

Workshop presented on 31 July 2017
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What every English teacher should know about vocabulary teaching

(and why words are the rocket-fuel of language learning)

Assoc. Prof. Jonathan Newton
School of Linguistics and Applied
Language Studies



Teaching vocabulary

1. What do you know and believe about teaching vocabulary?
2. What questions on this topic interest/puzzle you?
3. What are you confident that you do well?
4. What are you less confident that you do well?
5. What are your main challenges?



'Without grammar very little
can be conveyed, without
vocabulary nothing can be
conveyed' (Wilkins, 1976)

Wilkins, D. (1976) *Notional Syllabuses*. Oxford: Oxford
University Press.

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It follows then that ...

... learning vocabulary is one of the
learner's most important jobs,

and that...

an effective vocabulary programme
can transform learning outcomes.

And yet ...

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'Teaching vocabulary is amongst the
teachers' *least* important jobs.'
(Nation, 2008, p. 5)



So when it comes to building
'lexical bridges to academic
success' what are the teacher's
key jobs?



The teacher's jobs

- A. Measuring, monitoring, planning and setting attainment targets
- B. Teaching vocabulary
- C. Guiding vocabulary learning
- D. Ensuring vocabulary development occurs across the four strands

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Job A: measuring, monitoring, planning and setting attainment targets



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English vocabulary: some basic facts

1. How many words in English?
2. How many words does an educated young adult native English speaker know?
3. How many words are our learners likely to need?

To answer Q3 we need to turn to the frequency principle.

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The frequency principle

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Words are classified into two main groups according to their frequencies:

High-frequency words: words occurring very often and covering a large proportion of a wide range of texts.

Low-frequency words: words appearing very infrequently and covering only a small proportion of any text.

(Nation, 2013)

The frequency principle

Spending time on learning HF words gives a good return for learning.



Spending time on LF words does not!



Academic words

Shared vocabulary of several academic disciplines (Nation, 2013) E.g., *achieve, analyse, valid etc.*

Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List:

1. 570 words divided into 10 sub-lists
2. developed from a 3.5 million running-word corpus of texts from 28 academic subjects
3. covered around 10% of the words in a wide variety of academic texts
4. Available online at <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/>

Technical words

Vocabulary of one particular academic discipline or part of a discipline (Nation, 2013)

E.g., *inflation, asset, enterprise* (technical words in business)

Low frequency words

auger, indolent, swagger, salve, viscount, brocade, etc. ...

Word frequency

Word frequency	Percentage of running words
The most frequent word	7%
10 most frequent words	25%
100 most frequent words	50%
1000 most frequent words	75%
2 nd 1000 most frequent words	(+ 5%) 80%
3 rd -5 th 1000 most frequent words	(+2%) 82%
Academic Word List – AWL	(+10%) 92%
Technical vocabulary	(+3-5%) 95-98%
Low frequency vocabulary	(+3-5%) 100%

Are we now ready to set vocabulary learning attainment targets?

Almost ..

We now know that attainment targets should follow the frequency principle, namely, *spend time on the most useful words.*

Read

Sea Today, Gone Tomorrow

1 How can people destroy one of the great natural wonders of the world? This question terrifies some of us, and rightly, it should terrify all of us. A great variety of marine animals live in the underwater world, but their numbers are slowly diminishing.

2 **(Oil spills pollute the ocean)** Next consider the Strait of Malacca. It was once home to beautiful corals, lush sea grass and clear blue water. Now the corals are dying, the sea grass is being destroyed and an oily water surface greets swimmers and holidaymakers.

3 Hundreds of ships use the Strait of Malacca daily. Sailing boats, cruise ships, fishing vessels and large tankers ply the strait. Oil and waste from these vessels do enough damage to marine life. When vessels collide in mid-sea, it makes the situation worse. Oil spills and fires from the collisions kill sea creatures in great numbers. In addition, factories and other industries dump waste into the sea, polluting the water even further.

4 Human activity is the main reason for the loss of marine life. The methods of fishing used also harm marine plants and animals. Some trawlers use dragnets that drag the sea bed and destroy the undersea gardens. Shellfish and corals, broken by the dragging action of the trawlers, face certain death.

