

Yet it is hasty generalization to characterize the Neoclassical Age as the Age of Reason or the Age of “one single voice”; rather, its cultural diversity resists any conclusive, synthetic label. The call for order and reason did not prevail as the dominant voice then; at most it was only one voice among many others. “In every sense England in this period was a medley, and one that many enjoyed. It was possible . . . to emphasize not social divisions, but rich diversity . . .” (Hoppit 7). By 1727 “pluralism and heterodoxy in many walks of life were accepted . . .” (Hoppit 9). The environment was “far removed from order and reasoned pursuit of politics” because politics was haunted by plots, rebellion, and disorder (Hoppit 39). Disorder actually prevailed in all levels of society in addition to politics: “Contemporaries were sure that society ought to be stable, ordered, and predictable, yet equally certain that it was rarely so” (Hoppit 51). Therefore, this period “is best understood as one full of anxiety and prospects, each feeding off the other. People, often provoked by changes they disliked, usually sought stability and order, clamouring for an earthly paradise” (Hoppit 495). In other words, those who “sought stability and order”—including Pope,

who declares the necessity of following Nature in “An Essay on Criticism”—exposed in fact the fundamental lack of peace and harmony in all levels of society. No authority could effectively govern this pluralistic environment and settle all disputes.

Common was the dialogue among various voices in the pluralistic culture of the neoclassical England. The dominant literary mode in Restoration England was drama (Sutherland 397), a genre in a dialogic form. In fact, “collaboration and literary dialogue were essential” to eighteenth-century writers (Knapp 458). They emphasized the importance of imitation—which does not mean the slavish copy of some ancient writers, but the creative expression of nature or general humanity. Eugenius, in “An Essay of Dramatic Poesy” by Dryden, argues that a writer must resist “a dull imitation” of the ancients, and that nature must guide the creation of the poet (219). Boileau, following Horace, affirms the necessity for a writer to listen to the critical opinions from the others (243). Enmeshed in “an intricate web of social and political connections,” neoclassic writers produced mostly “occasional” works which were prompted by public events (Griffin 37). Writing at that time was “an essentially social practice, at every stage of literary production,” while “conversation primed the writer’s pump” (Griffin 38). The eighteenth century presented diverse, contradictory ideas which shared one characteristic: “a conscious engagement with social issues” (Cunningham and Reich 415). *Mac Flecknoe* and *Absalom and Achitophel* by John Dryden, *Gulliver’s Travels* and “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift, *Essay on Man* and *Dunciad* by Alexander Pope, and *Rasselas* by Samuel Johnson all mean to criticize their contemporary society. The story of the ancient mariner or the intoxication in listening to the song of a nightingale would not appeal to their socially oriented imagination.

Literary criticism, the response to literary works, became increasingly prominent in the Restoration England. Much of the work of Boileau, Le Bossu, Rapin, Saint-Évremond was available in English translation, while professional critics began to emerge in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Much of the literary criticism in Restoration England took the form of “a defensive attempt to rationalize contemporary creative practice” (Sutherland 397). By 1700, the discussion of literature had become common, and professional critics strove to match creative writers in importance (Sutherland 28). Poetry of all sorts was widely written and “subjected to constant criticism in coffee-houses, discussed in letters and pamphlets, expounded and defended in prefaces and dedications” (Sutherland 154). The pamphlet war in the early years of the eighteenth century focused on the value judgment of the ancient and modern literature, while in the middle of this century the flourishing of anthology and the critical review struggled to establish the aesthetic theory (Benedict

75). Critics did not give orders in the gesture of the cold authority, but strove to invite readers to hear their voices.

The dialogic quality of eighteenth-century writing can hardly be exaggerated. “Writing and talking were closer in the early eighteenth century than they are today”—the distinction between conversation and written text was blurred: both “were mixed so regularly in daily practice that oral conversation took on many of the stylistic habits associated with formal writing, and the written word often was conversational in tone and habit” (Hunter 11). Poets participated in the public sphere and “expected active readers who would respond to their formulations of policies, ideas, and opinions” (Hunter 13), and consequently they tended to assume the role of spokespersons for the culture. Poetry, moreover, “was considered a standard means of public communication, and poems . . . were often the basis for public discussion,” while abundant major issues were presented in verse (Hunter 15). An index of the close relationship between writing and talking is the great number of treatises, in both poetry and prose, written in dialogue form—to imitate “the give-and-take of social conversation” (Hunter 16). The eighteenth-century readers anticipated poetry to highlight the public, social, and discursive topics. Literature and literary criticism belonged to the public domain, and manifested the prevalence of “dialogue” in the neoclassical England.

Bakhtinian Attitude toward Popean Nature

Popean Nature⁶ emerged in this heterogeneous, dialogic cultural background. His characterization of Nature as the absolute, transcendental standard contributes to our general understanding of the so-called neoclassic poetics. This corresponds to what Lyotard calls “metanarrative”: the discourse that determines the validity of all the other discourses (Malpas 24). The most remarkable example of metanarratives is Enlightenment reason, which effectively dominated the particular “under the sign of the universal” and attempted to eliminate the heterogeneous (Docherty 11; cf. Lyotard xxiv). Adorno and Horkheimer also propose that “Enlightenment is totalitarian” because knowledge, based on human reason, is assumed to master the world (6-9). In Bakhtinian dialogism, such a totalitarian discourse always hampers cultural development.

In the official culture after the Renaissance, Bakhtin observes, “there prevails a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness” (*Rabelais* 101). Official culture “is founded on the

⁶ By “Popean Nature” I merely refer to the “clear, unchanged, and universal” power that the poet praises in his discourse; it does not follow that he harbors a consistent and unproblematic “definition” of Nature.

principle of an immovable and unchanging hierarchy in which the higher and the lower never merge" (*Rabelais* 166). With such a principle, "[t]he Enlighteners had a lack of historical sense, an abstract and rationalist utopianism, a mechanic conception of matter, a tendency to abstract generalization . . ." (*Rabelais* 116). In short, they "tended to impoverish the world" (*Rabelais* 124), whereas "[r]ationalism and classicism clearly reflect the fundamental traits of the new official culture; it . . . was also authoritarian and serious" (Morris 228). From Bakhtin's perspective, therefore, Pope spoke for the absolute "official" culture in the eighteenth-century England, with Nature as the soul of a stable hierarchical order and the representation of "abstract generalization."

Pope inherited the critical tradition of western poetics, and intended to develop an all-embracing and systematic theory. His worldview and philosophy presume an ordered universe: "See worlds on worlds compose one universe, / Observe how system into system runs, / . . . / May tell why heav'n has made us as we are" ("An Essay on Man" 1.24-25, 28). The Great Chain of Beings, upheld by God, "draws all to agree" ("An Essay on Man" 1.33-34). Likewise, systematic poetics must be formulated and taken for granted, an opinion that can be traced back to Aristotle.⁷ With the ambition to construct such poetics, Pope was "the last great Renaissance poet, the last poet to speak from an enviable sense of real authority in the country" despite his handicaps and marginalization (Woodman 2). However, such an ambition

⁷ Aristotle, the first arch-critic mentioned in Part III of "An Essay on Criticism," might inspire Pope's ambition to develop an all-embracing discourse to describe and regulate the creation of literary works. Both Aristotle and Pope encountered similar situations in their careers. (1) In Athens in Aristotle's age, "there was ample interchange among the schools of philosophy" (Cooper 130), while in London in the neoclassical England gentlemanly conversation was in vogue: "literature is no longer proffered by men who speak with the voice of authority, but by men whose tone is persuasive; the reader is not being addressed from above, he is being spoken to as an equal" (Dobrée 3). (2) They were marginalized among their contemporaries. After having returned to Athens "as a resident alien" (Cooper 125), Aristotle established Lyceum outside the city rather than rejoining his former colleagues at the Academy; Pope as a Roman Catholic was deprived of the rights to attend colleges, to live in London, and to serve in public organizations. Aristotle's writings "provide the systematically developed and deployed, detailed accounts of the physical, sensible world and our life within it . . ." (Cooper 132), with the aim to highlight "the universal" in the world. Paralleling the conquest of the Hellenistic world by Alexander the Great, Aristotle's absorption of all branches of his contemporary knowledge established a comprehensive system of western philosophy, the system that initiated "the consolidation of a 'unifying language'" from the Bakhtinian perspective (Gardiner 34). The study of nature occupies the most remarkable portion of his complete works. His *Physics* deals with nature, which is defined as "a source or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily" (*Physics* 22) and which covers at least both scientific and philosophical senses—with the conclusion that the world depends on some "unmoved mover" in order to exist under constant change (Cooper 138-39). He indicates that poetry should express the universal ("Poetics" 55). He formulates the requirements of tragedy with respect to plot, characterization, language, thought, spectacle, and music. The power that sets the standard for literary creativity and judgment is identified as Nature: "Nature herself . . . teaches the choice of the proper measure" ("Poetics" 63). Following Aristotle's example, Pope also tried to establish systematic poetics and asserted Nature to be the supreme head in terms of literary creativity and judgment. Unlike Aristotle, however, Pope emphasizes the forces of Nature mainly with regard to artistic creation in "An Essay on Criticism."

incurs theoretical problems for Bakhtin. “In the literature of classicism and the Enlightenment a special type of aphoristic thinking was developed, that is, thinking in separate rounded-off and self-sufficient thoughts which were purposely meant to stand independent of their context” (*Problems* 96). The “organic poetics of the past—those of Aristotle, Horace, Boileau—are permeated with a deep sense of the wholeness of literature and of the harmonious interaction of all genres” (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 5). The high genres present “a single and unified world view” (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 35). This “wholeness of literature” and the “single and unified world view” in “An Essay on Criticism” allegedly derive from the “harmonious” influence of Nature. Pope’s translation of *Iliad* also impresses his readers with “representative, stable truthfulness to Nature” (Brower 130). Nature seemingly presides over Pope’s poetry and the “official” culture of the neoclassical England as well.

Nevertheless, Pope’s view of Nature does not totally correspond to Dryden’s. According to the latter, human beings are the best created by Nature: “The diapason closing full in man.” Harmony and unity characterize the whole universe, and should also reign in human relationships. However, Pope witnessed ceaseless conflicts in history, and also continually attacked and counterattacked his enemies. In order to defend the sacredness of Nature, he intends to silence all disputes in “An Essay on Man”: “Cease then, nor order imperfection name” (1.281). Without offering sufficient explanation about the existent discord and imperfection, he merely calls for the acceptance of the status quo: “Whatever is, is right.” He blames all who question the ultimate perfection of Nature: “All nature is but art unknown to thee”—a statement which contradicts his description of Nature as “[w]hat oft was thought” in “An Essay on Criticism.” The value of Nature depends on her universal acceptance by all poets and critics, yet in “An Essay on Man” Pope denies this universality.

Such a self-contradiction invites a Bakhtinian reading of Popean Nature. The absolute status of Nature is taken for granted and hence emerges as monologism attacked by Bakhtin. The monologic culture “asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 9). Furthermore, unlike the consistent, harmonious image of Popean Nature, that of Bakhtinian Nature “has a deeply carnivalesque spirit.” He quotes some passages of Goethe’s “Nature” to highlight this spirit:

Surrounded and embraced by it, we cannot emerge from it, nor penetrate deeper into it. Unwanted, unexpected, it draws us into the whirlwind of its dance and flies on with us, until we drop wearily out of its hands. . . . It is all. It rewards and punishes, gladdens and torments. It is stern and gentle,

loves and terrifies, is impotent and all-powerful. All men are in it, and it is in all men. It conducts a friendly game with all, and the more they win in it, the more it rejoices. . . . It is whole and eternally unfinished. As it creates, so can one create eternally. (*Rabelais* 254)

Goethe/Bakhtin also considers Nature a universal and eternal force; however, with “carnavalesque spirit” this force contains contradictory elements (“impotent and all-powerful”; “whole and eternally unfinished”). In a carnival, the constant and the changeable coexist (*Problems* 158). Far from being a monological, transcendental, and unchanged goddess, Goethean-Bakhtinian Nature stands with all people on equal terms, conducting “a friendly game with all” and yielding to endless transformation. Unlike Pope, Goethe/Bakhtin does not formulate Nature as the unerring soul of a systematic, authoritarian discourse.

Bakhtin’s model of Nature triggers our reconsideration of Popean Nature. Despite Pope’s endeavor to establish an all-embracing, organized theory of Nature, he in fact exposes the insufficiency of Nature as the ultimate guide of creativity and criticism, and renders her universality as problematic and untenable. For the convenience of discussion, I will concentrate on three aspects related to Nature proposed mainly in “An Essay on Criticism”: (1) the prevalence of little learning versus the universality of Nature; (2) poetic license versus all-embracing Nature; (3) the canonization of classics and critics. In other words, this paper intends to explore *the significance of Pope’s self-contradictory voices with regard to Nature through the perspective of Bakhtinian dialogism*. The historical and social background concerning Nature in different ages—an issue far beyond the scope of this paper—or the comparison between Pope’s concept(s) of Nature and those of his predecessors and contemporaries will be slightly touched in some notes in the discussion.⁸ This, in other words, is a paper devoted to *the problems of Popean Nature*, not to the evolution and comparison of the concepts of Nature in western culture. The demystification of Nature may reveal the importance and inevitability of dialogue in Pope’s poetry.

LITTLE LEARNING VS. NATURE

The Downgrading of Nature

The prevalence of men of little learning and the lack of harmony

Originally the Latin word *natura* means “birth” or “character,” and reflects the mythological image of Mother Earth that allegedly gives birth to all forms of life.

⁸ Readers who are interested in the multiple meanings of nature can find detailed discussion in Lovejoy’s works listed in Works Cited.

Such an image reveals the yearning for a universal, almighty being that can guarantee order and procreation. This image of a life-giving mother is also found in Pope's glorification of Nature (72). In literature, the demand for unity and consistency in a literary work under the authority of Nature emerges in many classical critical works.⁹

If Nature actively imparted "[l]ife, force, and beauty" to all creative and critical minds, then harmony would definitely reign in the literary circle because "Unerring Nature" could never betray herself. The infinite wisdom of God, in addition, "must form the best" and render everything coherent so that "all that rises rise in due degree" ("An Essay on Man" 1.44-46). The general order, he boldly asserts, "[i]s kept in nature, and is kept in man" ("An Essay on Man" 1.171-72); "That God of Nature, who, within us still, / Inclines our action, not constrains our will" ("The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace" 280-81). Humanity and Nature supposedly go hand in hand and share the same characteristic.

Yet conflicts in literary circles frequently occurred, while Pope attempted to defend himself and to attack his enemies throughout his life. The decline of humanity, he laments, has turned man to be the "foe to nature" ("An Essay on Man" 3.161-64). His masterpieces contain the most brilliant satires on all those who know nothing about Nature, and harmony seldom graces his tone and discourse¹⁰. In "An Essay on

⁹ Horace, for example, describes the Sabine farm, which "are not Nature still, but Nature Horatianized," while Pope and his friends "often saw their own world through Horace's eyes" and "tried to shape the actuality to fit the dream" (Brower 164). In other words, Horace uses his own imagination more than he follows and imitates a transcendental guide or tradition, although he does not emphasize the value of individual creativity as humanists. Yet he still acknowledges the irresistible and ubiquitous power of Nature: "For Nature first forms us within to meet all the changes of fortune. She causes us to rejoice or impels us to anger or burdens us down to the ground with a heavy grief" (69). This description anticipates Pope's argument that Nature imparts "[l]ife, force, [and] beauty" to all creatures (72). Nature is presumed to be an active, dynamic force that directs a poet's emotion and literary creation. Such ubiquity is not emphasized by Aristotle, who only indicates the direction of Nature in choosing the proper measure. His career as a poet and a critic was nourished in a dialogic background as well: he valued "the interaction and exchange of ideas with contemporaries" (Rutherford 249)—a situation that also nourished Alexander Pope's creativity. Horace's comments on other poets frequently stemmed from his desire to establish his relation to them (Rutherford 252). In addition, Plotinus also affirms that the creation of an artist depends on nature (102), while Quintilian advises rhetoricians to "[f]ix your eyes on nature and follow her. All eloquence is concerned with the activities of life . . . and the mind is always readiest to accept what it recognizes to be true to nature" (251). These classical critics portray Nature as the procreative female, whose power sustains the life and force of creativity. Pope's veneration of Nature indeed owes much to the Greco-Roman heritage.

¹⁰ The veneration of Nature in western tradition usually accompanies the belittlement of human capability. Most of the major Renaissance and Neoclassical writers tend to exalt Nature above human creativity and judgment in terms of importance despite the humanist affirmation of individual potential. Castiglione argues that an orator must compose "in the simplest manner and according to the dictates of nature and truth" (32), and that nature "always aims to produce the most perfect things" (157, 158), an aim that stands beyond the reach of ordinary poets. Boileau encourages poets to study nature and to follow her guide alone; she "appears in every soul marked with different traits," but "not everyone has the eyes to see her" (249). Dryden indicates that those which delight all ages "must have been an imitation of Nature" ("Author's" 2130). John Dennis, Pope's life-long enemy, recognizes poetry as "the imitation of nature" (270), not as the expression of the poet's artistry and feelings. Samuel Johnson also glorifies nature by indicating that to imitate nature is "the greatest excellency of art" ("On Fiction" 318), and that "[n]othing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature"

Criticism,” he identifies them as “men of little learning”—“Those half-learn’d witlings, numerous in our isle, / As half-form’d insects on the banks of Nile” (40-41); in *Dunciad*, he mocks them as fools who worship the goddess Dulness. Nature as “the personification of the cosmological order” should have assigned all things to their ordained rank; however, “[t]oo much learning, ‘the maze of schools,’ tempts man to go outside his assigned role, to disrupt the inner and outer orders, and so become a ‘fool’” (Brower 198). Later in his life, Pope became skeptical and disbelieved the possibility for common people to learn truth: “Can they direct what measures to pursue, / Who know themselves so little what to do?” (“The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace” 122-23). Little learning is dangerous (215), and it leads directly to chaos:

Some to Conceit alone their taste confine,
And glitt’ring thoughts struck out at every line;
Pleas’d with a work where nothing’s just or fit,
One glaring chaos and wild heap of wit. (289-92)

Some writers reject or neglect the universal truth of Nature and focus only on studying some trivial techniques (“Conceit”). They will subsequently “hide with ornaments their want of Art” (296).

Furthermore, in Pope’s eyes, some dull people cannot learn the true essence of Nature despite studying hard: “The vulgar thus thro’ imitation err, / As oft the learn’d by being singular” (424-25). John Dennis, from Pope’s perspective, can be such a foolish critic who fails to follow Nature. Men with little learning outnumber the true followers of Nature—a fact which Pope unwillingly recognizes and which stimulates the poet’s vehement ridicules later in his life. With little learning, a critic cannot convince the readers with valid arguments, and conflicts become the “norm” in criticism. In a conflict-ridden environment, a critic cannot please everybody: “Sure some to vex, but never all to please” (505). Thus Homer and Dryden were attacked, and would continue to be criticized in the future (458-65). Pope criticizes “shameless bards,” “mad, abandoned critics,” and “bookful blockhead” for their degenerating of contemporary culture (616-18). Besides, he deems it impossible to educate the “honourable fool[s]” (i.e., the aristocrats who get degrees without studying) (588). As

(“Preface” 321). Thomson depicts Nature as the work of God: he characterizes Nature as the mighty and majestic “Great Parent” who wins universal praise (“Spring” 859-60). For him, Nature can restore poetry from its fallen state (Morris 228). The veneration of Nature permeated, whereas the poet’s art appeared comparatively insignificant. However, this fallen state did not improve in the Augustan Age, as Pope’s numerous satires suggest. In the abundant discourses about nature-art relationships, critics rarely belittle the sacredness and transcendence of Nature. Her sacredness stood far beyond disputes, and it might never occur to those critics to resist or reject her. This almighty and universal image of Nature also marks Pope’s characterization of her in “An Essay on Criticism”: she is “the source, and end, and test of Art” (73), and critical rules are “nature methodized” (89). Wit and imagination, which are valued by humanists, must obey those rules and yield to the restriction of Nature-inspired judgment.

Pope pictures the ideal state of Nature, he also observes the chaotic reality, which obeys no guidance from Nature. The best policy is to leave these dull people alone (596-97). This insinuates that the so-called universal, almighty force of Nature actually fails to shed light on some people.

The dubious universality of Nature

Pope's pessimistic comments on the status quo negate his proposal in the "First follow Nature" stanza. Under the "universal light" of Nature, it is impossible for artists and critics to deviate from her "just standard" since this "light" *must* impart life and force to everyone. An ideal poet, Pope also points out, will compose "true expression, like th' unchanging sun, / [which] [c]lears and improves whate'er shines upon" (315-16). According to his argument, no one can resist the universal force of Nature just as no one can escape from sunshine—even the blind can feel its warmth. If Nature as the authority were accepted universally, then "people would fully coincide with themselves, be defined once and for all in a way potentially knowable by all" (Morson and Emerson 219). However, in his "Epistle II," he mocks Chloe by declaring that Nature forgot to give this lady a heart (158-60). His series of satires ironically subverts the universality of Nature. "What oft was thought" appears as a mysterious, unknown power.¹¹

Now that little learning can bewilder people and separate them from this "universal light," then the universality of Nature appears quite dubious and problematic. Probably trying to mend his arguments of Nature, he owes the

¹¹ Pope's discourse on the significance of Nature brought problems, as illustrated in the inconsistency in his description of this "source and test of art"—she is "[w]hat oft was thought" in "An Essay on Criticism," but becomes unknown to mundane people in "An Essay on Man." Pope's anger towards his contemporary society exposes the absence of a truly universal power, which may guarantee the social harmony in general and the poet's creativity in particular. This longing for nature "is a desire for something in visible retreat"; writers "who grew up during Pope's ascendancy felt strongly that something was amiss" (Morris 229). In other words, Nature was not unanimously praised or followed in the eighteenth century—otherwise, Pope would find no target to satirize. Ironically, some interpretations of Nature treat her as part of humanity—interpretations that Pope also proposes ("An Essay on Man" 1.171-72)—and consequently render her significance all the more problematic and controversial. The eighteenth-century readers "could agree with Pope that Nature and Homer were the same, because they shared a belief in the unchanging characteristics of human beings" and in "a stable order in the nature of things" (Brower 106-07); Nature means "that which is universal and unchanging in human experience" (Cunningham and Reich 434); Hammond points out that "by 'Nature' Pope primarily means 'how the world is' or 'how human beings behave'" (156)—all these interpretations of Nature contradict the all-too-evident fallen state of humanity. If Nature were "the unchanging characteristics of human beings," "how the world is," or "how human beings behave," then Pope's basic tenets in "An Essay on Man," his attack on the corruption of humanity, and his lament for the decline of culture would become unreasonable and farcical. Thence the concept of Nature falls into a paradox: the identification of Nature as a feature of humanity sets her to be the target of mockery and praise simultaneously, and reminds us of Bakhtin's description of Nature mentioned earlier. This challenges Dryden's declaration of the harmony of Nature and of the "diapason closing full in man." The neo-classical age was not actually governed by harmonious Nature; the diverse explications of her meanings did not reach a universal consensus in all details.

prevalence of little learning to men's ignorance of Nature in "An Essay on Man": "All nature is but art unknown to thee" (1.289). If human beings cannot understand Nature, however, they naturally cannot follow this "universal" standard, and thence their deviation from her guidance should not be blamed. After all, "[w]hat can we reason but from what we know" ("An Essay on Man" 1.18)? Pope's defense of Nature still fails to reconcile the universality of Nature and man's inability to follow her. His lament of the dominance of men of little learning downgrades the power of Nature and renders her at the mercy of little learning. If the power of Nature prevailed, then no one would feel vexed under her light. The monologic and absolute status of Nature is disrupted due to the existence of men of little learning. The more powerful Pope's attack toward those men of little learning is, the more dubious the universality and power of Nature appear.

Pope's Pride: His Deviation from Nature

In addition, Pope never explains why it is possible for his enemies, such as Dennis, to deviate from the source and end of Art. Perhaps their blindness to the universal light of Nature derives from their little learning, and will consequently lead to pride (201-04). If it is indeed Nature's will to leave dull people alone (588, 596-96), then Pope violates this will by continually attacking Dennis and all his "foolish" enemies. Theoretically, only Nature can "punish" the ignorantly proud writers: "Nature to all things fix'd the limits fit, / And wisely curb'd proud man's pretending wit" (52-53). Like God, Nature can actively determine the order of all things and humble the proud people. Yet Pope, presuming himself as Nature, tries hard to fight against the "fools" as if Nature herself were unable to do her job. He speaks in a tone in which he is very much at home with Nature, and she is definitely on his side (Brower 199).

This self-appointed surrogate of the "universal light," nevertheless, either commits the same error as his victims do or fails to recognize their merits. He considers that "man's as perfect as he ought" ("An Essay on Man" 1.70), but his fierce satires never "respect" his enemies as God's perfect creation. He blames the proud people who "[c]all imperfection what thou fanci'st such" ("An Essay on Man" 1.115), and who considers that all creatures are created for their own benefit ("An Essay on Man" 3.27-46), yet his derision of the "dull" critics assumes the same pride. Partial and biased is Pope's criticism of Charles II, the Britain monarch who is blamed for bringing the corruption and ecline of culture (534-37). In fact, the king encouraged the study of science and patronized artists. Charles "was certainly a connoisseur of wit and humor and raillery in verse and prose, and he was by no means insensitive to the

prestige that his poets could confer upon the monarchy . . .” (Sutherland 154). In the universal light of Nature, moreover, theatrical degeneration and religious conflicts should not have happened as Pope criticizes (540-43; 546-49). If Charles II should be blamed, then Nature evidently fails to grace the king with “[l]ife, force, and beauty.” Pope’s prejudice perverts the basic principle of criticism: “In all you speak let Truth and Candour shine” (563). In “An Essay on Man,” he shows that “reason, possessed by pride, issues in the closure of the divine and an alienation from nature . . .” (Jackson, “Teaching” 103). Pope urges critics to avoid pride, but throughout his life his mockery of his enemies exposes his pride, as he blatantly declares:

So proud, I am no slave:
So impudent, I own myself no knave:
So odd, my country’s ruin makes me grave.
Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see
Men not afraid of God, afraid of me:
Safe from the bar, the pulpit, and the throne,
Yet touched and shamed by ridicule alone. (“Dialogue II” 205-11)

Pope takes pride in satirizing men of little learning, a declaration of his independent critical thinking which approximates arrogance. With such an announcement Pope elevates himself even higher than God in terms of the judgment of his “foolish” and proud enemies. This is what he attacks in “An Essay on Man”: “In pride, in reas’ning pride, our error lies; / All quit their sphere and rush into the skies!” (1. 123-24). His voice “is not detached from but entangled with the audience as it participates in the very follies it purports to criticize” (Bellanca 64). Although Fenner avers that the unity of “An Essay on Criticism” is achieved though the theme of attacking pride (236-37), Pope does betray such a unity and show his pride by his vehement criticism of those men of “little learning”—he exposes his own pride more than he attacks the “pride” of his enemies. Pope the critic contradicts his own argument and assumes himself the role of the ultimate judge—a situation that upsets the so-called all-powerful and all-embracing Nature. Auden recognizes Pope’s inability to follow Nature: Pope

was a snob and a social climber, who lied about his ancestry and cooked his correspondence; he was fretful and demanded constant attention, he was sly, he was mean, he was greedy, he was vain, touchy, and worldly while posing as being indifferent to the world and to criticism; he was not even a good conversationalist. (208-09)

Most of Pope’s satirical discourses arise from his dissatisfaction with the status quo (“my country’s ruin makes me grave”). He wrote much of his great poetry “from an anti-establishment stance, from a position of self-righteous Achillean defiance of

authority. Pope saw himself, in his role as Horatian satirist, as an Achillean warrior . . ." (Shankman 70). He intended his satire as a "supplement to the public laws" (Baines 150). This is to "position himself as a kind of superior magistrate, acting outside the limited ethics of the law"; "An Essay on Criticism" in fact "enacts a kind of social judgment" (Baines 151). He was even regarded as the first poet of political opposition in English literature (Erskine-Hill 135). Nevertheless, his morality did not qualify him as the perfect incarnate of Nature or God.¹² His self-righteousness attests to his own deviation from Nature and from his ideal. In his own words, an ideal critic is "a soul exempt from pride; / And love to praise, with reason on his side" (641-42); sour or severe criticisms should be avoided since "[t]o err is human, to forgive, divine" (525). Oddly enough, his funny caricature of Dennis (267-84) demonstrates that the poet who asserts the importance of following Nature and of maintaining modesty also proudly transgresses his own regulations. His complaint of the dull critics and his lament of the cultural decline do not vindicate his ways to men, but expose the imperfection of humanity and the limitation of Nature. What truly guided his writing, consequently, is not Nature but his "dialogues" with his friends and foes.

As Pope mocks his foes, therefore, he also invites self-mockery unawares. He assumes Nature and human beings to be God's perfect creation, but his eagerness to take the role of Nature exposes his own deficiencies in both morality and ideal. He laughs at poor poets and critics, not accepting that he can be laughed at as well. For Bakhtin, "carnival does not know footlight, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators"; "everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people"—consequently, it has "a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world . . ." (*Rabelais* 7). Contrary to his intention, Pope's description of Nature unintentionally negates her universal power, and thus carries the carnivalesque mark.

Pope's Laughter toward Dull Poets

Of course Pope does not palpably devote himself to carnival writing like Rabelais. In "An Essay on Criticism," the sparkle of carnival flashes now and then, and shows Pope's sense of humor seldom found in his later works. He continues to

¹² Pope was viewed as "hypocritical in his attitude toward money"—he earned money by publishing his translation of Homer, but he condemned those who wrote for money as well (Ingrassia 176). As the first English writer to achieve a comfortable independence from the business of marketing his own poetry and translation, he "soon became an astute manipulator of audience and opportunity" (Nicholson 77). His letters during the time when translating Homer are filled not with the writing of poetry, but the selling of his works (Ingrassia 181). Poetry eventually justified the money he earned (Ingrassia 183).

attack “dull” poets throughout his life by poking fun at them. For example, he “parodies” their poetry:

Where’er you find “the cooling western breeze,”
In the next line, it “whispers thro’ the trees” ;
If crystal streams “with pleasing murmurs creep,”
The reader’s threaten’d (not in vain) with “sleep” (350-53)

This tricky passage emanates carnivalesque flavor: Pope mocks awkward poets by “quoting” their words. With his arrangement, the clichés become imbedded in Pope’s satire, which becomes a double-voiced discourse. Bakhtin indicates that every genre has “its own parodying and travesty double, its own comic-ironic contre-partie” (“From the Prehistory” 53). As he argues, parody is “an intentional dialogized hybrid” (“From the Prehistory” 76) and “the creation of a decrowning double” (*Problems* 127). It is not a dialogue like that in narration but “a dialogue between points of view” (“From the Prehistory” 76). To laugh at the poor language, in this case, can hardly be separated from self-teasing. “The direct and serious word was revealed . . . only after it had become the laughing image of that word . . .” (“From the Prehistory” 56). The “truth” about the writers of little learning is laid bare in Pope’s mimicry of their words. Parody brings laughter and criticism as well, and it forces men to experience the truth “that is not otherwise captured in them” (“From the Prehistory” 59). The satirical effect of Pope’s mimicry becomes more impressive and powerful than that of direct condemnation.

Pope’s carnivalesque passage, nevertheless, lacks the positive side of parody emphasized by Bakhtin. For Bakhtin, parody is free from nihilistic denial: “[p]arodic-travesty literature introduces the permanent corrective of laughter, of a critique on the one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word . . .” (“From the Prehistory” 55). It shows “the corrective of reality” which is “*too contradictory and heteroglot* to be fit into a high and straightforward genre” (“From the Prehistory” 55). “Pope is posing as a healer, but his satires are often motivated by vengeful spite” (Canfield 75). Pope, in other words, worked as a *pharmakeus* (a magician), who used the *pharmakon*, a drug that is both remedy and poison at the same time. It is “the dangerous supplement; it suggests that no one vision, no one word will ever suffice, not Pope’s, not ours” (Canfield 79). He pronounced the “faults” of his foes and the necessity of following Nature, but he did not really care whether they took his advice or not. His life-long hatred of and conflicts with John Dennis, Lewis Theobald, and Colley Cibber manifest his narrow-mindedness: his attack, far from defending Nature, amounts to nothing but a means to humiliate his enemies. Yet, for Bakhtin, parody “was not, of course, a naked rejection of the parodied object. Everything has its parody, that is, its laughing aspect, for everything is reborn and renewed through

death" (*Problems* 127). "Parody undermines not authority in principle but only authority with pretensions to be timeless and absolute" (Morson and Emerson 435). In "An Essay on Criticism," Pope shows no sign of "renewing" his victims; what they are supposed to do is to follow his instructions unconditionally. Actually, he intends to establish his own authority as the spokesman of Nature, an intention that drives him toward monologism.

Carnival is essentially incompatible with Popean Nature. In Bakhtinian terms, Pope sets Nature as a monologic, centripetal force. He praises her as an unerring goddess, who bequeaths life and beauty to everybody in her "clear, unchanged, and universal light." He hopes to impose this ultimate guide on all poets and critics, and to offer a once-for-all solution to all literary disputes. Yet carnival demonstrates a totally different worldview: it celebrates "joyful relativity" which rejects rationality, seriousness, absolutism, and dogmatism (*Problems* 107). Dual images abound in the combination of contradictory elements: the sacred and the profane, the lofty and the low, the great and the insignificant, the wise and the fool (*Problems* 123). It is "the festival of all-annihilating and all-renewing time" (*Problems* 124), and therefore it contains more than one meaning and refuses to be finalized (*Rabelais* 218). Popean Nature, alien to carnival, will necessarily be downgraded and subverted in this unfinalized, indeterminate festival. To some extent Pope carnivalizes Nature: he exalts her as the universal, ultimate guide for all poets and critics, but he also exposes her inability to guide men of little learning and to reconcile conflicts. He pokes fun at dull poets, yet the language of his mockery is found to "contain" their voices and anticipates no harmony in general humanity. Though he exalts the universal influences of Nature, he himself fails to behave as a generous and humble critic toward his enemies—an image which Pope proposes in "An Essay on Criticism": Nature-inspired critics can "gladly praise the merit of a foe" (638) and be "exempt from pride" (641). Still, his unintentional subversion of Nature arouses no laughter, while his attack on his enemies brings no renewal. His argument is generally accompanied by a serious, one-sided tone, not by the hearty, rejuvenating carnival laughter.

POETIC LICENSES VS. NATURE/RULES

... the first Almighty Cause
Acts not by partial but by gen'ral laws:
Th' exceptions few; some change since all began;
And what created perfect? ("An Essay on Man" l. 145-48)

The Authority of Man-made Rules

The recognition of Nature as a universal force and standard cannot practically guide poets and critics in their writing; therefore, Pope offers concrete methods for them to follow: to study Homer (classics) day and night¹³, and to obey the critical rules developed by continental critics. Nature is restrained only by the law that she has ordained (90-91). In other words, she will remain consistent and never contradict herself; all who follow her just standard will never betray this harmonious "norm." Proclaiming Nature as his ultimate ideal, Pope intends to formulate a systematic and consistent discourse and to put his arguments into practice. Since Nature remains unchanged and stable, creativity for Pope aims not at exploring some unknown field or highlighting some revolutionary ideas. Her image corresponds to Bakhtin's description of authority:

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. (Bakhtin, "Discourse 342)

In this light the "First follow Nature" episode functions as an authoritative discourse. Such a discourse "demands our unconditional allegiance," refuses to merge with diverse voices, and assumes itself pure and complete; in Bakhtin's words, "one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it" ("Discourse" 343). Since wit (poetic imagination), which Pope compares to Pegasus, "[m]ay boldly deviate from the common track" (151), it must be restrained by critical judgment. In order to regulate literary expression, theorists have devised so-called "critical rules," and to copy

¹³ The identification of Homer as Nature can be traced back to the Tudor era. For Tudor writers, imitation signified (1) the copying of other writing, and (2) representation of nature, and modern accounts "often describe the transition from medieval to Renaissance poetics as a shift from a rhetorically based imitation to an Aristotelian understanding of mimesis. . . . [Yet] the two meanings of imitation . . . [are] always present in Tudor aesthetic discourse and always in dialogue with each other" (Hulse 29). Learning from Nature/Homer was already a dialogic concept in Renaissance.

Nature, Pope asserts, is to obey these rules (140), which are “nature methodized” (89)¹⁴. In other words, the rules must be worshipped as universal, unchanged, and monologic as Nature.

The identification of the aesthetic rules as the universal Nature was propelled by the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century rationalistic philosophy (Bate 29). Classicism assumed that the universal that comprises the absolute standard of taste may be grasped by human reason; this standard is to be achieved by “a proper use of methods and of rules” (Bate 27). It is essentially a humanist view to treat Nature and critical rules as the same. It affirms the potential of human capacity indirectly by assuming that those man-made rules can match transcendental Nature. Paradoxically, Pope calls for the respect for and practice of the man-made rules, which are treated as Nature herself, because he does not believe that poets by nature can follow Nature. His ambiguous attitude toward human potential coexists with that toward Nature: in Pope’s eyes the continental critics followed Nature actively, while the Britons rejected it. Nature/rules did not prevail in England at all.

The Subversion of Popean Nature/Rules

Yet the sacredness or transcendence of the man-made rules may bring more problems than solutions. Those rules, nonexistent in ancient Greece and Rome, were gradually developed based on interpretations of the classics. Aristotle mentions some reasonable arrangement of time and place in a theater, but he neither prescribes the so-called “three unities” nor renders them absolute and unchanged. Horace suggests some tips for a creative writer: decorum in language and style, the convincing portrayal of characters, and the learning from the critical opinions of mentors. He does not conceive his suggestions as the equal of an absolute aesthetic standard, either. Even Corneille, in his discussion of the three unities, advises critics not to be too severe in maintaining these critical rules. He humbly states that his readers may reject his opinions (212). Samuel Johnson, moreover, insinuates the disparity between nature and the three unities: those who follow the rules deserve to be applauded, but “the greatest graces of a play are to copy nature and instruct life” (“Preface” 327). He

¹⁴ The identification of Nature as the governing principle can be traced back to Aristotle. Although Pope does not accept all the various meanings of Nature found by Aristotle, at least both treat her as some transcendental, universal, ultimate ruling power. “Things ‘have a nature’ which have [sic] a principle of this kind” (*Physics* 22). Aristotle intends to find the “unmoved” principle behind or beyond the mutability of the world. Following Anaxagoras, he proposes that “Mind is impassive and unmixed . . . for it could cause motion in this sense only by being itself unmoved, and have supreme control only by being unmixed” (*Physics* 144). He emphasizes the importance of the essence “that which primarily imparts motion is unmoved” (*Physics* 147). Pope basically follows Aristotle’s attempt to grasp the “unmoved” and the “universal”—especially with respect to literary creativity and judgment—yet neither of them can actually simplify and unify the various meanings of Nature, the so-called “unmoved” mover.

does not consider the three unities absolute: the action on the stage is not supposed to be real, and “the unities of time and place are not essential to a just drama” (“Preface” 327). After all, those rules “have given more trouble to the poet, than pleasure to the auditor” (“Preface” 325).

Indeed, critical rules cannot explain and guide everything in creative writing: “Some beauties yet no precepts can declare” (141). Pope warns critics not to stick to the rules: “Neglect the rules each verbal critic lays, / For not to know some trifles is a praise” (261-62). This warning ironically denies the correspondence of Nature and rules. In the all-embracing grace of Nature, “trifles” do not exist and nothing should be neglected. In addition, he maintains,

If, where the rules not far enough extend,
(Since rules were made but to promote their end)
Some lucky license answers to the full
Th’intent proposed, that license is a rule. (146-49)

So evident is Pope’s self-contradiction in his presumption that the rules cannot extend “far enough,” and that licenses are required to supplement the rules. When a poet “snatch[es] a grace beyond the reach of art” (155), this poetical license, though not regulated in the rules, must still be respected as Nature/rule. Pope intends to incorporate the irregularities in literary creation to the general order of Nature, and identifies the “license” as “a rule.” The rules, identified as the equivalent of Nature, should have been able to shed constant light on all creative works like the stable sun. To accept licenses as indispensable means to reject the universality and transcendence of the rules and of Nature as well. Licenses function as a “dangerous supplement” to the rules, and reveal their insufficiency as the universal, transcendental guide. “The supplement is an inessential extra, added to something complete in itself, but the supplement is added in order to complete, to compensate for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself” (Culler 103). Like Nature, the critical rules are presumed to be complete; however, the existence and necessity of licenses deny this completeness. Licenses can be incorporated to those rules only if the latter are not self-sufficient, only if there is already in the rules a lack that invites licenses to supplement them. Since critical rules are identified as “nature methodized,” the need for licenses directly exposes the original deficiency in Nature.¹⁵

¹⁵ Derrida indicates this lack of Nature when talking about Rousseau. Nature should be self-sufficient, but the supplement of art manifests a void in Nature. The supplement is exterior to Nature; “Nature’s supplement does not proceed from Nature, it is not only inferior to but other than Nature” (Derrida 144-45). Based on this argument, then, licenses do not essentially belong to either Nature or the critical rules. Pope’s recognition of the necessity of licenses for the critical rules actually downgrades Nature—the universal, all-embracing power must rely on some extra supplement in order to be “complete.” In addition, Pope proclaims the universality of Nature in his description of true wit: “True wit is nature to advantage dressed; / What oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed” (297-98). The relationship between wit and Nature parallels that between licenses and critical rules, and may

From the perspective of Bakhtinian dialogism, a self-sufficient idea does not exist, while Pope's affirmation of the necessity of poetical license verifies Bakhtin's conception of Nature as "eternally unfinished" (*Rabelais* 254). The meanings of Nature remain unspecified and undefined, so does the essence of "methodized" Nature (critical rules). Epic is a dead genre because it has been fully developed and remains unchanged in a self-enclosed world; novel is a developing genre because it continually incorporates various elements from other genres ("Epic and Novels" 4). Similarly, to proclaim Nature and critical rules as unchanged means to sentence them to death. Because Pope identifies Homer (metonymy for "epic" or "classics") as Nature (135), the "death" of epic also connotes that of Nature from the perspective Bakhtinian dialogism. Epic "is already antiquated" with "a hardened and no longer flexible skeleton"; studying this genre "is analogous to studying dead languages" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 3). Epic is among all the old genres that are "already dead" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 4). "The epic world is an utterly finished thing . . . it is impossible to change, to re-think, to re-evaluate anything in it" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 17). "The dead [genres (including the epic)] are loved in a different way. . . . Language about the dead is stylistically quite distinct from language about the living" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 20). Epic, tragedy, and all the other major genres "had already long since come to completion, they were already old and almost ossified genres" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 38). On the other hand, "life" depends on continual dialogues: "*To be means to communicate*. Absolute death (non-being) is the

consequently yield to the deconstructive reading as well. To proclaim that "[t]rue Wit is Nature to Advantage drest" insinuates the insufficiency of Nature herself to work independently as the life-bestowing power. Wit serves as a "supplement" to Nature—this relationship resembles that between education and Nature when Derrida discusses Rousseau's theoretic problems in *Confessions* and *Emil*. The place of a supplement "is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness" (Derrida 145). It is "exterior, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it" (Derrida 145). Nature is supposed to be complete—both Rousseau and Pope agree—but the need of supplement exposes an inherent lack in Nature. The universal truth—"What oft was thought"—must depend on wit so that it can be "well expressed" (298). Nature in Pope's discourse, therefore, never directly formulates the ultimate beauty and truth by herself. The supposedly universal presence of Nature is consequently deferred. Moreover, wit does not exist universally: as Pope has observed, men of half learning abound, while only few poets can be identified as wits. Even if wit can function as an ideal supplement to Nature, the presence of Nature still does not claim to be universal and ultimate, since "supplementation is possible only because of an originary lack" (Culler 105).