5 Fishermen often find injured sea animals trapped in their nets. These creatures have been injured by the irresponsible actions of human beings. In the Strait of Malacca, dugongs¹ found trapped in fishermen's nets were nursed.

growing thickly and strongly in a way that is attractive

act of crashing into something

a type of sea mammal

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Proportion of words at different frequency levels in a text from a Malaysian textbook

Frequency levels	% of the words in the text	Examples	Kinds of vocabulary
1 st 1,000	77.34%	<i>make, new, live</i>	High frequency words
2 nd 1,000	8.07%	<i>active, develop, effect</i>	Low frequency words
3 rd and above	11.73%	<i>trawl, dugong, lush</i>	
Proper nouns	2.86%	<i>Malacca</i>	

Knowledge of high-frequency words enables learners to know a larger proportion of the text (85%) than that of low-frequency words (12%)

How to diagnose vocabulary needs and measure vocabulary size?

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Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT)

(Nation, 1983, 1990; Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001)

Purpose: to diagnose which vocabulary levels learners need to focus on.

Levels of the VLT	Kinds of vocabulary measured
2,000-word	sufficient high-frequency vocabulary to function effectively in English
3,000-word	
5,000-word	upper boundary of high-frequency vocabulary
10,000-word	low-frequency vocabulary
Academic Word List	academic vocabulary

Vocabulary Levels Test

Matching format: Test-takers have to choose 3 out of the 6 words to match with the 3 definitions.

1	business	
2	clock	part of a house
3	horse	animal with four legs
4	pencil	something used for writing
5	shoe	
6	wall	

- 10 sections/level
- 30 items/ level
- Score showing mastery of a level: 26/30 correct answers at a level

Vocabulary Levels Test

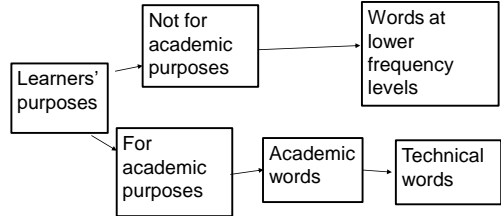
Benefits of the VLT:

- Helps teachers to diagnose their learners' vocabulary levels and determine which kinds of vocabulary they should focus on
- Easy to administer and grade
- Hard copy versions are freely available at: <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/paul-nation>
- Bilingual versions have been created in Japanese, Korean, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Tongan, Samoan, and Tagalog
- <http://www.lex tutor.ca/>
- Indicates vocabulary learning progress from year to year

We now ready to set vocabulary learning attainment targets

Which words to introduce?

After learners have mastered high-frequency words, depending on their purposes of learning English, teachers can decide which kinds of vocabulary they should focus on.



Interpreting the levels test

Level	Learners			
	Milos	Tom	Dick	Harriet
2000	12	15	26	29
3000	7	8	13	18
5000	4	3	10	14
AWL	23	1	14	22
10,000	3	0	4	7
Level for direct learning?				

Vocabulary Levels Test

Important caveats:

1. This is NOT a progress test.
2. It should NOT be released to students (although results should)
3. It is not appropriate for low proficiency students. LALS is developing a 1000 word levels test for this purpose



Vocabulary Size Test (VST)

(Nation and Beglar, 2007)

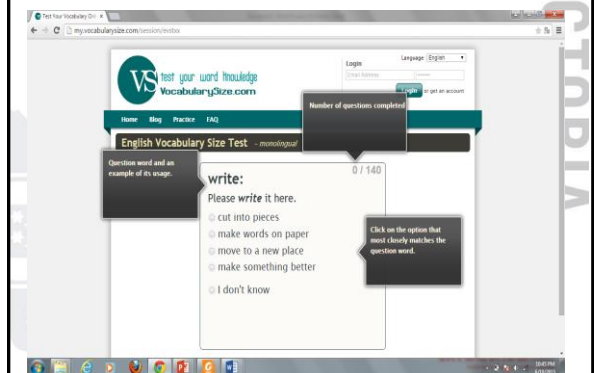
Purpose: to measure learners overall vocabulary size and determine if they have enough vocabulary to perform a certain task. E.g.:

- Knowing the most frequent **3,000** words
 - understands 98.86% of the words in a graded reader (Nation, 2006)
 - understands 95% of the words in television programs, movies, and conversation (Nation, 2006; Webb & Rodgers, 2009a,b)

Knowing **8,000-9,000** word families → understand 98% of the words in novels and newspapers (Nation, 2006)

Vocabulary Size Test

(Nation and Beglar, 2007)



Vocabulary Size Test

(Nation and Beglar, 2007)

- Multiple Choice Format
- 140 items
- 14 levels representing 14 different 1,000 word frequency levels from the first to the 14th 1,000 word levels.
- 10 items/level
- Overall vocabulary size = learners' score on the test x 100.