Wit as a "dangerous supplement" (in Derrida's phrase) to Nature will also threaten the transcendence of Nature. In Pope's "Essay on Criticism," wit comes from Nature, the "source" of art. Thus, Nature is the cause, while wit, the effect. However, no one can see Nature directly; the existence of Nature arises from our perception of wit in literature. In other words, the concept of Nature is constructed after the presence of wit. Viewed from this perspective, it is wit which "causes" Nature, not vice versa. Without the supplementation of wit, Nature can claim neither completeness nor presence. Furthermore, the cause-effect relationship between Nature and wit crumples in self-deconstruction: "If the effect is what causes the cause to become a cause, then the effect, not the cause, should be treated as the origin. . . . If either cause or effect can occupy the position of origin, then origin is no longer originary; it loses its metaphysical privilege" (Culler 88). Pope's arguments, to sum up, deconstruct the transcendence and originality of Nature.

state of being unheard, unrecognized” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 287). “To communicate,” far from being unilateral, always presupposes the mutual interaction of both sides. In Pope’s argument, Nature, like the unchanging sun (315-17), never “communicates” with common poets and critics; he even asserts that she is too sacred and transcendental to be known by the mundane world (“An Essay on Man” 1.289). Blasphemous and downgrading, therefore, are Pope’s deification of Nature and glorification of critical rules as self-sufficient, unmovable standard.¹⁶

Even if a writer follows the rules strictly, his/her “unerring” works do not necessarily impress readers as “divinely bright.” Pope satirizes those who write with a certain formula (352-53). An unimpeachable work may appear insipid and lifeless. Hartley denies that Nature and critical rules, represented by Aristotle, can be identified the same (261). Besides, Pope warns those who stick to the rules:

But in such lays as neither ebb nor flow,
Correctly cold, and regularly low,
That shunning faults one quiet tenor keep,
We cannot blame indeed—but we may sleep. (239-42)

This warning contradicts Pope’s equation of rules with Nature: this “source of Art” is supposed to inspire artists, not to hypnotize readers. Nature is viewed as “Unerring”; however, Pope affirms, “a faultless piece” never exists (253-54). Faults are sometimes inevitable and normal:

As men of breeding, sometimes men of wit,
T’avoid great errors must the less commit;
Neglect the rules each verbal critic lays,
For not to know some trifles is a praise. (259-62)

Indeed it is beyond the power of mortal men to reach perfect Nature, and indeed it is poor judgment to concentrate on some trivial mistakes in a piece of work without recognizing its merits. Nevertheless, Pope fails to reconcile his identification of critical rules as Nature on the one hand and his argument for the tolerance of some minor errors on the other. He acknowledges indirectly that critical rules cannot function as the absolute and universal standard, and that some “minor errors” in a literary work may achieve the effects which those rule-abiding poets cannot do. Nature is “Unerring,” so is the excellent expression of art which shines on all objects “like th’unchanging sun” (315-17). A good critic, however, must not stick to the “rules” and must sometimes accept “licenses,” the deviation from those rules, as an expression of wit. Universal and unerring Nature, consequently, does not correspond to man-made rules, which appear “[c]orrectly cold, and regularly low.” He echoes

¹⁶ The impossibility to depict Nature as a consistent universal standard is echoed by Gadamer’s negation of natural sciences as the base of human studies: “Thus a conclusion based on universals, a reasoned proof, is not sufficient, because what is decisive is the circumstances” (23).

Dryden's argument in "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy": though the French follow the classical laws strictly, their works "are indeed the beauties of a statue, but not of a man" (227); they demonstrate nothing but "dearth of plot, and narrowness of imagination" (230). In the "irregular plays" of Shakespeare, Dryden indicates, "there is a more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing" than any French play; this is not his deviation from nature because Shakespeare "was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there" (231). Thus rules do not work as "unerring" Nature at all. The Swan of Avon can find Nature without studying Homer and critical rules day and night.

Furthermore, Pope unintentionally divulges the clash between Nature and critical rules when praising Aristotle's achievement:

Poets, a race long unconfin'd and free,
Still fond and proud of savage liberty,
Receiv'd his laws, and stood convinc'd 'twas fit
Who conquer'd Nature should preside o'er Wit. (649-52)

In other words, poets are not *naturally* inclined toward discipline and order; by learning Aristotle's poetics, one may demonstrate wit and *conquer* Nature. This evaluation opposes his statement that the general order "[i]s kept in nature, and is kept in man" ("An Essay on Man" 1.171-72), while the critical rules, initiated by Aristotle, become so terribly powerful as to subordinate Nature. By nature, this passage (649-52) indicates, poets obey no order and authority, whereas the application of critical rules incurs tension and conflict—not harmony—between poets and Nature—insinuated in the word "conquer'd." He even condemns Britons for their defying the critical rules and their staying uncivilized (715-18)—a condition which denies the "universality" of critical rules. Neoclassical England, unlike contemporary France, stood outside of the "universal" influence of Nature/rules and still needed the regulation of critical rules in order to approach her. The emphasis on the necessity of critical rules, therefore, subverts the transcendental and authoritative status of Nature. The emergence of the heterogeneous voice, uttered by Pope himself, manifests again Bakhtin's negation of a self-sufficient, harmonious idea and of the validity of monologism. No authority "is established once and for all" (Emerson xxxviii).

Pope's ambivalent attitude towards critical rules may derive from Longinus's interpretation of sublimity. On the one hand, Longinus affirms the transcendence of Nature and praises her "a first and primary element of creation"; she must work with "method" (rule) which "is competent to provide and contribute quantities and appropriate occasions for everything, as well as perfect correctness in training and application" (139). He formulates some certain criteria for sublimity and proposes certain techniques for writers so that they may achieve greatness. On the other hand,

however, he also recognizes that “divine writers . . . disdained exactness of detail and aimed at the greatest prizes in literature” (152). A mediocre writer who attempts to avoid all mistakes is inferior to a great writer who, despite some mistakes, reaches sublimity. The “great geniuses are least ‘pure’”. Exactness in every detail involves a risk of meanness; with grandeur, as with great wealth, there ought to be something overlooked” (150). Sublimity, a deviation from Nature/rules, belongs to the “license” proposed by Pope. The necessity of overlooking something does not match the all-embracing quality of Nature at all. Longinus never attempts to reconcile the disparity between the necessity of his “rules” and the transcendence of sublimity—neither does Pope. The existence of such a paradox, nevertheless, denies the legitimacy of the monologic, authoritative voice with regard to Popean Nature and critical rules.

CANONIZATION AND RE-ACCENTUATION OF THE CLASSICS

Nature is also incarnated through the canonization of the classics: Pope identifies Homer as Nature, and he canonizes a series of arch-critics from Aristotle to William Walsh in Part III of “An Essay on Criticism.” As the models for all critics, they demonstrate the universally ideal learning and personality: “pleased to teach, and not yet proud to know” (632), unbiased (633), well-bred and sincere (635), willing to praise the merits of a foe (638), owning exact taste (639), not proud (641), and reasonable (642). Their supreme status is supposed to remain permanently unchanged and universally accepted because they reveal the eternal light of Nature—they devoted themselves to topics of universal values, not to those of particular issues.¹⁷ He encourages all would-be poets and critics to study Homer day and night, and thus indirectly promotes the conclusive and closed worldview. In epic, tradition must be accepted as totally sacred and authoritative (Morson and Emerson 421). Bakhtin indicates this closedness:

¹⁷ Pope’s veneration of the canon, as well as his glorification of critical rules, can be traced back to Aristotle’s quest for the “unmoved.” Unlike his teacher Plato, Aristotle does not label the “unmoved” as “Ideal,” nor does he reject the changing world as illusory and false. He conceives the ultimate principle as dynamic: “The only continuous motion, then, is that which is caused by the unmoved movement: and this motion is continuous because the movement remains always invariable, so that its relation to that which it moves remains also invariable and continuous” (*Physics* 162). Numerous literary works are continuously created, and readers must rely on some ultimate guidance in order to appreciate the truly valuable. Canonical works and critics are affirmed because their value is presumed to be permanently valid like the “unmoved.” Therefore, “when Aristotle defined poetry as an ‘imitation of nature,’ he did not mean the indiscriminate copying of any individual, but rather the selective imitation of what is general and representative in man” (Bate 10). Pope echoes this by stating that the general order “[i]s kept in nature, and is kept in man” (“An Essay on Man” 1.171-72). For Pope, the reliance on critical rules and the identification of canonical critics can illustrate Nature; Nature constantly sheds light on all beings, a “continuous motion” in Aristotle’s words.

There is no place in the epic world for any openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy. There is no loophole in it through which we glimpse the future; it suffices unto itself, neither supposing any continuation nor requiring it. . . . Absolute conclusiveness and closedness is the outstanding feature of the temporally valorized epic past. ("Epic and Novel" 16)

Therefore, Pope announces that a poet and a critic cannot expect to create anything "new" under the sun, but only "[w]hat oft was thought" (298). With this closed worldview, Pope detests the academic debates between Scotists and Thomists (444), and means to silence all disrupted voices in "An Essay on Man": "Cease then, nor order imperfection name." Nature, tradition, classical rules, and classics are valued as eternally stable, authoritative, and sacred; it is not allowed in Pope's discourse to question their validity and authority. The world governed by Nature operates essentially in order, and thus he maintains that "Whatever is, is right" ("An Essay on Man" 1.294). Disharmony and chaos do not really exist in the fundamentally systematic, peaceful universe. Heteroglossia is thus suppressed and neglected in this static, monologic discourse. Popean Nature is hostile to dialogism: dialogue in such a condition is rejected, and the clash among various voices is considered deviation from Nature.

Canonization, however, depends on value judgment, which, in Pope's words, works "as our watches, none / Go just alike, yet each believes his own" (9-10). The evaluation of the so-called canon varies from generation to generation, and no decisive comment can be placed on any single masterpiece. In the process of canonization, the valued elements are preserved and glorified, while the heteroglot voices are rejected and marginalized. Still, it is difficult to decide the canonized element of the literary language and that of heteroglossia; it is especially so in the analysis of ancient works (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 418). A reader must possess the knowledge of "the shifting dialogizing background" in order to discern what was canonized at a particular time (Morson and Emerson 363). Canonization "blurs heteroglossia" and "facilitates a naïve, single-voiced reading" (Holquist 425). In "An Essay on Criticism," Pope's neglect of Sidney's achievement¹⁸ in literary criticism is

¹⁸ Beginning from Renaissance, the significance of Nature gradually became diversified, but generally her superior power and status were still widely acknowledged. With the rise of humanism, human creativity was affirmed to the extent that sometimes a poet's glory can rival that of Nature—a situation which is not found in classical critics and which is suppressed in "An Essay on Criticism." Sidney represents the typical humanist voice when he praises poetic imagination: a poet can create "better than nature bringeth forth" and deliver a golden world, while nature only set forth a brazen (145). "He mixes Platonic ideals with an Aristotelian mimesis in order to convey . . . how the poetic world is analogous to an intricate natural one by means of varying perspectives" (Kinney 9). In Bakhtinian terms, Sidney's poetics is essentially polyphonic and heterogeneous. His ideal poet "produces works for the Tudor century distinctive in the pluralism and plenitude they harbor. Such writing opens things up rather than closes them down, forever inviting readers to join in the production of meaning" (Kinney 9). In other words, although the court functioned as the center of all cultural activities in the Tudor dynasty,

perhaps an attempt to blur heteroglossia: since this Renaissance courtier exalts poet's creativity above Nature's power, Pope must reject this voice in order to present an apparently consistent western critical tradition. Pope inherited Renaissance humanism in assuming the necessity of learning from the Greek and Roman writers, but he excludes Sidney, an arch-humanist who dares to regard as brazen the world brought forth by Nature.¹⁹

Renaissance was actually pluralistic, hostile to all forms of monologic discourse that meant to render all its disparate voices into harmony. Therefore, Sidney does not propose nature to be as authoritative and transcendental as Popean Nature. Although he still recognizes poesy as "an art of imitation," he does not encourage poets to follow nature; in his eyes the best poets can "imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God" (146). Sidney's discourse here demonstrates the integration of the classical tradition and Christian belief—the concept of nature originated from the Greco-Roman culture, while the representation of "excellencies of God" in poetry is alien to Aristotelian poetics. Likewise, Hobbes defines Nature as "the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World" (9). This is the result of the dialogue between two heterogeneous cultures, and both Sidney and Hobbes do not even attempt to justify the co-existence of God and nature, a pagan deity, in his defense. This co-existence may derive from the cultural background of Renaissance. Renaissance was simultaneously the "rebirth" of the Greco-Roman culture and the "revolution" of medieval heritage. Medieval Christianity did not totally pass away, while the pagan voices poured into Europe. The veneration of Mother Nature was introduced into Renaissance. Pope himself also blends God and Nature: "All are but parts of one stupendous whole, / Whose body nature is, and God the soul" ("An Essay on Man" 1.267-68). Since the humanist learning, which requires the study of Greek and Roman classics, may easily lead to heteroglossia in one's language and discourse, we can anticipate that Pope, who studied Homer day and night, also speaks with a heteroglot voice. Nevertheless, he attempts to present a systematic, harmonious discourse by excluding heterogeneous voices like that of Sidney.

¹⁹ No other Renaissance writers except Sidney dare to claim that Nature can only bring forward a brazen world, but the affirmation of the poet's imagination still continues in the humanism-inspired culture. It does not follow that Renaissance generally remained unified and single-voiced. It was the time when "many strands of authority coexist[ed] and occasionally struggle[d] against each other"—while such a struggle is often reflected in literature (Burrow 19). A dialogic milieu also stimulated the literary production of this age: "London writers read each others' works, imitated each others' styles, and tried eagerly to overgo each other . . . Genres developed and died with an almost unhealthy rapidity" (Burrow 24). The Aristotelian sense of imitation—the representation of nature—was interpreted and practiced so variously as to arouse the nature-art debate. With regard to the relationship(s) between nature and art, both Shakespeare and Jonson had their unique viewpoints which can hardly be rendered in a totally consistent, harmonious "system." Shakespeare emphasizes the dramatist's autonomous artistry when indicating the mimetic feature of drama: plays must hold "the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her own feature, scorn her image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (*Hamlet* 3.2.19-23). It is a humanist declaration of the artist's independence: Not that a writer should follow Nature passively, but that she must follow the creativity of the artist in order to show the true essence of virtue or vice. However, Shakespeare does not belittle the power of Nature at all: "Yet nature is made better by no mean / But nature makes that mean; so over that art / Which you say adds to nature, is an art / That nature makes" (*The Winter's Tale* 4.4.89-92). This is Polixenes's response to Perdita, who has heard that art may corrupt Nature; in short, the latter denies the transcendental power of Nature, while the former affirms it. Nature predetermines art, and artists' creativity and judgment miraculously echo the work of nature. Shakespeare leaves the nature-art debate with no conclusive remarks, but the image of nature as a universal life giver is recognized. For further discussion of nature-art debate in Shakespeare, see Colie; Orgel; Wilson; Kermode. For Ben Jonson, on the other hand, Nature "is always the same," but "Men are decayed" ("Timber" 402). The guidance of Nature, therefore, is indispensable for artists. Generally speaking, nevertheless, he holds that Nature and art work together in harmony, as it is expressed in his praise of Shakespeare—"Nature herself was proud of his designs, / And joy'd to wear the dressing of his lines" ("To the Memory" 47-48); "a good Poet's made as well as born" ("To the Memory" 64). Nature gives birth to the artistry of poets, and poets can reach her through their creation. Besides, "without art, nature can never be perfect; and, without nature, art can claim no being" ("Timber" 416). The mutual dependence of art and

Reader's understanding will definitely be biased with the rejection of heteroglossia. Nowadays "An Essay on Criticism" has been canonized, and readers tend to treat Pope's discourse as the genuine representative voice in the eighteenth-century England. Pope satirizes Dennis, and we may be led to treat the latter as a genuine dunce, to believe in the supremacy of Nature in the production of neoclassical writers, and to take for granted the correspondence of Pope's practice and preaching. Nevertheless, Dennis was a dominant and important critic among his contemporaries, and Pope, a minor figure when he started to mock Dennis, never forgave his enemy like the generous critic portrayed in "An Essay on Criticism." The canonization of Pope's poetry may thence misdirect our understanding and evaluation of Dennis's works; it distorts Dennis's true image and suppresses his voice. Pope's description of his enemy manifests the ideology of dominance, which tends to "dehumanize people by stereotyping them, by denying them their variousness and complexity" (Christian 2263). To regard Dennis as a dunce is simply "a naïve, single-voiced reading." Pope's mockery does not shine like the sun and demonstrates nothing but his own prejudice.

Also, Pope's extol of William Walsh (725-44) amounts not to the general consensus but to his own biased judgment. The young poet owes his own artistry to the deceased critic in a language that seems to elevate the latter to the status of Nature, with the tone which sounds like that of a Christian's prayer to God. Nowadays, Walsh

nature implies their equal status—here nature is not deified as the supreme guide for poets and critics. Jonson also avers the poet's creativity. In his praise of Shakespeare's achievement, he exposes the contrast between Nature and art: "For though the Poet's matter Nature be / His art doth give the fashion. And that he / Who casts to write a living line, must sweat / (Such as thine are), and strike the second heat / Upon the Muses' anvil, turn the same / (And himself with it), that he thinks to frame" ("To the Memory" 57-62). This episode, agreeing with that from *Hamlet*, proclaims the independent creativity of a poet. Nature herself engenders no masterpiece; it is only through the labor of poets that her glory may come into being. "*Ars corona* (i.e. "Art is the crown"), he argues, and art can make nature and imitation perfect ("Timber" 416). Moreover, Jonson adds, Shakespeare's art can match Nature ("To the Memory" 55-56). With different talents, both Shakespeare and Jonson—though not so provocative like Sidney as to belittle Nature—harbor the humanist idea that an individual poet can reach beyond the grasp of Nature with independent creativity. For both dramatists, Nature represents the transcendental power that finds incarnation in literary works, a view that Alexander Pope also agrees in his statement that Nature and Homer are the same. In both Shakespeare and Jonson, artists and Nature were held to complement each other. Pope also recognizes such a relationship: "True wit is nature to advantage dressed; / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" (297-98). Yet Pope does not conceive the poetic creativity as the equal of Nature: a poet as a humble servant of Nature must always follow Her instructions. Moreover, Shakespeare is regarded as a poet with "the natural wit" because of his "wildness," his non-conformity to the conventional rules, the spontaneous freedom of his imagination and his expression, that proved him Nature's true pupil" (Lovejoy, "Discrimination" 12). In "An Essay on Criticism," by contrast, Nature and the critical rules are identified the same (140). Deviation of those rules, consequently, offends Popean Nature. The contrast between these two types of Nature reflects different viewpoints on human potential: Shakespeare composed at the time when humanism was on the rise, and therefore the artist's creativity was highly affirmed (the same can be found in Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry"); Pope's voice characterizes the typical neoclassical evaluation of human capacity: "So vast is art, so narrow human wit" (61). With this wit, a poet can only demonstrate "[w]hat oft was thought" (298). For Popean Nature, therefore, tradition is far more important than invention.

is not universally ranked as important as Aristotle, Horace, or Erasmus; Pope's canonization of a minor critic, again, illustrates the absence of a generally accepted aesthetic standard. His own "peculiar" evaluation reveals that his "watch" goes different from the others', and that his personal appreciation of Walsh corrupts his own critical judgment. His condemnation of Dennis and his encomium of Walsh originate actually from his communication with both, not from a mysterious source of Art. As the self-appointed spokesman for Nature, Pope attacks those who deviate from the monologic, static ideal, but his life-long interaction with his contemporaries illustrates the inevitability of dialogue—he did not really practice what he preached. Monologic as his argument appears, his works still highlights more dialogic awareness than those of Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He prefers to speak directly to the others rather than indulge in his emotion recollected in tranquility. This dialogic inclination runs counter to his attempt to canonize his own favorite poets and critics once for all.

Actually Pope recognizes diverse voices with regard to the canonized works and western world in general, a recognition that denies his own belief in the existence of general order in Nature and humanity²⁰. Homer and Dryden are continually attacked in every generation (458-65); Horace suffers from "wrong translations" and "wrong quotations" (663-64); tyranny and superstition ruined arts when Roman had declined and fallen (685-88); monks destroyed civilization like Goths (692). All the disorder and destruction theoretically do not and should not exist in the harmonious universe proposed by Dryden and Pope. Yet their existence challenges the myth of harmony and unity in Pope's ideal, and questions the stability of Nature and canon as well.