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Vocabulary Size Test

(Nation and Beglar, 2007)

Benefits of the VLT:

- helps teachers to determine their learners' overall vocabulary size and the difficulty they may have with different texts
- easy to administer and grade
- available online at <http://my.vocabularysize.com/>
- bilingual versions in Vietnamese, Russian, Mandarin, Spanish, Korean, Japanese, etc.

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So now I know the range of vocabulary sizes of my learners, what next?

Use this information to guide planning decisions

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Decision 1: Selecting and adapting texts to suit learners vocabulary size.

How?

[Lextutor](http://www.lextutor.ca/)

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Evaluate the lexical load of an English text with the VST and VocabProfile

Scenario: You want to see if the text *Food can be dangerous from your health!* from *New English File** is suitable for your students or not.

Steps you should follows

Step 1. Measure learner's vocabulary size (VST)

Step 2. Use VocabProfile to determine the vocabulary size needed to reach 95% or 98% coverage of the text.

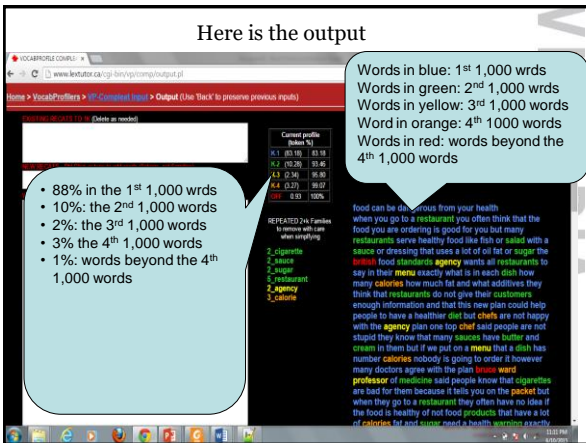
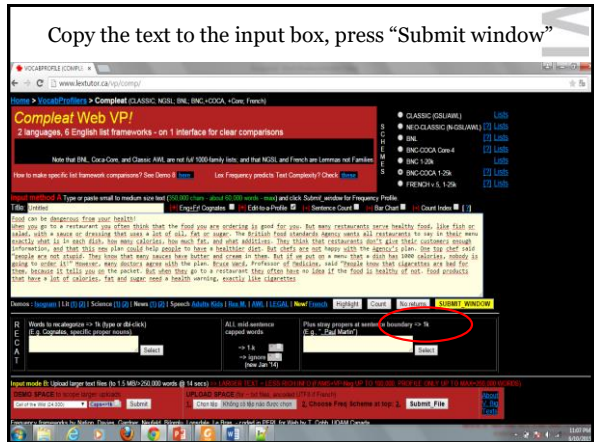
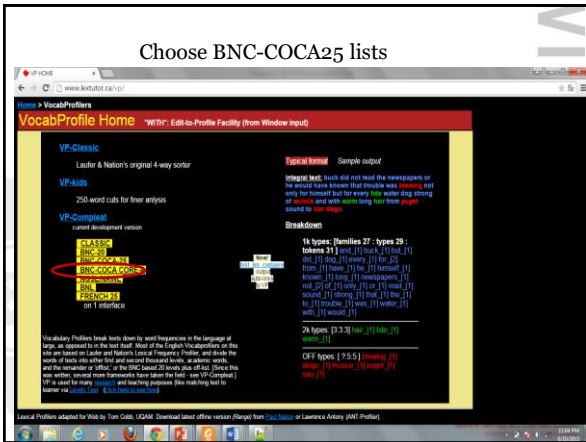
*Elementary Clive, Latham-Koenig, & Seligson, 2004, p. 87.