²⁰ "Nature" in the eighteenth century carried various meanings—"It is a landscape, but it is also a way of feeling—of feeling about native soil, of feeling about the past, of feeling about Englishness itself" (Fulford 109); it is also "an exact reproduction of every-day life and manners, as opposed to anything wild or extravagant, or that existed only in the writer's imagination. Nature meant . . . Common-Sense" (Phelps 11). "The conception of 'nature' as the ultimate standard . . . underlies the classical conviction that the end of art is the revelation to man and the rational, ethical inculcation in him of that ideal perfection of which . . . he as a particular is only a faulty image" (Bate 10). Pope's glorification of Nature, perhaps stemming from Boileau's argument that she actively bestows talents among authors (242; 249-50), "made nature the place where God's order . . . could be observed" (Fulford 111). This glorification also emerges in his "An Essay on Man," in which he admonishes human beings to be content in "the hand of one disposing Power" and not to question mysterious, "unknown" Nature (1.285-89). He announces that "All are but parts of one stupendous whole, / Whose body nature is, and God the soul" (1.267-68). All the seemingly contradictory elements in Nature actually exist in harmony, and she "is but art unknown to thee" (1.289). She guides wit and reason (2.161-64), shaping everything according to various laws (3.1-9) and remaining "unvaried" and "fixed" (3.189-90). In other words, the faith in the source of Art in "An Essay on Criticism" echoes the religious belief in "An Essay on Man"—both refer to the same divine power, which governs all creatures and activities. In "Epistle I: To Sir Richard Temple," Pope even identifies Nature as God (95)—a manifestation of the blending of Christianity and pagan cultures. "Nature" in the eighteenth century, as Morris argues, held "an inseparable connection with religion and with religious feeling" (230). She was presumed to guide not only literature but also the whole universe, and Pope's glorification of her governance manifested his yearning for a universal and transcendental order.

Moreover, Pope praises the “great injur’d name” of Erasmus (693-96). This humanist philosopher was persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church because of his tolerance of different voices in faith. Pope should have had supported the action of the church, since the “unity” and “order” in religion must be maintained by the suppression of heterogeneous voices, and this is what Pope attempts to achieve in his discourse. However, he violates his monologic inclination in his canonization of Erasmus, a man who embraced heteroglossia. Perhaps Pope appreciated Erasmus because of his own social status in England: as a marginalized Catholic, who had been denied a college education and many public rights, Pope meant to challenge the contemporary authoritative culture with the publication of *An Essay on Criticism*, speaking as if he alone were the authority who could regulate the rules and interpret the classics. In the same work he even boldly denounces Charles II, William III, and reformist priests, taking it for granted to vent his anger to those political and religious leaders (534-53)²¹. Both Erasmus and Pope spoke “alien” voices among their contemporaries. Though he declares the necessity of harmony and order in criticism and society, his own voice neither preserves self-consistency nor yields to his contemporary authority. Pope’s canonization of the critics, thence, exposes his intention to be the authority.

Pope’s veneration of Nature and classics as the universal standard for creativity and criticism parallels the predominance of the natural sciences described in *Truth and Method* by Gadamer. The human sciences, in order to gain its independence from the natural sciences, must abandon the glorification of a universal, abstract standard and resort to the humanistic tradition, which presupposes the necessity of *sensus communis* (good sense). *Sensus communis* requires a dialogic environment: it “does not mean only that general faculty in all men but the sense that founds community” (21). Gadamer’s argument about the problems of the human sciences also illustrates those of literary creativity and judgment in Pope’s discourse. Popean Nature, which is similar to the abstract formulas in the natural sciences, assumes transcendence and thus separation from the changing human community. Under such a circumstance, poets and critics can only accept passively the grace from Nature, which never yields to the evaluation and investigation from human beings. Literary criticism, which follows Pope’s monologic ideal, will fail: “a conclusion based on universals, a

²¹ Pope’s denouncement here reveals his own prejudice. His partial judgment of Charles II has been discussed earlier. William III, after the Glorious Revolution, promoted the Act of Toleration (1689), which protected the Protestant nonconformists. He even accepted the Bill of Rights (1689), which restricted the royal prerogatives. As to the religious Reformation, it is regarded as a revival of Christian faith by nonconformists, but Pope as a Catholic treated it as an unpardonable rebellion against the true belief. John Wesley, one of the famous nonconformist preachers among Pope’s contemporaries, witnessed the corruption of Catholic clergymen and consequently persisted in his reformation. Therefore, Pope’s criticism does not “gladly praise the merit of a foe” (638) as a Nature-inspired critic would do.

reasoned proof, is not sufficient, because what is decisive is the circumstance” (Gadamer 23). Judgment “cannot be taught in the abstract but only practiced from case to case.” Neither can it be learned, “because no demonstration from concepts can guide the application of rules” (Gadamer 31). Therefore, community or a dialogic environment counts far more important than a transcendental guide. Placed in a community, a critic must endeavor the “renewed adaptation to new situations” (Gadamer 26), not the application of universals to individual cases.²²

Language is never unitary (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 288). Epic is considered a dead genre by Bakhtin because it assumes an inaccessible, transcendental tradition, which resists continual evaluation and interpretation. Nothing is new under the sun in the epic. Yet language is always re-accentuated: “For the word is . . . not a dead material object in the hands of an artist equipped with it; it is a living word and is therefore in all things true to itself . . . [I]ts meaning—once realized—can never be completely extinguished” (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 419). Pope’s evaluation of Nature, critical rules, the classics, the canonical critics and his contemporaries actually re-accentuates what he has learned from ancients and moderns; his evaluation must also be re-accentuated by later generations.²³ “The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological re-accentuation”—new meanings continue to emerge (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 421). Canonization may lead readers to neglect the necessity of their continual dialogic relationship with the text. The value and significance of classics do not rely on a once-for-all judgment based on universals. The “potentials of the text must enter into dialogic relations with other perspectives the author cannot predict or concretely imagine” (Morson and Emerson 364). All canonized works can achieve immortality through continual re-accentuation, not through the authoritative prescription of some major critics.

²² My application of Bakhtinian dialogism does not work like that of formulas in dealing with problems of mathematics or physics. First, the meanings of Pope’s discourse are not “determined” once for all by Bakhtinian reading. The meanings and significance of literary texts can never be exhausted by a single approach. Besides, Bakhtin never affirms the universal applicability of his own theory—he maintains that dialogue must prevail if we intend to learn more widely and deeply, and he also recognizes the existence of monologism. “Exceptions” and “deviations,” which frequently occur in literary criticism and the human sciences as well, must be reasonably resolved in the rigorous natural sciences. Yet my reading does not aim at reconciling the self-contradictory voices in “An Essay on Criticism.” Dialogism does not function as the critical rules upheld by Pope, but only as a possible method to interpret a text.

²³ The meanings of “Nature” indeed underwent significant re-accentuation in the Romantic age. While Pope deals generally with her philosophical and religious connotations, Wordsworth and some other romantics tend to appreciate her as an enlightening landscape. The poet’s ego is considered to be the origin of creativity, while Nature reflects ideal humanity (Bloom 136-37; 142-43), not the transcendental guide for wit and judgment as Pope emphasizes. “Nature is important insofar as it manifests the same transcendental energy as informs the human mind . . .” (Day 45); mind or spirit is given “a priority over nature and matter” (Day 58). Romantic poets describe the details of natural objects with far more effort than neoclassical writers. For the thorough discussion of the significance of Nature in romantic age, see Abrams; Bloom.

CONCLUSION

The Insufficiency of Popean Nature as the Transcendental Guide

If Popean Nature functions as a “metanarrative,” then the Bakhtinian reading of this transcendental standard exemplifies the postmodern spirit in Lyotard’s term: “incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv). Lyotard’s rejection of universal theories means to incorporate different voices in a discourse (Malpas 103). Likewise, Bakhtinian reading of Popean Nature exposes various voices in Pope’s arguments. Pope recognizes their existence, but his belief in Nature, the ultimate and harmonious power, invites him to suppress or deny those voices. The prevalence of men of little learning, the limited applicability of the critical rules, and Pope’s evaluation of certain characters all call into question the validity of the all-embracing power of Nature.

This embarrassing status of Nature reflects the essential problem of all monologic discourse. “Pope, Swift, and Dryden still believe there is some absolute truth out there, to which only the God’s-eye view is adequate, even as they deny that any human perspective may grasp it” (Noggle 9). Such an imposing gesture works like “adding epicycles to a Ptolemaic astronomy and at worst a wholly unjustified leap of theoretic faith” (Morson and Emerson 144). One’s discourse and voice, nevertheless, “will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse . . . [since] a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual’s consciousness . . .” (“Discourse” 348). Pope’s “centripetal” attempt lapses into self-contradiction, and this attempt characterizes the “monological” career of a poet as well: “The poet can speak alone, and does not require interaction with other consciousnesses and with other languages . . . [T]he poet escapes [heteroglossia] in order to write in a language that is timeless . . .” (Morson and Emerson 320).

Yet it is inappropriate to conclude that Pope was a monologic poet and that neoclassical literature rejects dialogism. Actually the neoclassical age was “full of anxiety and prospects, each feeding off the other. People, often provoked by changes they disliked, usually sought stability and order, clamouring for an earthly paradise” (Hoppit 495). Neoclassical critics tended to impose “a set of principles created for one language on to another” (Cruttwell 453), and their “[b]elief in hierarchy and order were as strong as ever, but society was too fluid to be contained within any neat categorization or series of expectations” (Hoppit 88). Dialogical spirit already existed at that time. Sitter believes that most of the neoclassic apologists for poetry “stay[ed] closer to the ground” (“Questions” 136)—in other words, they were mostly practical

and hostile to abstract theories. Therefore, young Rasselas deems it impossible to be a poet who “must write as the interpreter of nature, and legislator of mankind, and must feel himself “superior to time and place” (Johnson, *Rasselas* 50-51). Pope’s life-long career also illustrates his continual “dialogue” with his friends and foes. His gentlemanly but authoritative tone in his poetry, though inclining toward monologism, always presupposes the existence of a community and the possible responses of addressees. Monologue, self-pity, and the ennui of an isolated, wandering hero are rarely found in his work.

Bakhtin conceives truth as that which “allows every moment of existence to be rich in potential” (Morson and Emerson 236)—that is, truth can never be pinned down in a conclusive generalization. An idea begins to exist “only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas . . .” The realm of the existence of an idea “is not individual consciousness but dialogic communion *between* consciousnesses” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 88). Indeed “[c]onversation was a form of public utterance, almost of publication; often texts were created from conversation, and texts and talk easily followed from one another” (Hunter 12). In a dialogue, open-endedness prevails and yields to no definite, ultimate standard: “unfinalizability, real creativity, cannot be located in a system of laws” (Morson and Emerson 39), while authoritative discourse rejects growth and unfinalizability, and never merges with other voices (Morson and Emerson 219). Pope hails Nature as universal; for Bakhtin, the true universal spirit is carnival (*Rabelais* 7). In carnival “*nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free . . .*” (*Problems* 166). Pope’s satire of his foes carries some carnivalesque tints, and his discourse about Nature brings unintentional self-mockery. Nature, “the source, and end, and test of Art,” did not govern Pope’s relationships with his foes; her “incarnation” in critical rules and canonized works never wins unanimous approval in history. Whatever is, is not necessarily right.

The Necessity of Dialogue

Pope conglomerates various arguments about Nature from ancient Greece to the Neoclassical Age, and consequently carries heteroglossia. Perhaps this is why he does not exactly define the “essence” of Nature. The meanings of Nature are too complicated, and her significance is too multi-layered, while his declaration of Nature as “[w]hat oft was thought” may lead us to neglect such complexity and multiplicity. As he absorbs knowledge from the ancient writers and intends to describe Nature, he brings simultaneously diverse voices and contradictory elements into his discourse.

Things become all the more complicated because he also puts contemporary men and issues in his arguments. In a Bakhtinian reading, Pope's self-contradiction manifests actually the result of his "dialogues" with the ancient and his contemporaries. By exposing incongruous elements in Pope's arguments about Nature, we may detect the true power that guided his creativity.

In Bakhtin's theory, we are alien to one another, and being alien makes dialogue possible. With one viewpoint one cannot fully comprehend truth (Gardiner 94). Judgment "involves not merely applying the universal principle according to which it is judge, but co-determining, supplementing, and correcting that principle" (Gadamer 39). Pope cultivated his concept of Nature through his "dialogue" with the ancient writers. What is truly "canonized" is neither absolute Nature and the classics, nor tradition and critical rules, but dialogue. To assume the universality and transcendence of Nature neither removes all the warring voices nor contributes to the establishment of perfect poetics. Bakhtin affirms the value of dialogue, which was "canonized among all the genres" ("Epic and Novel" 12). He points out the necessity of dialogism: "Languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language" ("Epic and Novel" 12). Only in continual dialogue can each critic probe into truth, not in the passive, static reliance on some ambiguous standard (Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy* 44, 46). True dialogic spirit never evades the conflicts of different voices, nor compels others to disregard them by claiming "Whatever is, is right"; rather, this spirit always treats disharmony as the "norm." In dialogism, human consciousness "always exists in a tensile, conflict-ridden relationship with other consciousnesses, in a constant alterity between self and other. In fact, a fully self-sufficient and isolated consciousness cannot possibly exist" (Gardiner 28). Bakhtin means to "break the stranglehold of the omniscient, authorial viewpoint, to challenge the pretence of any mode of representation to 'reflect' reality and fully to depict the external world" (Gardiner 95).

Therefore, a serious critic does not impose a transcendental standard on literary works; rather, he/she may recognize the dialogical relationship in them (Bakhtin and Medvedev 20). The meaning of a text never comes *naturally* from the so-called authority; the understanding of a text always changes from generation to generation. "There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context." Meanings which were generated in the past dialogue can never remain stable and will change in the future (Bakhtin, "Methodology" 170; "Notes" 146). Therefore, a critic's job "is to bring the past into the present and the present to confront the past" and a critic "had to free himself from the tyranny of the present and the tyranny of the past" (Mason, "Miraculous" 294). Pope himself did not and could not escape from dialogues despite his glorification of monologic Nature: he speaks like an ironist who

“is always expressing identities between opposites of praise and blame, seeming ignorance and true knowledge” (Brower 199). A satirist always assumes some specific targets and responds to the attack from foes. “Pope knew that things fall apart, even the classics of verse, which he sought to refashion, and hence fleetingly preserve, through translation . . .” (Young 130). The changing evaluation of the classics insinuates the impossibility of the existence of an infallible standard, and Pope’s attempt in “An Essay on Criticism” represents only his voice among his conflict-ridden contemporaries. Whatever is, is to be re-evaluated in dialogue.

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天道與對話：亞歷山大·波普權威式論述中之衝突²⁴

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摘要

波普 (Alexander Pope) 在《批評論》(An Essay on Criticism) 中認為：文藝和批評最高的指導原則為「天道」(Nature)。此一原則放諸四海皆準、亙古不易，其光輝普照人間、影響遍及古今，並將生命、能力、美艷賜給眾人，實為文藝的本源、目的、和試金石。然而波普對於「天道」的論述，充滿矛盾，難以自圓其說。本文借用巴克汀 (Mikhail Bakhtin) 的對話理論，擬就三方面探討波普矛盾的「天道」觀：(一) 半瓶醋文人的充斥：照波普說法，人人都蒙受「天道」恩澤，無人例外；然而波普又埋怨半瓶醋文人遍及全英國，似乎他們可以抗拒「天道」的影響；(二)「批評法則」與「破格手法」(poetic license)：波普認為「批評法則」為天道之「方法化」，因此本質上和天道應同具「普遍適用性」；不過波普也承認「批評法則」有時而窮，無法解釋許多現象，而「破格手法」可以適時補充其不足，也應當視為批評法則的一部分。弔詭的是：「破格」不能常常使用，違反「天道」或批評原則的普遍性；且批評法則需要靠「破格」補全，表示「法則」本身不周全。(三)「經典化」的問題：波普《批評論》第三部分列出所謂重要批評家，上自亞里斯多德，下至華許 (William Walsh)。波普對後者的讚許，顯然和現代普遍觀點不合。此外，作品被稱為「經典」後，容易使讀者忽略其背後多重聲音的樣貌，使詮釋趨向單一化。其實波普雖然說話有如權威，但他的創作經常預設對話情境，而非與世隔絕、喃喃自語。他對於半瓶醋的抱怨、對於批評法則有限性的論點，以及將其恩師華許「經典化」的作法，其實都出於他和當時社會的互動，而非根據一抽象、超然的「天道」來寫作。

關鍵字：波普、《批評論》、天道、巴克汀、對話

²⁴ 本文改寫自作者所著《批評論：亞歷山大·波普對話手法之展現》一書中第二章「對話、異質性、天道之窘境」。內容已大幅增刪。

The Investigation of Taiwanese University EFL Learners' Idiom Familiarity and the Affecting Factors in Idiom Comprehension

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate Taiwanese university EFL students' idiom comprehension from two aspects: how efficiently they can comprehend the meaning of English idioms, and if the three factors (learners' proficiency, idiom types, and context) play significant roles in affecting their idiom comprehension. One hundred and seven sophomores who majored in English at a private university in southern Taiwan participated in the study. The mix-method approach was used for the research design.

Regarding learners' guessing efficiency, the results revealed that the learners' difficulty was evidenced by (a) their 52.2% wrong guesses in the task items containing unfamiliar idioms, (b) only a mean score of 29.97 (out of 100) achieved in their attempts at guessing idioms reported as unfamiliar, and (c) their failure to recognize the familiar idioms in 5.0% of the total number of the task items. Regarding the impact factors of learners' guessing ability, the results indicated that the higher proficiency learners significantly made more accurate guesses in the meaning of unfamiliar idioms. In terms of context factor, learners' guessing performance in the contextual idioms was significantly better than in the isolated idioms. For the factor of idiom type, learners significantly performed better in the ET (English idioms which have exact Chinese translation equivalents) and PT (English idioms which have partial translation equivalents in Chinese) groups than in the NET (English idioms which cannot be translated literally into Chinese and whose literal translation make no sense in Chinese) and FF (false-friend) groups in guessing the meaning of unfamiliar idioms. Finally, data from the think-aloud task (TA) gave us an insight into the learners' problems and difficulties with idiom comprehension. Some pedagogical implications for classroom teachers to improve idiom teaching in EFL situations are also included.

Keywords: Idiom comprehension, Idiom type, Learner proficiency, Contextual support, Affecting factor analysis, English teaching and learning

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Language competence continually develops from childhood all the way into adulthood, irrespective of country or culture. Although all of the changes that occur are subtle, one aspect of language that reflects this subtle growth is the understanding of figurative expressions (Nippold, 1998). These expressions commonly occur in spoken and written communication such as conversations, newspapers, advertisements, poems and commercials (Gibbs and Beitel, 1995; Nippold, 1998). For the researcher, observing how effective linguistic communication can be is a very interesting research topic. Sometimes people convey large amounts of meaning and information with only a few words—idioms. John-Laird (1993) states that “it is difficult to speak spontaneously without lapsing into idiomatic usage” (p. 3); in addition, McDevitt (1993) also argues that “idioms are an important part of any language and may be said to be an indicator of one’s fluency in that language” (p. 4). Idioms, therefore, play a significant role in a foreign language as well as in the first language. Foreign language learners learn not only vocabulary and grammatical structures of the target language but also idiomatic phrases to integrate themselves into the culture of the target language.

Mastering English idioms is not easy for EFL learners, who may see them as a stumbling block (Cooper, 1999). According to Buchwald (1992), foreigners often misinterpret what Americans say since they take everything Americans say literally. Thus, English idioms are probably the most problematic aspect for EFL learners to comprehend and interpret in their L2 learning. To sum up, non-native speakers of English, even if they understand standard literary American English, may feel frustrated and confused when they hear idiomatic expressions, since the true meaning of the idiom generally cannot be determined by the knowledge of its component parts. Therefore, learning idiomatic phrases and expressions of a specific language is important, not only for the acquisition of that language itself, but also its social communication and culture. Unfortunately, studies aiming at the teaching of idioms to EFL students have not been able to catch the attention of many EFL teachers. Idioms are thus often ignored during the process of teaching and learning. This is to be regretted as it handicaps EFL learners’ command of the target language in the long run. Few studies to date have investigated whether Taiwanese college-level EFL students share the problem of comprehending idioms and where exactly their difficulties lie.

Purpose of the Study

Idioms such as *play with fire* and *pull someone's leg* are expressions that abound in English and are easily produced and understood by native speakers. Given the commonness of figurative expressions, it is important to know how people learn their meanings. Especially for EFL learners, this information can be used to facilitate figurative understanding in non-native speakers who have difficulty in this area. When EFL learners' language knowledge of idioms is developed, then they are able to use the language appropriately, and their language proficiency is definitely enhanced. Thus, the purpose of the study was to investigate Taiwanese university students' English idiom comprehension ability in the following aspects: how efficiently they can comprehend unfamiliar idioms, and which factors play a significant role in affecting students in comprehending these culturally coded linguistic forms. Therefore, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How efficiently can Taiwanese university EFL students comprehend the meaning of unfamiliar idioms?
2. Do the three factors (learners' proficiency, idiom types, and context) play significant roles in affecting students' comprehension of unfamiliar idioms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Traditionally, idioms are described as fixed expressions, as phrases or sentences whose figurative meaning is not clear from the literal meaning of their individual constituents. As a consequence, most authors have drawn a fundamental distinction between literal and figurative language and have assumed that idioms and their figurative meanings must be stored separately in the mental lexicon, and that this meaning must be learnt as a whole unit. For linguistic theories, which are mainly concerned with literal language, idioms have always caused serious problems. This is why, over the last four decades, linguists and psycholinguists have developed a number of hypotheses to describe the special grammatical characteristics of idioms and to explain their processing and representation (Abel, 2003).

Non-native Speakers' Idiom Processing

Numerous research studies on native speakers' processing of idiomatic expressions have been done in the past; however, research which looked into the representation and processing of idiomatic expressions by L2 learners has not received the same interest from applied linguistic researchers. Several researchers (i.e. Cooper, 1999, Liontas, 2002, Bortfeld, 2004), confirmed the lack of research on non-native speakers' processing of figurative language. In other words, we know very little about how EFL learners process unknown English idioms.