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Go to <http://www.lextutor.ca/> and choose Vocabprofile

The screenshot shows the Lextutor website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'LEARNERS' and 'RESEARCHERS' tabs. Below this, there are several columns of text and links. The 'LEARNERS' column is highlighted, and the 'VocabProfile' link is circled in red. Other links in the 'LEARNERS' column include 'Tests', 'List Learn', 'Group List v4.2', 'Vocab Profiling', 'Corpus', 'Lextutor', 'Data-driven Corpus', and 'Corpus Writer'. The 'RESEARCHERS' column contains 'Concordance', 'VocabProfile', 'N-Grams', 'All Builder', 'Word Study', and 'Research Tools'. The 'TEACHERS' column contains 'Test Tools', 'Lextutor', 'Frequency', 'Test List Compiler', 'VocabQuiz', 'WordWords', and 'Morphology'. The 'VocabProfile' link is the central focus of the image.

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Interpreting the results

Learners' vocabulary size	% of words in the text they may know	The suitability of the text for the learners
1,000 words	83.18%	Too difficult
2,000 words	93.46%	Too difficult
3,000 words	95.80%	Suitable, but learners need some help
4,000 or more words	99.07%	Suitable for reading for learning and pleasure

How to adapt the text

Option 1: Provide the meaning of unknown words:

- If the number of unknown words is small: pre-teach or let their students look up the unknown words before reading
- If number of known words is larger, use glossaries


Option 2: Simplify the text: replace LF words with HF synonyms: *chef* (4th 1,000 word level) → *cook* (1st 1,000 word level)

Some useful vocabulary programs to analyse the lexical load


Tom Cobb's website: VocabProfile
<http://www.lexutor.ca/>

Nation, Heatley, & Coxhead's (2002) RANGE program
<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/paul-nation>

Laurence Anthony's program AntwordProfiler
<http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antwordprofiler/>



Job 2: teaching vocabulary job 3: guiding learning



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Strategy training

Learners need to know:

1. Which words should I spend time on?
2. How should I learn them?

Encouraging learners to think about their vocab learning fosters **learner autonomy** and **learner-centred** instruction.

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Strategy training

Four useful strategies:

1. Learning word parts
2. Guessing words in context
3. Using word cards
4. Mnemonics

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Strategy 1: Learning word parts

- 97% of the words in a ranked list of the 7,476 words with a frequency of ten per million and above in the LOB corpus were derived from 2000 roots (Bird, 1990 cited in Nation 2013).
- The 15 most common prefixes accounted for 82% of prefixed words in a 20,000 word corpus (Stauffer, 1942 cited in Nation 2013).

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Learning the meaning of common prefixes

Prefix	Meaning	Word	Other Forms
ab-	from, away	abstract	a- abs-
ad-	to(ward)	advertise, attention	a- ab- ac- af- ag- al- an- ap- ar- as- at-
anti-	against	anti- government	
bi-	two, twice	bilingual	
com-	with, together	communicate	co- col- con- cor-
dis-	not	dislike	
dis-	apart, away	distract, distance	di- dif-
ex-	formerly	ex-president	
ex-	out, beyond	express	e- ef-
in-	not	inconsistent	ig- il- im- ir-
in-	in(to)	instruct	il- im- ir-

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The Word Part Levels Test

Yosuke Sasao
Toyohashi University of
Technology
Japan



Downloadable from:
<http://ysasaojp.info/testen.html>

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A sample from Yosuke Sasao's word part test

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 7 mono- (<u>monotone</u> ; <u>monoculture</u>) | 8 dis- (<u>disappear</u> ; <u>disorder</u>) |
| (1) person/thing | (1) not |
| (2) not | (2) person |
| (3) one | (3) new |
| (4) into another state/place | (4) main |
| 9 -ess (<u>actress</u> ; <u>princess</u>) | 10 -able (<u>acceptable</u> ; <u>predictable</u>) |
| (1) female | (1) person |
| (2) small | (2) not |
| (3) not | (3) can be |
| (4) many | (4) one |

Strategy 2: Guessing from context

- **Most frequently used strategy for dealing with unknown words** (de Bot, Paribakht, & Wesche, 1997; Fraser, 1999)
- **Teachable** (Fukink & de Glopper, 1998; Kuhn & Stahl, 1998; Walters, 2006)

A five step strategy for guessing words from context

1. **Part of speech**
2. **What does what?**
3. **Wider relationships**
4. **Guess**
5. **Check**



- a. the grammar of your guess
- b. the sense of your guess
- c. any prefixes, roots or suffixes that confirm your guess.