Indeed, most of the existing research in the area of second language learners' idiom processing has been concerned with language transfer, the effect of L1-L2 idioms in terms of lexical, pragmatic, or semantic similarities on L2 learners' comprehension of such idioms. In fact, as Cooper (1999) pointed out, only a few research studies in the EFL context have dealt with idiom processing outside the circle of L1-L2 idiom similarity and the impact it can have on foreign language learners' comprehension and interpretation of target language idioms. In addition, non-native speakers' idiom comprehension strategies have also hardly been studied.

While some researchers have suggested that non-native speakers comprehend idioms by direct retrieval of their figurative meanings, others have claimed that non-native speakers first process idioms literally only and then access their figurative readings (Liontas, 2002). In addition, Kecskes (2000) argued that owing to the lack of metaphorical competence in L2, non-native speakers are more likely to rely on literal meanings of figurative utterances and on their first language conceptual system when producing and comprehending figurative phrases.

Research in the foreign and second language teaching area has shown that L2 speakers, similar to L1 speakers, apply some strategies while processing unfamiliar idioms, despite the lack of sufficient input in the classroom setting and the lack of language contact. In order to interpret the meaning of idioms, L2 speakers recall the strategies acquired during their first language acquisition, and they rely on the literal meaning conveyed in the context and guess at the intended meaning (Bulut, 2004). According to Katja's (2004) study, the results suggested that English idioms were fairly difficult for Finnish EFL students: the easiest were the idioms that had an identical equivalent in Finnish. However, the tendency to seek assistance in the mother tongue at times led to erroneous interpretations.

Matlock and Heredia (2002) suggested that the role of literal and figurative meanings in the processing of L2 idioms will be determined by the L2 learner's proficiency in the language. Accordingly, they have proposed that L2 learners of the

beginning-level must first establish direct connections between literal and non-literal meanings of figurative expressions. Following from this assumption, Matlock and Heredia (2002) envisaged idiom comprehension at early stages of L2 learning as consisting of three steps. In the first step, an L2 idiomatic expression is translated literally into L1. Next, the learner accesses the literal meaning of the expression and attempts to make sense of it. Finally, in the third stage, the figurative meaning is accessed. On the other hand, at more advanced stages of L2 learning the non-native speaker may process figurative expressions in the same manner as a native speaker, without having to access their literal meanings first. This suggests it is very likely that the status of literal and figurative meanings in processing idiomatic expressions will be different for native speakers and for non-native speakers.

Interlingual Transfer of Idioms

In L2 learning, interlingual transfer (i.e. transfer from any other previously learned language or mother tongue) is a major cognitive strategy that learners fall back on when their linguistic means are insufficient to achieve their communicative goals. Without a doubt, the influence of the mother tongue and the existence of interlingual transfer are indisputable, especially in the EFL context where learners' exposure to the target language is confined to a few hours per week of classroom instruction, such as English learners in Taiwan. Therefore, interlingual transfer is a strategy that is readily available to the learners to compensate for inadequacies when they attempt to communicate in the foreign language.

Deviations resulting from interlingual transfer have been recorded at all linguistic levels, (Gass & Selinker, 1994; Odlin, 1989). Generally speaking, foreign language learners cannot understand and use idioms unless they attain an advanced level of proficiency in the target language. Even then, EFL learners' ability to comprehend and produce idioms hardly reach a native speaker' level (Baker, 1992; James, 1998). In other words, EFL learners usually only manage to express themselves in plain non-idiomatic language.

After years of formal EFL classroom instruction in junior high and high schools, many Taiwanese college students hardly attain an intermediate level of proficiency. Through the study of Arabic EFL learners' positive and negative interlingual transfer of idiomatic expressions in their English writing assignments, Mahmoud (2002) found that the small number of idioms used and the high frequency of negative transfer were indicative of the problems encountered in learning and using idioms. In addition, facing the problem of low proficiency in EFL on the one hand and the urge to achieve 'idiomaticity' in it on the other hand, college students seem to arrive at a compromise

by falling back on the interlingual transfer strategy. Therefore, his pedagogical implication was that adult EFL learners could be made aware of the transfer strategy and its outcome, and cases of positive and negative transfer could be discussed with them so that they know when to transfer and when not to. Moreover, with the belief that the low-proficiency foreign language learners can be encouraged to use interlingual transfer, Mahmoud (2002) suggests that more exposure to the target language through reading and listening is vital—the language course should aim at idiomatic phrases as well as fluency and accuracy.

Irujo (1986) examined the effect of idiom similarity of L1 and L2 on advanced EFL learners' comprehension and production of idioms. Her aim was to find the role of transfer in a group of Spanish-speaking Venezuelan advanced EFL learners' comprehension and production of idioms. She classified the English idioms into three categories: (1) identical idioms: those with the same form and meaning as their Spanish equivalents; (2) similar idioms: those similar to their Spanish equivalents; and (3) different idioms. In terms of comprehension, Irujo found that identical idioms were the easiest to comprehend; similar idioms were comprehended almost as well as the identical idioms were, while different idioms were the most difficult for the participants to comprehend. Irujo concluded that both positive and negative L1 knowledge transfer was shown in the case of identical or similar idioms when the learners' first language was close to the target language; therefore, L1-L2 idiom similarity could be an influential factor in second language learners' idiom comprehension, but is not necessarily so.

Previous Studies on Idiom Comprehension

Some researchers in recent years have claimed that conceptual metaphor can facilitate the learning and comprehension of idioms which was based on the Conceptual Metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The research results suggested that metaphorical and metonymical understanding played an important role in idiom comprehension (Gibbs, 1992; Hamblin & Gibbs, 1999).

In a series of Bortfeld's (2002) experiments, native and nonnative speakers of English were asked to form mental images of familiar American English idioms. Even when given explicit instructions to base their images on the phrases' literal meanings, both groups of speakers reported images that reflected fusions of the phrases' literal and figurative meanings. In a subsequent rating task, non-native speakers were judged to have produced more natural sounding sentences using the target idioms after the imaging task than they did before the task. In a second experiment, non-native English speakers were asked to form images of unfamiliar American English idioms both

before and after being told the phrases' figurative meanings. The result shows non-native speakers' images did not noticeably change between the first and the second imaging session, Bortfeld's (2003) study indicated that their images were not dependent on explicit knowledge of the phrases' figurative meanings.

Several studies were conducted in the Taiwanese EFL context. Based on Krashen's (1982) idea that linguistic input is crucial to language acquisition and Swain's (1985) postulate that linguistic output should be viewed as being as important as linguistic input, Huang (2007) investigated the effectiveness of input and output instruction via pictures in Taiwanese college students' comprehension. Idioms were taught with not only metaphors and metonymies but also visual aids. The participants were divided into three groups with different ways of idiom teaching: the first group was taught with the underlying metaphors and metonymies, the second with the underlying metaphors and metonymies plus visual input, and the third with the underlying metaphors and metonymies plus visual output. The results showed that the three groups all positively increased their idiom comprehension and improved their understanding of the underlying metaphors and metonymies. Also, the visual output group outperformed the other two groups in idiom comprehension and retention in memory. Finally the ability to comprehend conceptual metaphors and metonymies was correlated with the complexity of the conceptual metaphors underlying idioms.

Another similar study done by Feng (2007) investigated the utility of conceptual metaphors and metonymies in enhancing the idiom comprehension of EFL learners. Her results showed that in the pre-test, participants were not aware of the connection of the underlying metaphorical and/or metonymical knowledge and the figurative meanings of idioms. However, the underlying knowledge, including two kinds of metaphors and metonymies, of idioms could be to some extent taught to learners, which in turn facilitated and increased their comprehension of unfamiliar idioms. In addition, the ability to comprehend conceptual metaphors and metonymies was connected not only to universal and cultural knowledge but also correlated with the participants' language proficiency.

To explore L2 learners' comprehension processes when they attempt to interpret idiom meanings, some researchers have also investigated the comprehension strategies and techniques which were used by the learners. How do EFL learners process unknown idioms? As previous studies suggested, they are likely to use all the clues available to derive the meanings of the idioms, such as contextual information, the individual words of the idiom, L1 knowledge, world knowledge, and so on. Cooper (1999) examined the on-line processing strategies used by EFL learners with varying backgrounds of L1, and identified seven strategies: 1) guessing from contexts, 2) discussing and analyzing the idiom, 3) using the literal meaning, 4) requesting

information, 5) repeating or paraphrasing the idiom, 6) using background knowledge, 7) referring to an L1 idiom. Another similar study done by Chen (2004) with an idiom comprehension test and a think-aloud task investigated Chinese EFL learners' strategy use. The result showed that the number of strategies used by the participants increased as idioms increased in difficulty, and the statistics indicated that strategy use by the advanced learners was more diversified and more effective.

While previous studies have provided enlightening theoretical and practical insights into L2 idiom comprehension, only a few researches have been done regarding idiom comprehension of college EFL students in Taiwan. As Lionats (2001) points out, in light of the pervasiveness of idioms in both written and spoken discourse, research into idiom understanding and interpretation must be text-situated and context-based. Therefore, the current study aimed to examine Taiwanese college EFL learners' idiom familiarity and the factors in their idiom comprehension.

THE METHODOLOGY

Participants

One hundred and seven sophomores who major in English at a private university were selected as the participants for the study. They were non-native speakers of English who on average had at least ten years of EFL instruction since elementary school. The study was conducted during the fall semester of 2011 while the participants were enrolled in the course Intermediate English Listening.

The Instrumentation

At the beginning of the semester, a 25-item GEPT (General English Proficiency Test) reading-section test was administered in order to determine the students' levels of English language proficiency. Based on the test scores, 42 participants were assigned in a high-level group and 65 were in a low-level group, according to the mean performance and the standard deviation of the vocabulary test ($M = 36.78$). To protect all participants' anonymity throughout the study, the researcher applied S initial (which stands for every Student) and a number given to every participant indicating his or her order in each group as High: S1-S41, and Low: S42-S107. Then all participants were asked to complete the Idiom Familiarity and Interpretation Task I and II—items came from the book *English Idioms in Context*.

The first test only showed 16 isolated underlined idioms, while the second test had the same sixteen idioms but underlined in 16 written sentences. At first, all

subjects were asked to rate their familiarity with each sample idiom in a four-point scale ranged from 1 (never heard of that idiom) to 4 (very familiar with that idiom). Next, all subjects were asked to define each underlined idiom in the written texts, and write down their meanings as their interpretations. Since students were able to figure out the meanings of the sample idioms in a contextual situation on the second test but not on the first test, the purpose of the Idiom Familiarity & Interpretation Tasks I and II also intended to check if 'context' could help learners' recognition with the idioms. Students' written answers were graded by two Taiwanese English teachers.

In order to investigate college EFL students' on-line idiom comprehension process, a think-aloud technique was also used at the same time while the idiom tasks were implemented. The researcher randomly selected 15 students among the participants to conduct the think-aloud protocols. While doing the think-aloud task, unlike the other participants who were only asked to write down their interpretation for each idiom on the sheets, they were asked to verbalize their thoughts while performing the two idiom tasks. While these participants spoke aloud what they thought about the meaning of each idiom and how they figured out the idioms (such as literal transfer or background information), all their utterances were voice-recorded by the monitors. In the case when there was a silent span of more than ten seconds, the monitor would prompt the participant. These verbal protocols then were transcribed word for word for further analyses. Finally, all subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire for the idiom survey, including their personal information and 18 questions regarding their opinions and attitudes toward English idioms.

Data Analysis

The purpose of the study was to investigate EFL students' familiarity with idioms: if language proficiency, idiom type, and context play significant roles in impacting learners' idiom comprehension and their guessing efficiency of unfamiliar idioms. The data gathered from the two idiom tasks in which the recorded protocols of participants were transcribed verbatim (including the idioms without contextual and with contextual support) was processed by ATLAS.ti, the qualitative data analysis software. The transcripts were analyzed for two things: one was the methods the participants applied in deciphering the meaning of each idiom; the other was the meaning they arrived at for each idiom. In addition, the correlations between the participants' correct or incorrect responses regarding the idiom meanings and the idiom types were examined. With reference to earlier L2 idiom processing studies (i.e. Irujo, 1986; Liontas, 2001), the degree of L1-L2 similarity was taken as one criterion in

classifying English idioms in the present study. Four idiom types are identified, according to whether the idiom can be directly translated from English to Chinese:

Table 1 *Four types of L1-L2 Idiom Translation Relationship*

| | Translation Relationship L1-L2 Idiom | Abb. |
|---|---|------|
| 1 | English idioms which have exact Chinese translation equivalents | ET |
| 2 | English idioms which have partial translation equivalents in Chinese | PT |
| 3 | English idioms which cannot be translated literally into Chinese and whose literal translation make no sense in Chinese | NET |
| 4 | English idioms which cannot be translated literally into Chinese, yet whose literal translation makes sense in Chinese and denotes a different meaning other than the target idiom's meaning (false-friend) | FF |

The next step in coding was to score the participants' comprehension of the sixteen idioms in two idiom tasks. A correct answer to the meaning of each idiom was granted 2 points, a partially correct meaning was granted 1 point, while wrong comprehension or indication of not knowing the meaning of the idiom was marked 0.

RESULTS

This study, focusing on the question of how familiar the EFL students are with English idioms, aimed to examine: (1) how efficiently they can comprehend the idiom meaning, and (2) if the learners' proficiency level, idiom types, and context play significant roles in affecting their comprehension of idiom meaning. Among 107 participants, 22 were male (20.6%) and 85 were female (79.4%). The first part of the *Student Questionnaire: Attitudes toward Learning English Idioms* is concerned with students' personal information, and the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Participants' Personal Information (N=107)*

| Item | Frequency (n) | Percent (%) |
|------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1. Gender | | |
| Male | 22 | 20.6 |
| Female | 85 | 79.4 |
| 2. Off-campus English Lesson | | |
| Attended | 16 | 15.0 |
| Not attended | 91 | 85.0 |
| 3. On-campus English Lesson | | |
| Attended | 78 | 72.9 |
| Not attended | 29 | 27.1 |
| 4. Interest in English | | |
| So-so | 23 | 21.5 |
| Some | 53 | 49.5 |
| A lot | 31 | 29.0 |
| 5. Daily English learning | | |
| Seldom | 5 | 4.7 |
| Yes, on the Internet | 24 | 22.4 |
| Yes, material reading | 34 | 31.8 |
| Yes, cram school | 8 | 7.5 |
| Yes, TV/movies | 76 | 71.0 |
| Yes, songs | 78 | 72.9 |
| Yes, other activities | 3 | 2.8 |
| 6. Best skill in English | | |
| Listening | 33 | 30.9 |
| Speaking | 15 | 14.0 |
| Reading | 41 | 38.3 |
| Writing | 14 | 13.1 |
| Translation | 4 | 3.7 |
| 7. Worst skill in English | | |
| Listening | 20 | 18.7 |
| Speaking | 33 | 30.9 |
| Reading | 3 | 2.8 |
| Writing | 38 | 35.5 |
| Translation | 13 | 12.1 |

Table 2 illustrates that among the 107 respondents, only 16 (15.0%) had attended after-school off campus English lessons, but 78 (72.9%) had attended extracurricular English lessons offered by the school. Regarding their interest in learning English, 84 students (78.5%) showed positive attitudes. In terms of their self-learning of English in daily life, five students replied that they seldom learn English (4.7%). The majority stated that they watched English TV programs and movies as their way of self-learning English (71.0%) or listened to English songs (72.9%), while nearly one-third (31.8%) stated that they read English materials such as magazines or novels, and 22.4% preferred learning English on the Internet. From students' self-report

regarding their best and worst English skills, the findings indicated that their receptive skills (listening and reading) were better than their productive skills (speaking and writing).

Items 8 and 9 were concerned with EFL learners' learning motivation and learning difficulty in reading and listening. As the results shown in Table 3, most of their motivation came from the belief that learning English was helpful for their job-hunting and employment in the future (84.1%)—those with better competence in English could have better competitiveness in their career. Also, 65.4% of the participants' motivation was to go abroad/travel to a foreign country, and 45.8% stated their desire for making friends with foreigners—of course, a good English conversation skill is definitely needed. In addition, nearly half of them (53.3%) were motivated in English learning since they enjoyed learning foreign languages.

Table 3 *Participants' English Learning Motivation and Difficulty (N=107)*

| Item | Frequency (n) | Percent (%) |
|---|---------------|-------------|
| 8. English learning motivation | | |
| Helpful for academic achievement | 39 | 36.4 |
| Helpful for future job and employment | 90 | 84.1 |
| Enjoy learning foreign languages | 57 | 53.3 |
| Go abroad or travel to foreign country | 70 | 65.4 |
| Make friends with foreigners | 49 | 45.8 |
| Passive learning motivation | 5 | 4.7 |
| 9. The biggest difficulty in listening or reading | | |
| Lack of vocabulary | 54 | 50.4 |
| Poor grammar | 26 | 24.3 |
| Classroom teaching is useless | 5 | 4.7 |
| Hard to understand English | 22 | 20.6 |

In terms of EFL students' learning difficulty in listening and reading, half of the participants (50.4%) blamed their lack of vocabulary, and nearly one-fourth (24.3%) attributed their learning difficulty in English to their poor grammar. Only five students thought English teaching in their classroom was useless.

Research question one intended to assess the guessing efficiency of the university EFL students. Therefore, the items were also required to be analyzed in terms of the subjects' familiarity (i.e. their previous knowledge of the meaning of the sample idioms). Evaluating a subject's guessing efficiency had to be done by rating that subject's responses to the meaning of idioms that he or she reported as 'unfamiliar'. As such, each answer had to receive a 'correctness' rate as well as a familiarity report, based on the subject's reports of their familiarity toward each idiom). Therefore, each subject's answer was either one of the following situations:

1. Familiar and Correct (FC is assigned if the subject reports a given idiom as familiar and confirms his or her familiarity with that idiom by providing a correct answer for that idiom meaning);
2. Familiar and Partially Correct (FPC is assigned if the subject reports a given idiom as familiar and provides a partially correct answer for that idiom meaning);
3. Familiar and Wrong (FW is assigned if the subject reports a given idiom as familiar but provides a wrong answer for that idiom meaning);
4. Unfamiliar and Correct (UC is assigned if the subject reports a given idiom as unfamiliar but he or she provides a correct answer for that idiom meaning);
5. Unfamiliar and Partially Correct (UPC is assigned if the subject reports a given idiom as unfamiliar but he or she provides a partially correct answer for that idiom meaning);
6. Unfamiliar and Wrong (UW is assigned if the subject reports a given idiom as unfamiliar and he or she provides a wrong answer for that idiom meaning).

According to Boers and Demecheleer (2001), only responses with unfamiliar reports, regardless of the rates that were assigned to them, were to be examined in order to assess the participants' guessing efficiency. That is, the findings related to the guessing efficiency would be based on the number of the items containing the unfamiliar idioms, whether the participants' guesses were correct, partially correct or wrong. In other words, the number of answers which were assigned as FC, FPC, and FW were excluded and would not be calculated in the subject's total score.

Table 4 Number of Items with the Rates Assigned to Subjects' Answers

| Reported as Familiar Idioms | | | Reported as Unfamiliar Idioms | | |
|------------------------------------|------|------|-------------------------------|-------|-------|
| FC | FPC | FW | UC | UPC | UW |
| 200 | 66 | 86 | 403 | 247 | 710 |
| 11.7% | 3.9% | 5.0% | 23.5% | 14.4% | 41.5% |
| Total: 352 (20.6%) | | | Total: 1360 (79.4%) | | |
| Total Number of Items: 1712 (100%) | | | | | |

All participants completed 1712 items in idiom task I. Table 4 represents the participants' overall performance in guessing: the correctness rate that each of the 1712 items received. As shown in Table 4, approximately one-fifth of the subjects (20.6%) were already familiar with the meaning of the sample idioms in the idiom task I. Thus, their guessing efficiency was to be assessed only of their answers to the remaining items (reported unfamiliar idioms). The number of such items, 1360, represented roughly four-fifths (79.4%) of all the 1712 items done by the participants.

Table 5 *Number and Rate of the Items Containing Reportedly Familiar Idioms*

| Correct | Partially Correct | Wrong |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 200 | 66 | 86 |
| 56.8% | 18.7% | 24.5% |
| Total: 266 (75.5%) | | Total: 86 (24.5%) |
| TOTAL: 352 (100%) | | |

Table 5 shows the number of sample idioms that the subjects reported as familiar and it also presents the rate assigned to the subjects' answers. Participants provided correct or partially correct answers for 75.5% of the sample items in which they reported those idioms as familiar. Despite this fact, they provided wrong answers for 24.5% of the items in which they reported the sample idioms as familiar. Although the participants reported their familiarity with sample idioms 352 times out of a total of 1712, they provided correct or partially correct meanings of these reportedly familiar idioms only 266 times, which represents 75.5% of all the reported familiar idioms. However, there were 86 times when the participants failed to prove their familiarity with the sample idioms. Failing to prove one's idiom familiarity refers to their inability of providing correct or partially correct meanings of the sample idioms that they reported as familiar.

To assess the participants' familiarity with the sample idioms presented in the task, it should be noted that the subjects mistakenly reported some of the idioms as familiar, although they were not indeed familiar with such idioms. Accordingly, two types of familiarity can be distinguished: *Reported Familiarity* and *Measured Familiarity*. The first type refers to being familiar with an idiom as reported by the subjects, whether they were truly familiar with that idiom or not; that is, *Reported Familiarity* refers to what the participants believe they are familiar with, whether they proved that familiarity or not. The second type, *Measured Familiarity*, refers to the subjects' familiarity as measured by the task; that is, as evidenced by the participants' correct and partially correct answers as to the meanings of idioms that they reported as familiar. As shown in Table 6, among the 16 sample idioms, although the participants reported being familiar with an average of 3.3 sample idioms, they could prove their idiom familiarity with only an average of 2.5 idioms.

Table 6 *Average Number of Familiar Idioms*

| | Subject (N) | Correct Item | Average Number |
|----------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|
| Reported Familiarity | 107 | 352 | 3.3 |
| Measured Familiarity | 107 | 266 | 2.5 |

The distinction between the two types of familiarity is needed because it shows that the participants missed the chance of learning by guessing the meaning of the idioms. In other words, the subjects did not attempt to make guesses because they mistakenly believed that they were already familiar with the meaning of such idioms. Therefore, these items are excluded from the calculation of the subjects' total scores. Regarding the subjects' Measured Familiarity, the participants were familiar with only 266 items (i.e. 200 correct + 66 partially correct answers), not with the idioms in the 352 items because the subjects mistakenly reported their familiarity with the 16 sample idioms. In other words, without providing correct or partially correct answers to these items, the participants failed to confirm their familiarity with the idioms in 24.5% of the reportedly familiar items, or 5.0% of all the task sample idioms.

Table 7 Number and Rate of the Items Containing Reportedly Unfamiliar Idioms

| Correct | Partially Correct | Wrong |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 403 | 247 | 710 |
| 29.6% | 18.2% | 52.2% |
| Total: 721 (47.8%) | | Total: 710 (52.2%) |
| TOTAL: 1360 (100%) | | |

In terms of unfamiliar idioms, the participants failed to make correct or partially correct guesses in more than half (52.2%) of the 1360 items containing unfamiliar sample idioms. On the other hand, as shown in Table 7, the participants made correct or partially correct guesses for less than half (47.8%) of the 1360 items containing unfamiliar sample idioms. Moreover, the participants' grades in percentages of the highest possible grade are presented in Table 8. The result indicates that the participants achieved a mean score of 29.97 (out of 100) in their attempts at guessing the meaning of the idioms reported as unfamiliar. That is, the participants scored 29.97% of the possible highest grade.

Table 8 Descriptive Statistics of Guessing Scores in Idiom Task I

| | <i>N</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Score (Out of 100)</i> | <i>Std. Deviation</i> |
|--------------|----------|-------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Task I Score | 107 | 9.59 | 29.97 | 4.29 |

In conclusion, regarding college EFL learners' guessing efficiency for the meaning of idioms, the results indicate that the subjects in the current study seem to have difficulty comprehending unfamiliar idioms by guessing their meaning. Such difficulty is evidenced by 1) the subjects' wrong guesses in more than half (52.2%) of the items containing the unfamiliar idioms, 2) the participants' mean score of 29.97 (out of 100), and 3) the participants' failure to recognize familiar idioms as such in 5.0% of the total number of the task items.

Research question two intended to examine if the three factors—learner proficiency (high and low level), idiom types (ET, PT, NET, and FF), and context (with and without contextual support)—can affect college EFL learners’ correct or incorrect guessing for the unfamiliar English idioms’ meanings.

Learner Proficiency Factor

First of all, the learner proficiency factor was tested to see if any relationship existed with the learners’ performance in guessing idiom meanings. Two hypotheses were made:

H₀: There is no difference in the ability of guessing idiom meaning between low-proficiency learners and high-proficiency learners.

H_A: There is a significant difference in the ability of guessing idiom meaning between low-proficiency learners and high-proficiency learners.

Table 9 *Descriptive Statistics of Two Groups’ Total Guessing Scores*

| Group | <i>N</i> | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|------------------|----------|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| High Proficiency | 42 | 28.48 | 8.11 | 1.25 |
| Low Proficiency | 65 | 16.42 | 5.13 | .64 |

The participants were divided into two groups based on their performance in the vocabulary test. The ones whose scored higher than the mean score ($M = 36.78$) were assigned to the high-proficiency group, and the others were assigned to the low-proficiency group. To explore whether the factor of learner proficiency made any difference in the subjects performance in idiom interpretation, the total scores of the two idiom interpretation tasks were collected. According to the descriptive statistics in Table 9, it seems that the participants of the high-proficiency group ($M = 28.48$, $SD = 8.11$) performed better than the low-proficiency group did ($M = 16.42$, $SD = 5.13$).

To determine whether the analysis of variance between the two groups of participants (high-proficiency and low-proficiency) reached the significant level, the independent samples *t*-test was conducted. Before the *t*-test, the variances of the two populations were checked by Levene’s test to verify whether they were significantly different. As Table 10 shows, since the result of Levene’s test for Equality of Variances showed that $F = 7.41$, $p < 0.05$ level ($p = 0.008$), the equal variances not assumed were accepted. Therefore, the result $t(62.26) = 8.60$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ means that a statistically significant difference was found between the mean scores in total scores received by the two groups of participants. We reject the null hypothesis of no differences in guessing ability between the high-proficiency and low-proficiency level learners. To sum up, the results indicate that there was a statistically significant

relationship between college EFL learners' proficiency and their ability in guessing idiom meaning—a learner who had better English proficiency made more accurate guesses as to the meaning of unfamiliar English idioms.

Table 10 *Independent Samples Test of Two Groups' Total Guessing Scores*

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------|------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
| Equal variances assumed | 7.41 | .008 | 9.44 | 105 | .00 | 12.06 | 1.28 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | 8.60 | 62.26 | .00 | 12.06 | 1.40 |

Idiom Type Factor

In terms of idiom type, according to whether the idiom can be translated directly from English to Chinese, four types of idioms were identified as ET (English idioms which have exact Chinese translation equivalents), PT (English idioms which have partial translation equivalents in Chinese), NET (English idioms which cannot be translated literally into Chinese and whose literal translation make no sense in Chinese), and FF (English idioms which cannot be translated literally into Chinese, yet whose literal translation makes sense in Chinese and denotes a different meaning other than the target English idiom's idiomatic meaning; they are so-called 'false-friend'). Table 11 shows the 16 sample idioms used in the present study (two interpretation tasks) and their type groupings.

Table 11 *Sample Idioms Divided into Four Types*

| Idiom Type | Idiomatic Expressions | |
|------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ET | swallow the bait (#9) | show one's true colors (#12) |
| | fall between two stools (#11) | tighten one's belt (#13) |
| PT | find one's feet (#4) | turn the tables (#7) |
| | cost one an arm and a leg (#5) | lift a finger (#10) |
| NET | face the music (#1) | cook one's goose (#6) |
| | chew the face (#2) | take the biscuit (#14) |
| FF | pull one's leg (#3) | eat one's words (#15) |
| | move heaven and earth (#8) | make one's bed (#16) |

According to the participants' answers for both idiom task I and II, the idiom which received the highest correctness was *show one's true colors* (#12), followed by *cost one an arm and a leg* (#5) and *tighten one's belt* (#13). In other words, the

subjects wrote down the more accurate meanings on these three idioms than the others. It is noted that both *show one's true colors* and *tighten one's belt* belong to ET (exact equivalence), and *cost one an arm and a leg* is part of PT (partial equivalence). On the other hand, the idiom which received the lowest correctness was *eat one's words* (#15), followed by *pull one's leg* (#3) and *take the biscuit* (#14). It is noted that both *eat one's words* and *pull one's leg* belong to FF (false-friend), and *take the biscuit* is part of NET (no equivalence).

The idiom type factor was tested to see if any relationship existed with the learners' performance in guessing idiom meanings. Two hypotheses were made:

H₀: There is no significant difference in learners' performance of guessing idiom meaning among the four idiom type groups of ET, PT, NET, and FF.

H_A: There is a significant difference in learners' performance of guessing idiom meaning among the four idiom type groups of ET, PT, NET, and FF.

Table 12 *Descriptive Statistics of Guessing Scores Based on Idiom Types*

| Type | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error |
|-------|----|--------|----------------|------------|
| ET | 4 | 168.25 | 54.50 | 27.25 |
| PT | 4 | 134.75 | 50.31 | 25.15 |
| NET | 4 | 86.50 | 55.20 | 27.60 |
| FF | 4 | 57.50 | 31.22 | 15.61 |
| Total | 16 | 111.75 | 62.06 | 15.52 |

To evaluate if the factor of idiom type affected college EFL learners' performance in idiom interpretation, the descriptive statistics are shown in Table 12. Compared with their means from the four type groups, the highest mean scores were performed by the ET type group ($M = 168.25$, $SD = 54.50$) while the lowest mean scores of the four groups were performed by the FF type group ($M = 57.50$, $SD = 31.22$). In addition, the mean scores of the NET type group was also lower than the mean scores of the overall performed scores ($M = 111.75$, $SD = 62.06$).

Table 13 *ANOVA Result for Guessing Scores on Idiom Types*

| | Sum of Square | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|----------------|---------------|----|-------------|------|-------|
| Between Groups | 29207.50 | 3 | 9735.83 | 4.09 | .032* |
| Within Groups | 28569.50 | 12 | 2380.79 | | |
| Total | 57777.00 | 15 | | | |

Note. * $p < 0.05$

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the relationship between idiom types and subjects' guessing ability of idiom meaning.

The independent variable, the idiom type factor, included four idiom type groups; the dependent variable was the subjects' performance in the two idiom interpretation tasks. To see if the ANOVA was significant, the Tests of Between-Subject Effects were examined and presented in Table 13. As Table 13 shows, there was a strong relationship between the idiom type factor and subjects' guessing ability since a statistically significant difference was found among the groups of idiom type in the performed scores, $F(3, 12) = 4.09$, $p < 0.05$ level ($p = 0.032$).

A post-hoc comparison test was further employed to decide precisely which idiom type group means were significantly different from other group means. Tested by post-hoc multiple comparisons of group means using the LSD (Least significant difference) method, the result revealed that there were statistically significant differences in NET group ($p = 0.035 < 0.05$) and FF group ($p = 0.007 < 0.05$). This means that the participants' guessing ability for the items which belong to NET and FF groups was significantly worse than the other two type groups (ET and PT). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis of no significant difference in learners' performance of guessing idiom meaning among the four different idiom types. That is, the result revealed that two out of four comparisons were significantly different from each other.

Table 14 *Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons for Guessing Scores on Idiom Types*

| (I) Type | (J) Type | Mean Difference (I-J) | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|----------|----------|-----------------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------------|
| | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| ET | PT | 33.50 | .351 | -41.67 | 108.67 |
| | NET | 81.75 | .035* | 6.58 | 156.92 |
| | FF | 110.75 | .007* | 35.58 | 185.92 |
| PT | ET | -33.50 | .351 | -108.67 | 41.67 |
| | NET | 48.25 | .187 | -26.92 | 123.42 |
| | FF | 77.25 | .045* | 2.08 | 152.42 |
| NET | ET | -81.75 | .035* | -156.92 | -6.58 |
| | PT | -48.25 | .187 | -123.42 | 26.92 |
| | FF | 29.00 | .417 | -46.17 | 104.17 |
| FF | ET | -110.75 | .007* | -185.92 | -35.58 |
| | PT | -77.25 | .045* | -152.42 | -2.08 |
| | NET | -29.00 | .417 | -104.17 | 46.17 |

Note. *The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Participants' performance in the idioms of the FF group ($M = 57.50$, $SD = 31.44$) had a significantly lower mean score than that of the ET group ($M = 168.25$, $SD = 54.5$) and the PT group ($M = 134.75$, $SD = 50.31$), and participants' performance in the ET group ($M = 168.25$, $SD = 54.5$) had a significantly higher mean score than in the NET group ($M = 86.50$, $SD = 55.20$) and the FF group ($M = 57.50$, $SD = 31.44$).

Participants' guessing performance's mean score difference between the groups of PT and ET, between the groups of PT and NET, and between the groups of FF and NET, were not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. To sum up, the idiom type is certain a factor that impacts EFL learners' performance in guessing the meaning of unfamiliar idioms—they can make more accurate guesses when the L2 idiom is translatable and equivalent to their L1.

Context Factor

Finally, the context factor was also examined to see if the learners' guessing performance for unfamiliar idioms would be different in two situations: idioms shown in isolation and with contextual support.

H₀: There is no significant difference in learners' guessing performance for idiom meanings between the idioms shown in isolation and with contextual support.

H_A: There is a significant difference in learners' guessing performance for idiom meanings between the idioms shown in isolation and with contextual support.

In order to explore whether seeing the idioms with or without contextual support made any difference in learners' guessing performance, the received scores from the Idiom Familiarity & Interpretation Task I (idioms without contextual support) and II (idioms with contextual support) were compared. Their descriptive statistics are presented in Table 15. The most relevant for our purposes were the two means. Examination of these means suggested that the mean for idioms with contextual support ($M = 11.51$, $SD = 4.53$) was higher than the mean for isolated idioms ($M = 9.59$, $SD = 4.29$). However, the t -test would determine whether or not this difference was real or due to chance.

Table 15 *Descriptive Statistics of Idiom Scores*

| | | <i>Mean</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>Std. Deviation</i> | <i>Std. Error Mean</i> |
|--------|-----------------|-------------|----------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Pair 1 | Without Context | 9.59 | 107 | 4.29 | .41 |
| | With Context | 11.51 | 107 | 4.53 | .44 |

Table 16 *Paired Samples T-test for Isolated Idiom and Contextual Idiom*

| | | Paired Differences | | | | |
|--------|----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|----------------------------|----------|----------------------------|
| | | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Std. Error Mean</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> |
| Pair 1 | Without Context- With Context | -1.93 | 1.48 | .14 | -13.48 | 106 |
| | | | | | | <i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i> |
| | | | | | | .000 |

Further, a paired-samples t -test was used to examine if college EFL learners' performance of guessing meaning for an idiom with contextual support was

significantly better than for an isolated idiom. The result reveals that learners' guessing performance for the contextual idioms was significantly better ($M = 11.51$, $SD = 4.53$) than their performance for the isolated idioms ($M = 9.59$, $SD = 4.29$), $t(106) = -13.48$, $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.00$). Therefore, we rejected the null hypothesis of no significant difference in learners' performance of guessing idiom meaning between the idioms shown in isolation and in context. To sum up, the context is certainly a factor that impacts learners' performance in comprehending the meaning of unfamiliar idioms—they can make more accurate guesses when the idiom comes with contextual support than when the idiom is presented alone.

CONCLUSION

Figurative expressions of English sometimes are difficult for EFL learners; some students who are English majors or who have an intermediate level of general English language proficiency might still be frustrated in figuring out the meanings from the contents which they read or listen to. Mastering these multiword units or 'language chunks' is not easy for EFL learners since the meanings of these texts cannot be determined through an analysis of their individual word meanings. However, a high frequency of figurative language is a feature for native speakers in their daily communication and in mass media. Thus, having such language knowledge is vital for EFL learners to avoid misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Moreover, Chen (2010) mentions that this is an era of *Global English*, in which Taiwanese students should equip themselves with enough English vocabulary, enhance their English competence on the go, and use English continually in order to face the challenges of globalization and internationalism. The core of learning English is how to *use* the target language appropriately instead of knowing perfect grammar—that is, the ultimate goal of foreign language learning is to be able to achieve cross-cultural communication with foreigners. However, EFL learners are not considered competent speakers of English until they master the various idiomatic expressions.

The results obtained from the current study gives us an insight into the learners' problems and difficulties in idiom comprehension, and it suggests that both idiom type and learners L2 proficiency play an irreplaceable role in L2 idiom comprehension and interpretation. To be specific, NET and FF idioms posed the greatest difficulty in comprehension due to their characteristics of being non-transferable and causing negative interference, while ET idioms were the easiest to comprehend, it means that an increased degree of L1-L2 similarity between the English idiom and its Chinese translation equivalent foreshadows easier comprehension and interpretation.

Based on the research findings, the researcher believes that the gap between L2

and L1 cultures greatly affects L2 learners' cognitive and conceptual system that may lead to misunderstandings by the idiom's literal meaning. During L2 instruction, instead of treating all the idioms in the same way, differential attentions therefore should be paid to different types of idioms. For instance, for those L2 idioms which have L1 equivalents (e.g., ET and PT idioms), due to their easy comprehension, teachers can focus on the productive use of them. On the other hand, for those idioms which cannot be translated directly into the learner's L1 (e.g., NET and FF idioms), as Zuo (2008) suggests, comprehension should be privileged over production in classroom instruction.

Idioms taught in isolation are generally not retained and the full meaning of words can only come from encountering them in a rich linguistic environment; therefore, it is advisable to create a sense of need for idioms by presenting idioms in a natural linguistic context in which learners need to use the idioms they have learned to achieve a certain communicative purpose. Nevertheless, since many idioms are culture-dependent and even culture-specific, they can only be fully integrated into a learner's natural speech patterns after extensive exposure to the type of English which native speakers use with their culture. In order to recognize idioms and understand the context in which they are used, learners should be exposed to real-life language in which idioms are freely incorporated and can be studied in context. Therefore, the researcher expects this study to bring up the idea that both cultural literacy and idiomatic language should be integrated into L2 classrooms. According to the findings of the current study, the following pedagogical implications might be helpful to the improvement of idiom teaching in EFL situations:

1. EFL teachers should encourage students to guess the meaning of idioms during reading but direct teaching of idioms and explicit idiom learning should go along with such encouragement.
2. It is advisable that teachers try to offer more opportunities and practice in class in which students can be exposed to idioms contextualized in authentic language to generate natural, meaningful discourse using those idioms.
3. Students' schemata can be enriched by reading various genres of English and watching English programs to experience real language use in their daily life, so that they will be able to relate background information presented in the idiom with the information stored in their long-term memory and activate and use that knowledge to interpret the idiom's meaning.
4. EFL teachers should pay attention to the conceptual metaphor aspect of idiom learning and introduce the relevant cultural background knowledge related to the conceptual metaphors concerned.

To sum up, in the ESL/EFL classrooms, use of authentic materials will prove that idioms are employed quite often in certain genres, and progressing learners' knowledge of idioms will increase those learners' understanding of these materials. Also, if knowing idioms and using them appropriately truly forms a part of communicative competence, then teachers would do well to introduce them regularly and systematically to their students in a positive motivational way since language learners should learn not only the vocabulary and grammatical structures of the target language, but also the idiomatic phrases with which to integrate themselves into the cultural dimension of language learning.

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大學生對英語慣用語熟識度與影響慣用語理解因素之研究

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摘要

本研究的目的是要探究台灣的大學生對英語慣用語的熟識度及其理解能力與釋義過程，研究問題共有兩個方向：(1)學生對於不熟悉之慣用語，其猜測及釋義的效率如何？(2)學習者之英語能力、慣用語之型式、及有無前後文提示，這三個因素是否在大學生其慣用語之理解過程中扮演重要的角色？共有一百零七位南部某私立大學應用外語系大二學生參與研究。研究設計是採用混合型之研究方法：量化與質化兩種研究方法都將使用，包含資料收集及統計工具的分析。

研究結果發現，學生對於在不熟悉之慣用語猜測及釋義的效率上，研究結果可由三點來證明學生的困難度：(1)學生在其標為不熟悉慣用語的題數中，其猜測及釋義的答錯率達 52.2%；(2)學生在其不熟悉的慣用語中，猜測及釋義的平均分數僅達到 29.97(總分 100)；(3)在所有題數中，學生在其標為熟悉的慣用語中，仍有 5% 的題數是答錯誤的。在影響學生慣用語理解的因素中，研究結果顯示，就「英語能力」因素而言，高成就組學生比低成就組在慣用語的猜測及釋義的準確度表現上高出許多。就「有無前後文提示」因素來說，學生在有前後文輔助的慣用語理解上的表現，也比單單只光看慣用語來猜測及釋義的準確度表現上來的更佳；以上兩個因素在統計上皆達到顯著差異。在「慣用語型式」因素方面的研究結果發現，學生在「可直接轉譯」及「部份可轉譯」這兩種型式的慣用語猜測及釋義的準確度表現上，確實優於「無法轉譯」及「假朋友」(既熟悉但會犯錯的詞彙)型式之慣用語，此結果說明兩語言之相似與相異性對學習者理解的影響。在匯集自學生「邊想邊說」(think-aloud)的研究資料中，對於學生在理解慣用語的問題及困難，提供外語研究者與教學者更深入的了解及省思。最後，研究者就教師在英語教室中提升慣用語教學技巧之運用與學生之慣用語學習策略，在結論中提出建議以供參酌。

關鍵字：慣用語理解、慣用語型式、學習者英語能力、前後文輔助、影響之因素分析、英語教學

The Effects of Gloss Length and EFL Learners' English Proficiency Level on Vocabulary Retention

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Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the effects of gloss length and proficiency level on EFL learners' vocabulary retention. The participants in the present study were 120 college students from a university in Taipei, Taiwan. Based on the scores of a proficiency test, the participants were divided into 2 groups: high proficiency vs. low proficiency. Each participant of the two groups was further randomly assigned to one of the two treatments: short glosses vs. long glosses. Thus, a total of four groups were formed: high proficient and long gloss (HL), high proficient and short gloss (HS), low proficient and long gloss (LL), and low proficient and short gloss (LS). The participants were then asked to read an assigned article with 18 words glossed and then answer five multiple-choice reading comprehension questions. After the reading task, they were immediately given an unannounced vocabulary test, in the form of matching, on the 18 glossed words. A delayed test was also administered 2 weeks later. The collected data were analyzed by using a two-way-mixed-design ANOVA. The results are summarized as follows. First, the result did not show a significant main effect of gloss length on vocabulary recognition ($F(1, 116) = .08, p > .05$). Second, the interaction effect between proficiency level and gloss length on the learners' recognition of the target words was not significant ($F(1, 116) = .03, p > .05$). Third, the result failed to reveal a significant main effect of gloss length on vocabulary retention ($F(1, 116) = .15, p > .05$). Finally, the interaction effect between gloss length and proficiency level on the learners' performance of vocabulary retention was not found to be significant ($F(1, 116) = .09, p > .05$). Based on these findings, some pedagogical implications and suggestions for future research were provided.