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Apply the guessing strategy

The festival **lugar** was at the end of a tiny back street, up two long flights of wooden stairs. This space quickly filled with some 80 musicians and dancers, and their instruments. Most performances began at 6.00pm and many continued on into the small hours.

Steps:

1. What part of speech is the unknown word?
2. What does what in the sentence? (i.e. Subject –verb - object)
3. What wider relationships exist in the text?
4. Take a guess
5. Check your guess (same PoS?, substitute, word part cues?)

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The Guessing from Context Test

Yosuke Sasao
Toyohashi University of
Technology
Japan



Downloadable from:
<http://ysasaojp.info/testen.html>

Q1: Part of speech

What is the part of speech of the word 'candintock'?

Like a wine **candintock** who only has to smell the wine to know how good it is, a cat can learn all it wants to know without actually eating the food.

- (1) noun (2) verb (3) adjective (4) adverb

Q2: Contextual clue

What word or phrase helps you to work out the meaning of the word 'candintock'? Choose one item that applies best.

Cats have a good nose for food. Many cats smell food and then walk away without even trying it. Like a wine **candintock** who only has to smell the wine to know how good it is, a cat can learn all it wants to know without actually eating the food.

- (1) walk away without even trying it
- (2) who only has to smell the wine to know how good it is
- (3) a cat can learn all it wants to know without actually eating the food

Q3: Meaning

What is the closest meaning of the word 'candintock'? Choose one item that applies best.

Cats have a good nose for food. Many cats smell food and then walk away without even trying it. Like a wine **candintock** who only has to smell the wine to know how good it is, a cat can learn all it wants to know without actually eating the food.

- (1) consumer
 - (2) specialist
 - (3) seller
- The original word = connoisseur

Strategy 3: Using Word (Flash) cards



Job D: Guide vocabulary learning

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Electronic flash cards

<https://quizlet.com/>

<http://www.flashmybrain.com>



Research on flashcards

Nakata, Tatsuya. (2013). Optimising second language vocabulary learning from flashcards

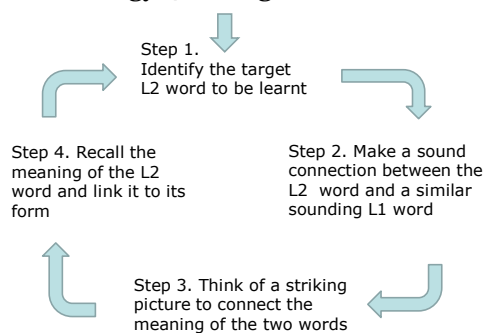
(Unpublished doctoral dissertation).

Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.


<https://victoria.academia.edu/TatsuyaNakata>

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Strategy 4: Using mnemonics



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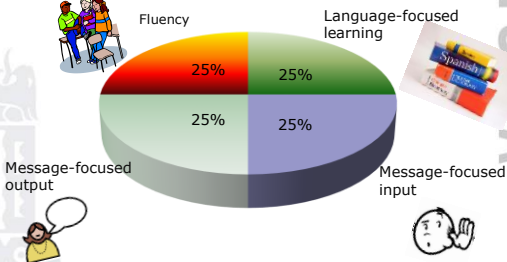


Job 5: Ensuring vocabulary development occurs across the four strands



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Ensure target words are met in all four strands



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Incidental learning of new words through reading (in L1)

... students reading typical books will spontaneously work out and learn the meanings of about **fifteen in every one hundred unknown words** they encounter. The higher the grade level the more students can pick up, and students with high reading ability learn more word meanings (McNaughton, 2002: 50)

What about implicit word learning in a second language?

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Summing up

'Teaching vocabulary is amongst the teacher's least important jobs'.

But ...

... learning vocabulary is one of the learner's most important jobs!

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How to reconcile these seeming contradictions?

1. Teaching should focus on **guiding learning** through goal setting, consciousness-raising and strategy training.
2. **Deliberate vocabulary learning** (word cards etc) can lead to rapid vocabulary growth.
3. Encounters with new words in message-based input & output is an important source of **incidental learning**.
4. BUT... knowing a word is like a **Russian doll**; 'knowing' has many dimensions. For robust vocabulary learning, new words must be met in all four strands.

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What does it mean to 'know' a word?

Knowing a word is like a **Russian doll**; 'knowing' has many dimensions.



Therefore, for effective vocabulary learning, target words met in one strand should be *systematically recycled in all the strands*.

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