Keywords: Gloss length, Proficiency level, Vocabulary retention

INTRODUCTION

In Taiwan, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), reading has been emphasized in English learning. However, the amount of effort spent does not seem to have paid off in recent years. In particular, in terms of Taiwanese students' reading performance in the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) in 2010, Taiwan has been reported to rank sixth, falling behind several EFL countries in Asia, such as China and South Korea, and ESL (English as a second language) countries, such as the Philippines (Wang, 2012). Over time, many researchers have been interested in finding the main factors that cause hindrance to comprehending reading texts (e.g., Huang, 1997; Yeh & Wang, 2003). The results generally showed that small vocabulary size has been one of the major culprits that cause ESL/ EFL learners' difficulties. Language learners in Taiwan, especially senior high students, tend to monotonously memorize large amounts of vocabulary items that are alphabetically arranged in a list. Unfortunately, this kind of rote learning tends to result in inefficient vocabulary retention. In view of this phenomenon, scholars have suggested that learners should enlarge their vocabulary size through extensive reading, which has also been highly promoted and extensively investigated in Taiwan in recent years (e.g., Lee, 2006; Sheu, 2003, 2004; Smith, 2011).

To maximize the effects of vocabulary learning through extensive reading, a number of scholars have recommended numerous methods, one of which is the use of glosses. Glosses are commonly held to be able to provide immediate assistance to learners. Numerous types of glosses, such as verbal gloss or visual gloss, have been suggested and researched. To date, related empirical findings generally have suggested that textual plus pictorial gloss (i.e., L1 or L2 definition combined with a corresponding picture) is the most beneficial aid for vocabulary learning (Yanguas, 2009). Concern has also been voiced about whether the effect of textual plus pictorial gloss will vary depending on its length (AbuSeileek, 2011). To put it differently, it remains unexplored whether learners, when given long textual plus pictorial gloss, can perform significantly better than those aided with short gloss. Another related issue worth concern is about whether the effect of gloss on vocabulary retention will be different among learners at different proficiency levels. Collectively, what remains at issue is whether the effect of gloss on vocabulary retention would be influenced by its length, learners' L2 proficiency level, and/or the interaction between these two factors. Hence, the current study made the first attempt to examine the effect of textual plus pictorial gloss on learners at different

proficiency levels, incorporating the manipulation of gloss length. In view of Taiwanese learners' declining performance on reading comprehension tests, it was hoped that the results of the present study could provide valuable suggestions for practitioners, such as reading material designers, in choosing appropriate length for textual gloss for reading texts. Specifically, based on the results of the present study, if the learners with low proficiency could perform better when provided with pictorial plus short glosses in reading than when aided with long glosses, the materials with short length of gloss should be chosen particularly for them. On the other hand, if learners with high proficiency could have a better performance when given long glosses than when offered short glosses, materials with long textual definitions should be selected to facilitate their performance on reading and accordingly to enlarge their vocabulary size.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary knowledge has long been considered as one of fundamental contributors to the comprehension of a text. The empirical evidence of the crucial role of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension and language learning has been obtained in many studies (e.g., August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; Baleghizadeh & Golbin, 2010; Wu & Hu, 2007). Among many variables investigated in Wu and Hu's (2007) study, vocabulary was found to have a significant and positive correlation with reading achievement and play a main determinant role in reading comprehension. Just as Kruse (1979) put it, "Of prime importance in reading is vocabulary skill" (p. 208). To understand the message in a reading passage, readers first of all have to know the meanings of words and then process the sentences by combining the meanings of words to further grasp the main idea of the text. Nowadays, many teachers acknowledge that when students face an article written in the foreign language, those unknown vocabulary items seem to be their challenge (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). By acquiring large amounts of vocabulary, students can gain more efficiency in reading.

Despite the fact that vocabulary learning is very crucial in language learning, learners may not be able to master all the words needed while reading. Take English learners in Taiwan for example. The students' exposure to English outside the classroom is quite limited, which may lead to an entire dependence on their teachers and may restrain them from obtaining sufficient input for additional expansion in lexical knowledge. On account of these inferior circumstances, there have been strategies suggested for students to learn vocabulary, such as intentional and incidental learning.

These two approaches, intentional and incidental learning, have been extensively investigated and have also shown to be effective for vocabulary learning. The main difference between these two lies in a methodological distinction—whether students are aware of an ensuing test or not. According to Hulstijn (2001), with intentional learning, students are notified in advance about the presence of a test on the specific knowledge after exposure. On the other hand, students will not be forewarned about a following test when they are in an incidental learning environment. Apart from the operational difference, word knowledge gained through incidental learning has also been perceived as a by-product of the main cognitive reading activity (Huckin & Coady, 1999; Kweon & Kim, 2008; Paribakht & Wesche, 1999). In other words, when students are engaged in incidental learning, they are instructed to read a text, with the main focus on the message of the text. When paying attention to the content of the text, they may tend to guess the unknown words from context. As such, Nation (2001) claimed that incidental learning through guessing from context is the most important of all sources of vocabulary learning.

In light of Nation's (2001) positive comments on incidental learning, most researchers have been more interested in exploring the effect of incidental learning on learners' performance of learning vocabulary than in examining that of intentional learning. It is believed that the effectiveness of vocabulary learning will be enhanced if students learn vocabulary incidentally. Specifically, an influential publication by Nagy, Herman, and Anderson (1985) argues that words should be learned in an incremental way since the number of words to be learned is too enormous to depend solely on explicit instruction. Hence, through incidental learning, learners can acquire most vocabulary by repeatedly encountering the words. Such beneficial effects have been disclosed in a number of studies (e.g., Kweon & Kim, 2008; Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985; Paribakht & Wesche, 1999; Shu, Anderson, & Zhang, 1995; Wode, 1999), which have asserted that incidental learning accounts for a considerable proportion of the vocabulary growth.

In spite of the claim that vocabulary can be learned more effectively in an incidental way, incidental learning is not without criticism. One of the most seriously attacked limitations, as pointed out by Huckin and Coady (1999), is that guessing obviously takes time and thus slows down the process of reading. Guessing is effective only when the context is fully understood. To comprehend the text, learners will need a certain amount of lexical knowledge to better understand the content. To put it differently, learners can benefit from incidental learning only when they are supplied with adequate prior vocabulary knowledge.

To cope with the major limitation inherent in incidental learning, scholars and

researchers have, therefore, suggested many practical methods. Among the various methods, the use of vocabulary glossary annotations has been adopted widely. According to Nation (2001), a gloss is a short definition or synonym that is presented with the text, either in L1 or L2. As for the goal of glossary notation, Otto and Hayes (1981) defined it as “not only to *acquire* but also to *internalize* and *apply* the skills and strategies that enable them to be independent readers of the full range of material they encounter” (p. 18). As pointed out by Ko (2005), there are many advantages of glosses. For one thing, the provision of glosses prevents students from incorrect guessing if they have little background knowledge or contextual clues. For another, glossing helps minimize the interruption while reading. In fact, glosses function as a bridge between prior knowledge and the new information in the text. Unlike dictionaries, which may distract students' attention from what they read, glossing can supply readers with immediate access to the definition of the unknown words. In view of these advantages, the use of gloss has prevailed over decades to assist students in reading.

Gloss comes in many different types, such as textual gloss, pictures, sound, and videos. Textual gloss, the original type of gloss is in general presented in a written form containing a brief definition or synonym. After its common use, pictorial gloss arose. Unlike textual gloss, it offers more visual stimuli by providing illustrations which represent what the glossed words mean. Shortly after the inception of pictorial gloss, with increasing interests in sound and videos, came a new form of gloss—sound and video glosses. When provided with a sound gloss, readers can hear the definition of the unknown words, whereas video gloss offers learners both visual and auditory aids. However, because of the resource availability constraints, auditory modes (sound and videos) are excluded from the present study.

Attempts to investigate the effect of textual gloss on vocabulary learning have shown that texts with gloss are more useful for vocabulary retention than texts without it (e.g., AbuSeileek, 2011; Grace, 1998, 2000; Hulstijn, Hollander, & Greidanus, 1996; Yanguas, 2009). For example, Hulstijn et al. (1996) conducted a study to compare the performance on vocabulary retention among French learners who were provided with marginal glosses (gloss located in the margin), those who were allowed to use a dictionary, and those who were supplied with nothing. They found that incidental vocabulary learning was fostered more when students were provided with the meaning of unknown words through marginal gloss or when they looked up the meaning in a dictionary than when no external information concerning unknown words was available. Furthermore, the group provided with marginal glosses significantly outperformed the group allowed to use a dictionary.

Similar to the textual gloss, pictorial gloss has also been extensively

investigated in the field of incidental learning over years (e.g., Akbulut, 2007; Kost, Foss, & Lenzini, 1999; Shahrokni, 2009; Yanguas, 2009; Yeh & Wang, 2003; Yoshii, 2006; Yoshii & Flaitz, 2002). For instance, Yoshii and Flaitz (2002) made an attempt to delve into the effects of pictorial gloss by replicating Kost et al.'s (1999) study in a multimedia environment. Their study was based on Paivio's (1971, 1991) dual coding theory, which posits that information coded both verbally (textual) and visually (pictorial) is more effective for learning than information coded singularly. Therefore, the combined effects of pictorial gloss and textual gloss were also investigated. Their findings, which were in line with those of Kost et al.'s study, showed that the combination group (annotations with text and picture) significantly outscored the text-only or picture-only group on both the immediate and delayed vocabulary tests. This study, therefore, lent some support to the dual coding theory.

In addition to Paivio's (1971, 1991) theory, Mayer's (1997) generative theory of multimedia learning was also the theoretical foundation of the above-mentioned studies. Mayer claims that learners engage in selecting, organizing, and integrating any visual and verbal information from what they see. Learners can thus construct referential connections between two forms of mental representations—the verbal system and visual system. To be more specific, learners learn more effectively when they gain access to both visual and verbal modes elaborating on the presented materials than when there is only one mode or when there is none provided to them.

In addition, another two models—*word association model* and *concept mediation model*—were introduced by Potter, So, Eckhardt, and Feldman (1984). These two models contend that as a learner's L2 proficiency increases, a developmental shift can be detected from the word association model to the concept mediation model. Specifically, when seeing a picture, lower proficient learners tend to associate it with words in their L1, and then translate it into their L2 equivalent. On the contrary, as the concept mediation model proposes, higher level learners are more inclined to make a direct association between the picture and the corresponding word in their L2. However, the two models were not supported by Potter and his colleagues' (1984) empirical findings and therefore await further studies to confirm them.

Along with the possible effect of L2 proficiency, there is another factor that is also believed to have some effects on vocabulary learning, the length of gloss (AbuSeileek, 2011). The cited factor, gloss length, has currently caused a rising concern. A recent study, conducted by AbuSeileek in 2011, sought to not only examine the effects of the gloss in different locations of the text, but also demonstrate the effects of the number of words in glosses. The length of gloss, devised as a within-subject variable, ranged from one word to seven words in length.

All subjects thus encountered all various lengths of glossed words. At the end of the study, the researcher concluded that glosses with three to five words produced more noticeable differences than did those with one to two or six to seven words. However, the subjects in his study were undergraduates, classified as beginner to pre-intermediate EFL learners, and there was no attempt made to explore the effect of gloss on advanced learners. Recognizing such a limitation, AbuSeileek himself therefore suggested that more studies should be conducted along this line to see whether his results could be generalized to learners with higher or advanced proficiency.

Taken together, numerous studies (Akbulut, 2007; Shahrokni, 2009; Tabatabaei & Shams, 2011; Yanguas, 2009; Yeh & Wang, 2003; Yoshii, 2006; Yoshii & Flaitz, 2002) have shown that textual and pictorial glosses can better enhance incidental vocabulary learning. However, learners' L2 proficiency level has not been examined in those studies, nor has it been incorporated in studies on gloss length. Hence, the present study is the first attempt to examine the effectiveness of picture and L2 gloss while taking into consideration the two variables, the proficiency level and the length of gloss.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine how college students at different proficiency levels perform on vocabulary retention tests when they are provided with textual and pictorial glosses in reading. The current study also aimed to explore the effect of the length of gloss on students' performance in vocabulary recognition and retention. Specifically, the present study attempted to address the following four questions:

1. Does the gloss length affect the effectiveness of pictorial and L2 gloss on vocabulary recognition?
2. Is there a significant interaction effect between gloss length and proficiency level on vocabulary recognition?
3. Does the gloss length affect the effectiveness of pictorial and L2 gloss on vocabulary retention?
4. Is there a significant interaction effect between gloss length and proficiency level on vocabulary retention?

METHOD

Participants

Initially, the present study recruited 135 college students who were enrolled in *Freshmen English* at one university in Taipei, Taiwan. They were from the Department of Music, Department of Mathematics, Department of Psychology and Counseling, Department of Chinese Language and Literature, and Department of English Instruction. Prior to the main study, the participants were classified into two groups at two different proficiency levels (high and low), based on the scores of a proficiency test (i.e., Wide Range Achievement Test 4 to be described below). For the purpose of achieving a clear-cut distinction between the high and the low proficiency levels among the participants, 15 students who scored from 4.6 to 5.0 in Grade Level were excluded from the main study. Hence, the final sample consisted of 120 participants. The participants who scored below the mean in the proficiency test ($M = 4.8$ in Grade Level) were designated as the low-proficiency group (1 to 4.5 in Grade Level); those who scored above the mean were labeled as the high-proficiency group (5.1 to 9.2 in Grade Level). After that, they were further randomly assigned to one of the two gloss conditions (long glosses and short glosses). As such, there were four groups in total: high proficiency and long gloss (HL group), high proficiency and short gloss (HS group), low proficiency and long length (LL group), and low proficiency and short gloss (LS group). Each of the four groups contained 30 participants.

The participants' pre-existing knowledge of the glossed words was assessed by a pretest (i.e., the definition supply test to be described below) administered prior to the formal study. The mean score was 1.20 for the HL group, 1.17 for the HS group, 0.63 for the LL group, and 0.97 for the LS group, respectively. These means were then calculated by a one-way ANOVA to further confirm whether there was a significant difference among these four groups with a significance level set at .05. The results showed no significant differences among the four groups with $F(3, 116) = 2.16, p > .05$, ensuring the equivalence of the four groups' entry knowledge of the target words.

Instruments

The instruments used in the present study included: (1) a proficiency test, (2) a definition supply test, and (3) a word recognition test. Each of the four tests is described in the following.

Wide Range Achievement Test 4 (WRAT-4)

A subtest of the norm-referenced Wide Range Achievement Test 4 (WRAT-4) (Wilkinson & Robertson, 2006), the green form of the sentence comprehension test was administered. The purpose was to determine the participants' proficiency levels and to divide them into the high and low proficiency groups. WRAT-4 comprises four subtests—word reading, sentence comprehension, spelling, and math computation. In the latest edition, the interpretation of scores has been improved by the inclusion of grade-based norms. With the addition of the grade-based norms and the extension of age, the usefulness of the test is proper for students in grades K-12 and test takers aged from 5 to 94. Among the four subtests, only sentence comprehension was adopted in the current study due to the fact that the other three subtests measure other irrelevant skills, such as spelling and mathematical ability. The green form of the sentence comprehension test consisted of 50 items, listed in an ascending order of difficulty and based on a modified cloze format. Test takers were required to fill in the blanks to complete the sentences. For example, after reading the sentence "*She took off her coat because she felt too _____,*" test takers should fill in an appropriate word or two at most for the sentence to make sense. The possible answers provided in the test manual were *hot* and *warm*. Although it was suggested that test takers should give oral responses, the participants in the present study were asked to write down the answers due to the time constraints for testing each of the participants. In addition, giving written responses may reveal the participants' English proficiency more faithfully because students in Taiwan learn English predominantly through reading and writing rather than through listening and speaking. Each item of the test was scored one point. Thus, the maximum possible total score was 50 for the 50 items. According to the manual, the median internal consistency reliability coefficients of this subtest were reported to be .93 for age group and .90 for grade level, respectively.

Definition Supply Test

The pre-existing knowledge test of the target words was given to the participants before the reading task began. The purpose of this test was to make sure that the participants had no knowledge of the 18 target words. The test contained 18 target words and 10 additional words to distract their full attention from the target words (see Appendix A). The 10 words were extracted from the list of 7,000 vocabulary items suggested by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan for college entrance examination. Those words (such as *bruise* and *corridor*) were selected because they were closely related to the content of the reading passage. The test was administered in the format of a production task, where the participants were instructed to put a cross mark next to any word they knew and provide an explanation either in L1 or L2. The 10 additional words were included to divert their attention and therefore were not given any points for correct answers. Each correct answer for the 18 target words in this section was awarded one point. Thus, the maximum possible total score for the definition supply test was 18 (the additional 10 words were excluded).

Word Recognition Test

The word recognition test, in a matching format, was designed to assess the participants' ability to recognize the target words. It contained all 18 target words on the left-hand side, functioning as item stems. The participants had to choose the corresponding definitions out of 23 alternatives on the right-hand side. The definitions in the test were paraphrased so that they were different from the way they have been presented in the reading task. Prior to the administration of the test, the revised version of those definitions was examined by a native speaker. Both the immediate (see Appendix B) and the delayed tests (see Appendix C) were in the same format. The only difference between the two tests was that the order of the stems in the delayed test was different from that in the immediate test to avoid memorization of the answers. The maximum possible total score for the recognition test was 18. The reliability estimates (Cronbach's α) for scores on the recognition test were .89 and .90 for the immediate and the delayed tests, respectively.

One thing to note is that the pretest and the immediate /delayed test differed in terms of item formats. The reason for adopting different formats was twofold. For one thing, if the matching format had been used in the pretest, the students would have obtained too many clues from the provided definitions of the glossed words.

Hence, it might have influenced the results of the present study. For another, the students might have had a practice or memory effect if the same format had been used for both the pretest and the immediate test.

Reading Material and Target Words

The article, "11-year-old Survivor of Floodwaters Saves Her Family," extracted from *Reader's Digest* online, was used as the main reading passage (Jones, 2009). This article was an amazing survival story about a brave 11-year-old girl who stayed calm when the whole family got trapped in an SUV, a car, which was lodged in a logjam in a creek. Without her courageous behavior, the car would have been engulfed by the swelling torrents and the whole family (including her mother and two toddlers) would have drowned. This authentic article was chosen because in extensive reading, it has been suggested that authentic materials should be employed (Berard, 2006; Walmsley, 2011). Furthermore, the magazine, *Reader's Digest*, is targeted for the general public and it includes real-life texts that were not written for ESL/EFL purposes.

The selection of glossed words was based on the following criteria. First of all, the results of a pilot study were taken into consideration. In the pilot study, 12 students were recruited and requested to mark the words that they considered difficult or unknown. After that, whether or not those unknown words could be concretely drawn was the second selection criterion. For example, most action verbs and concrete nouns (such as *submerge* and *torrent*) were suitable to be glossed because they could be vividly illustrated. As for unknown words (such as *foster* and *gaping*) that could not be illustrated, they were paraphrased or replaced by synonyms, as suggested by Bell and LeBlanc (2000). At the same time, these modifications were further checked by the same native English speaker, who is a lecturer at the university. After modification, the readability of the text was calculated by the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Readability Formula, which has been proved to be fundamentally valid for a broad spectrum of English readers that includes non-native and native readers as well (Greenfield, 2004). The final text was reduced in length from 996 words to 963 words, with a 5.3 on the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Readability Formula, suggesting that fifth graders in the U.S. could read and understand the text. Based on the results of the proficiency test, the average Grade Level of all the participants was 4.8. Therefore, the readability index (5.3) of this reading passage appeared to be comparable to the average Grade Level of all the participants.

Two types of gloss length were adopted, that is, short and long length of gloss.

In the present study, short glosses ranged from one to three words, whereas long glosses, were from seven to ten words. Furthermore, the L2 definitions were based on two dictionaries, *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2001) and *Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary* (1991), which have been used by Akbulut (2007) and Shahrokni (2009), respectively. To meet the requirements of the gloss length, the same native speaker was invited again to revise and refine the definitions so that all the glosses were of the proper length, except for the word, *diameter*, which was explained in four words as “measurement across a circle.” As for the pictures, they were extracted from the Internet. The textual plus pictorial gloss was provided in an additional sheet instead of at the bottom or in the margin because pictures tend to take up lots of space. Annotated words were given in bold and were numbered.

Procedures

The present study was made up of two phases. One was the pilot study and the other was the main study. Each of the phases is described in the following sections.

Pilot Study

Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted on 12 college freshmen (six low-proficiency and six high-proficiency students). The purposes of the pilot study were threefold. First, it was conducted to identify the potential difficulties that might be encountered in the main study. Second, the amount of time for the administrations of tests could be estimated. Finally, it was conducted to choose the target words to be glossed.

The procedures of the pilot study were illustrated in the following. Twelve freshmen were instructed to take a pretest on the target words and then to read the given text. While reading, they also needed to underline the words that were unfamiliar to them. The words that were highlighted by more than half of the students were taken into consideration as the target words for gloss in the main study. After reading the text, they answered the comprehension questions, followed by the immediate vocabulary retention test. The amount of time taken for the tests and the reading task was also recorded. Upon completion of the reading task, they were invited to give comments and feedback on the appropriateness and clarity of the textual definitions of the 18 target words. Their comments on the tests were adopted for further revisions of the tests. An example of their comments that were adopted was that the matching items should be put in the box, as shown in Appendix C, to enhance the neatness of the layout.

Main Study

The main study was conducted in a three-week period, as indicated in Table 1. In the first week, a pretest (the definition supply test, see Appendix A) on the glossed words was administered to test the participants' existing knowledge of the target words. After the pretest, they were instructed to read the text and then complete the reading comprehension questions. The short glosses were provided to the HS and the LS groups while the long glosses were given to the HL and the LL groups in reading the text. After the reading task, the participants then took the immediate vocabulary test (the recognition test, see Appendix B), which they had no prior knowledge of. Two weeks later, the delayed vocabulary test (the recognition test, see Appendix C) was then administered.

Table 1 Procedures of the Main Study

The first week (One hour)

- Pretest (10 minutes)
- Reading Task + Reading comprehension questions (35 minutes)
- Immediate vocabulary test (15 minutes)

The third week (15 minutes)

- Delayed vocabulary test (15 minutes)
-

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0. For the purpose of answering the first to the fourth research questions, a two-way-mixed-design ANOVA was conducted, where proficiency level and gloss length were the between-subjects factors and the vocabulary test was the within-subjects factor. Both the gloss length (long vs. short) and the proficiency level (high vs. low) had two levels. The within-subjects factor, the vocabulary tests, included the pretest, the immediate and the delayed tests.

RESULTS

Main Effect of Gloss Length on Vocabulary Recognition (Pretest vs. Immediate)

For the purpose of addressing the main effect of gloss length on vocabulary recognition, a two-way-mixed-design ANOVA was conducted, with gloss length (long vs. short) as one of the between-subjects factors and recognition as the within-subjects factor. Recognition referred to the gain score, that is, the total score on the posttest minus the total score on the pretest. In other words, it was operationally defined as the difference in scores between the pretest and the immediate test in the present study. As shown in Table 2, the result failed to reveal a significant difference in recognition between the long and the short gloss length groups ($F(1, 116) = .08, p > .05$). That is, gloss length did not have a significant effect on vocabulary recognition. Specifically, the means and standard deviations of the performance for the long- and the short-gloss participants on vocabulary recognition are revealed in Table 3. For the participants with the long glosses, they performed better on the immediate test ($M = 10.25, SD = 5.12$) than on the pretest ($M = .92, SD = .96$). Likewise, for the participants with the short glosses, they also obtained a higher score on the immediate test ($M = 9.83, SD = 5.11$) than on the pretest ($M = 1.07, SD = 1.00$). The gain score of 9.33 for the participants receiving the long glosses appeared to be slightly larger than that of 8.76 for those receiving the short glosses. However, the difference (i.e., .57) in the gain scores between those receiving the long glosses and those receiving the short glosses turned out to be statistically insignificant. That is, the length of glosses was not found to significantly influence the participants' vocabulary recognition.

Table 2 Summary of the ANOVA in the Mixed Design for Overall Score

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p |
|-----------------------------------|---------|-----|---------|--------|------|
| Between Group | 5673.73 | 6 | | | |
| Prof | 432.02 | 1 | 432.02 | 35.06 | .00* |
| Length | 1.07 | 1 | 1.07 | .08 | .77 |
| Prof x Length (between factor) | .42 | 1 | .42 | .03 | .85 |
| Test (within factor) | 4914.15 | 1 | 4914.15 | 558.66 | .00* |
| Test x Prof | 317.40 | 1 | 317.40 | 36.08 | .00* |
| Test x Length | 4.82 | 1 | 4.82 | .55 | .46 |
| Test x Prof x Length | 4.27 | 1 | 4.27 | .49 | .49 |
| Within Group | 2449.80 | 232 | | | |
| Block | 1429.43 | 116 | 12.32 | | |
| Residual | 1020.37 | 116 | 8.80 | | |
| Total | | | | | |

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of the Pretest and the Immediate Vocabulary Test

| Tests | Length | Prof | M | SD |
|-----------|--------|-------|-------|------|
| Pretest | Long | High | 1.20 | 1.00 |
| | | Low | .63 | .85 |
| | | Total | .92 | .96 |
| | Short | High | 1.17 | 1.14 |
| | | Low | .97 | .85 |
| | | Total | 1.07 | 1.00 |
| | Total | | .99 | .98 |
| Immediate | Long | High | 12.57 | 4.33 |
| | | Low | 7.93 | 4.86 |
| | | Total | 10.25 | 5.12 |
| | Short | High | 12.50 | 4.79 |
| | | Low | 7.17 | 3.93 |
| | | Total | 9.83 | 5.11 |
| | Total | | 10.04 | 5.10 |

Interaction Effect between Gloss Length and Proficiency Level on Vocabulary Recognition (Pretest vs. Immediate)

The second research question aimed at exploring the interaction effect between gloss length and proficiency level on vocabulary recognition. A two-way-mixed-design ANOVA was conducted with the vocabulary tests (the pretest and the immediate test) as the within-subjects factor and proficiency level (high vs. low) and gloss length (short vs. long) as the between-subjects factors. As shown in Table 2, the interaction effect between proficiency level and gloss length on vocabulary recognition was not statistically significant ($F(1, 116) = .03, p > .05$). The effect of gloss length on vocabulary recognition did not vary depending on the learners' English proficiency level. That is, whatever proficiency level the learners were at, the effect of gloss length on their vocabulary recognition remained the same.

Main Effect of Gloss Length on Vocabulary Retention (Immediate vs. Delayed)

For the purpose of answering the third research question, which examined the main effect of gloss length on vocabulary retention, a two-way-mixed-design ANOVA was conducted, with gloss length (long vs. short) as one of the between-subjects factors and retention as the within-subjects factor. Retention referred to the ability to retain the meaning of a word after a given period of time. In the present study, it was operationally defined as the difference between the delayed and the immediate tests. As can be seen in Table 4, the result failed to reveal a significant difference in vocabulary retention between the long- and the short-gloss groups ($F(1, 116) = .15, p > .05$). Gloss length did not have a significant effect on vocabulary retention. Table 5 displays the mean scores and standard deviations in terms of the immediate and the delayed tests for the long and the short gloss length groups. For the participants with the long glosses, they obtained a lower score on the delayed test ($M = 8.15, SD = 4.65$) than on the immediate ($M = 10.25, SD = 4.59$). Likewise, as for the participants with the short glosses, they had a lower score on the delayed test ($M = 7.97, SD = 5.35$) than on the immediate test ($M = 9.84, SD = 4.36$). The difference of 2.10 in the long-gloss participants' retention between the immediate and the delayed tests tended to be slightly larger than that (difference of 1.87) for those with the short glosses. However, the difference between 2.10 and 1.87 was not significant, indicating that gloss length had a trivial influence on vocabulary retention.

Table 4 Summary of the ANOVA in the Mixed Design for Overall Score

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p |
|----------------------|---------|-----|---------|-------|------|
| Between Group | 1318.08 | 6 | | | |
| Prof | 1008.60 | 1 | 1008.60 | 27.01 | .00* |
| Length | 5.40 | 1 | 5.40 | .15 | .70 |
| Prof x Length | 3.27 | 1 | 3.27 | .09 | .77 |
| (between factor) | | | | | |
| Test (within factor) | 236.02 | 1 | 236.02 | 29.44 | .00* |
| Test x Prof | 46.82 | 1 | 46.82 | 5.84 | .01* |
| Test x Length | .82 | 1 | .82 | .10 | .75 |
| Test x Prof x Length | 20.42 | 1 | 20.42 | 2.55 | .11 |
| Within Group | 5262.06 | 232 | | | |
| Block | 4332.13 | 116 | 37.35 | | |
| Residual | 929.93 | 116 | 8.02 | | |
| Total | | | | | |

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics of the Vocabulary Tests (Immediate vs. Delayed) for Long and Short Length Groups

| Length | Immediate | | Delayed | |
|--------|-----------|------|---------|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Long | 10.25 | 4.59 | 8.15 | 4.65 |
| Short | 9.84 | 4.36 | 7.97 | 5.35 |

Interaction Effect between Gloss Length and Proficiency Level on Vocabulary Retention (Immediate vs. Delayed)

The fourth research question focused on the interaction effect between gloss length and proficiency level on vocabulary retention. A two-way-mixed-design ANOVA was conducted with the vocabulary tests (the immediate and the delayed tests) as the within-subjects factor and proficiency level (high vs. low) and gloss length (short vs. long) as the between-subjects factors. As demonstrated in Table 4, the interaction effect between proficiency level and gloss length on vocabulary retention was not statistically significant ($F(1, 116) = .09, p > .05$). The effect of gloss length on vocabulary retention did not vary depending on the learners' English proficiency level. That is, no matter what proficiency level the learners were at, the effect of gloss length on their vocabulary retention remained the same.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The aims of the present study were to examine the main effect of gloss length on vocabulary recognition and vocabulary retention. Significant effects were expected prior to conducting the present study. Surprisingly, it turned out that no significant main effect was found for gloss length on either vocabulary recognition ($F(1, 116) = .08, p > .05$) or vocabulary retention ($F(1, 116) = .15, p > .05$). One plausible explanation for failing to find the significant main effect might be memory constraints. As noted by Craik and Lockhart (1972), “the subject processes the material in a way compatible with or determined by the orienting tasks” (p. 677). The participants knew that they would be tested on their reading comprehension but had no prior knowledge of the subsequent vocabulary tests on the glossed words. The participants, therefore, might strengthen their memory trace by rehearsing only the required information about the reading text in their working memory and then further reconstruct into mental representations. As such, without paying as much attention to those glossed words as they did to the reading text, it would be likely for the present study to have failed to find a significant main effect of gloss length.

Another possible explanation for these findings is that the participants in the present study might have attended to the pictorial glosses more than to the textual glosses. That is, the results might have been influenced by the participants’ learning styles. Just as pointed out by Yeh and Wang (2003), Taiwanese EFL learners showed a strong preference for visual stimuli. It was likely that the participants in the present study had tried to memorize the meaning of the new words by processing the pictures instead of the textual gloss. If the participants had attended more to the pictures than to the textual definitions, it was likely that they had difficulty in recalling the L2 definitions when taking the immediate and the delayed tests, where they were asked to match the appropriate meaning with the target words. As Taylor (2006) commented in his meta-analysis, where studies adopted traditional or CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) glosses were analyzed, pictorial aides placed next to textual gloss might be interesting to the learners. However, even with the pictorial aids, the textual glosses tended not to last for a long period if comprehension was their primary aim.

As for the insignificant interaction effects found on both vocabulary recognition ($F(1, 116) = .03, p > .05$) and vocabulary retention ($F(1, 116) = .09, p > .05$), one plausible explanation is the participants’ linguistic competence. Due to the fact that learners’ limited L2 linguistic competence may pose an obstacle to their comprehension of a text, even when the low-proficiency participants were aided

with either long or short glosses in reading, the 18 target words still appeared difficult for them. On the other hand, given that the high-proficiency participants had a good command of English, they might tend to perform better than their low-proficiency counterparts regardless of whatever gloss length they were provided with.

One final point worth noting is that the results of the present study did not lend support to the word association model and concept mediation model proposed by Potter, So, Eckhardt, and Feldman (1984), who elucidated that the effectiveness of glosses may vary depending on learners' proficiency levels. These two models were not supported by the results of the present study, where no significant interaction effect was found between proficiency level and gloss length. Hence, the tenability of these two models needs to be further examined.

Based on the results of the current study, the conclusions pertinent to each of the four research questions can be drawn as follows: (1) there was no significant main effect of gloss length on vocabulary recognition, indicating that gloss length did not have a significant effect on vocabulary recognition; (2) the interaction effect between gloss length and proficiency level on vocabulary recognition was not significant. No matter what proficiency level the participants were at, the effect of gloss length on their vocabulary recognition remained the same; (3) there was no significant main effect of gloss length on vocabulary retention, suggesting that gloss length had trivial influence in terms of vocabulary retention; and (4) the interaction effect between gloss length and proficiency level on vocabulary retention was not statistically significant. No matter what proficiency level the learners were at, the effect of gloss length on their vocabulary retention remained the same.

Some pedagogical implications can be derived from the results of the present study for language teachers in teaching vocabulary to EFL learners. As the current study showed, the participants recognized most of the target words after reading. Thus, language teachers should provide activities to make short-term learning develop into long-term memory. Numerous activities to facilitate the effect of gloss length on vocabulary retention have been recommended. For instance, as suggested by Gairns and Redman (1986), if short glosses are to be used in the reading, such as synonym, the retention can be improved by asking students to read with those newly-learned words underlined and supplied with two definitions—one is correct and the other is incorrect. The students need to choose the synonym out of the two definitions with the contextual clues. Likewise, if long glosses are adopted in the reading task, some post-reading activities can be organized. For instance, students can be given definitions and some pictures. First, they can discuss in groups and then find the corresponding pictures. While discussing those definitions, learners

make an attempt to reach an agreement on their understanding of those glosses. In sum, with plenty of exposure to glosses through the aforementioned activities, they will be engaged in a deep cognitive processing, thus leading to the retention of the words.

On the other hand, the results of the present study were subject to the following limitations. To start with, the participants were recruited from one university only. It remains unknown about whether or not the results can be generalized to students from other universities in Taiwan. Moreover, if a broad range of learners at different proficiency levels can be recruited from universities located in different areas, participants can be classified to achieve a more clear-cut distinction from high and low proficiency levels than they were in the present study.

Meanwhile, the results of the present study were also subject to the types of gloss and the words selected for glossing. In the present study, all of the four groups were provided with both pictorial and textual glosses simultaneously. It remains unknown whether or not the participants attended to the pictures more than they did to the textual glosses. Besides, the words glossed in the present study may not be the key words for comprehending the text, which may reduce the effectiveness of the glosses on vocabulary retention. Hence, the generalizability of the results should be made with caution.

In addition, there were also some limitations inherent in the instruments used in the present study. First, the format of the instrument used in the present study to assess vocabulary retention was susceptible to guessing. The format of matching only requires the learners to associate the target word with another word or phrase that carries the same meaning (Read, 2000). Learners can choose the right definition inevitably by the process of eliminating or guessing. That is, students still can guess the meaning of the words without learning them. Therefore, to ascertain whether the learners know the words or not, it is suggested that future studies include a purer measure to assess the retention of words, such as a production task, which requires learners to produce the meaning of the target words either in their L1 or L2.

While the study has its limitations, it is hoped that it can provide a basis for future research along this line. Several directions for future research are recommended in the following paragraphs.

First of all, this study was conducted in an attempt to find out the effect of gloss length on learners' performance on vocabulary retention across only two proficiency levels (high vs. low). Future research is needed to address the issue by recruiting a larger sample size to extend our understanding of the effect of gloss length on vocabulary retention of Taiwanese students with various levels of L2 proficiency. Besides, as mentioned above, if a larger number of learners can be recruited, the

issue of whether learners pay more attention to the pictures than to the textual gloss can be closely examined by including additional groups provided with textual glosses only.

A further concern regarding the reading text is that due to the constraint of scope, only one reading text was used in the present study. A large body of literature has found that both the rhetorical organization and the topic of a reading text can affect learners' comprehension (Carrell, 1984, 1987; Lee, 1986). Given that only narrative was used in the present study, it remains unknown about whether its results can be generalized to different rhetorical modes. Hence, future research should be conducted to further probe into the effect of gloss length on learners' performance on reading comprehension across different types of rhetorical modes or topics.

Moreover, a comprehensive study about the effect of gloss length on vocabulary retention could not possibly be carried out if it did not incorporate a wide range of testing techniques or item formats tapping the constructs concerned. As noted by Wolf (1993), "different assessment tasks yield different, and not necessarily comparable results" (p.475). Different item formats or testing devices may yield different results from learners. For example, the format of production, a more demanding task than recognition, requires learners to go through deep, elaborative processing to produce their own answers either in their L1 or L2. The retention of vocabulary can be assessed by asking learners to offer the definition of the word. As such, it eliminates the possibility of guessing. Hence, future studies should employ different types of item formats or testing techniques to explore the effect of gloss length on vocabulary retention. It is also unclear which glosses the participants paid more attention to—the pictorial glosses or the textual glosses. Hence, it is suggested that some follow-up interviews be made or comprehensive questionnaires be distributed to get a clear picture about which kind of gloss participants think can offer the most immediate assistance.

On the whole, future research following these suggestions may help gain more insights into the effect of gloss length in the field of L2 vocabulary learning. In addition, it may also help researchers draw clear conclusions about the effect of gloss length on L2 vocabulary learning, thus guiding instructors and material designers towards pedagogically sound practices.

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APPENDIX A

Definition Supply Test

Instructions: Please put an “X” in the box if you know that word, and write the meanings either in English or Chinese.

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| [] huddle _____ | [] diameter _____ |
| [] corridor _____ | [] haul _____ |
| [] torrent _____ | [] altitude _____ |
| [] submerge _____ | [] cinch _____ |
| [] prickly _____ | [] flimsy _____ |
| [] dumbfounded _____ | [] thermometer _____ |
| [] roar _____ | [] sprawl _____ |
| [] brake _____ | [] toddler _____ |
| [] windshield _____ | [] reunion _____ |
| [] circuit _____ | [] culvert _____ |
| [] hoist _____ | [] sway _____ |
| [] logjam _____ | [] porch _____ |
| [] silhouette _____ | [] clutch _____ |
| [] bruise _____ | [] assault _____ |

APPENDIX B

Immediate Word Recognition Test

Instructions: Please match the words in the left column with the correct meaning on the right-hand side.

| | |
|---------------|---|
| — submerge | [A] to raise something up to a higher position |
| — toddler | [B] a strong and fast-moving stream of water or other liquid |
| — logjam | [C] to go below the surface of an area of water |
| — hoist | [D] a piece of transparent material fixed at the front of cars |
| — huddle | [E] a device for slowing or stopping a moving car |
| — clutch | [F] a crowded mass of logs blocking a river |
| — diameter | [G] a pipe for steam or vapor to release |
| — dumbfounded | [H] badly made and not strong enough for the purpose for which it is used |
| — flimsy | [I] the dark shape and outline of someone or something |
| — windshield | [J] unable to speak because of surprise |
| — torrent | [K] to be held on the surface of liquid |
| — culvert | [L] to gather closely in a group or in a pile |
| — brake | [M] to pull with effort or force |
| — prickly | [N] a straight line going from one side of a circle to the other side, passing through the center |
| — porch | [O] measurement from bottom to top |
| — cinch | [P] covered with sharp-pointed stuff on the skin of plants |
| — haul | [Q] a tunnel that carries a river or a pipe for water under a road |
| — silhouette | [R] to grasp something very tightly |
| | [S] to fasten something tightly around one's waist |
| | [T] device in a car for speeding up |
| | [U] a small area at the entrance of a building that is covered by a roof |
| | [V] without a point or sharp edge |
| | [W] a child who is just beginning to walk |

APPENDIX C

Delayed Word Recognition Test

Instructions: Please match the words in the left column with the correct meanings on the right-hand side.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| ___ huddle | [A] a pipe for steam or vapor to release |
| ___ clutch | [B] to gather closely in a group or in a pile |
| ___ logjam | [C] a straight line going from one side of a circle to the other side, passing through the center |
| ___ prickly | [D] a piece of transparent material fixed at the front of cars |
| ___ silhouette | [E] a device for slowing or stopping a moving car |
| ___ culvert | [F] to pull with effort or force |
| ___ diameter | [G] a child who is just beginning to walk |
| ___ dumbfounded | [H] badly made and not strong enough for the purpose for which it is used |
| ___ porch | [I] to raise something up to a higher position |
| ___ windshield | [J] unable to speak because of surprise |
| ___ brake | [K] to be held on the surface of liquid |
| ___ torrent | [L] the dark shape and outline of someone or something |
| ___ hoist | [M] to go below the surface of an area of water |
| ___ toddler | [N] device in a car for speeding up |
| ___ flimsy | [O] measurement from bottom to top |
| ___ cinch | [P] covered with sharp-pointed stuff on the skin of plants |
| ___ haul | [Q] a crowded mass of logs blocking a river |
| ___ submerge | [R] to grasp something very tightly |
| | [S] to fasten something tightly around one's waist |
| | [T] a tunnel that carries a river or a pipe for water under a road |
| | [U] a small area at the entrance of a building that is covered by a roof |
| | [V] without a point or sharp edge |
| | [W] a strong and fast-moving stream of water or other liquid |

註釋長度與 EFL 學生英文程度對單字記憶之影響

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摘要

本研究旨在探討註釋長度以及 EFL 學生英文程度對於北部一所大學大一學生在閱讀理解能力與字彙記憶上的影響。研究對象為台灣北部一所大學的 120 位大一學生。學生依照 WRAT-4 程度測驗的結果及註釋的長短分為四組，分別為高能力長註釋組（HL），高能力短註釋組（HS），低能力長註釋組（LL），和低能力短註釋組（LS）。受試者在單字註釋的幫助之下閱讀一篇文章，並完成五題選擇題，測驗其閱讀理解能力。接著，受試者在未事先被告知的狀態下接受單字測驗，以配合題的方式來測驗其對於十八個註釋單字的記憶。兩週後，受試者接受相同的單字測驗。資料分析採用完全相依設計二因子變異數分析以探究註釋長度以及學生英文程度對於其字彙記憶上的影響。研究結果顯示：一、註釋長度的主要效果在字彙辨認方面也未達到顯著水準 $F(1, 116) = .08, p > .05$ 。二、學生程度與註釋長度的交互效果在字彙辨識上並未達到顯著水準 $F(1, 116) = .03, p > .05$ 。三、註釋長度的主要效果在單字記憶方面也未達到顯著水準 $F(1, 116) = .15, p > .05$ 。四、學生程度與註釋長度的交互效果在單字記憶上並未達到顯著水準 $F(1, 116) = .09, p > .05$ 。本研究最後並提供對英語教學之應用，以及對未來研究的建議。

關鍵字：註釋長度、英文程度、單字記憶

