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ABSTRACT

Suggestions are offered for teaching vocabulary in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL)/English-as-a-foreign-Language (EFL) instruction. Five components in vocabulary development are seen as crucial: meeting vocabulary for the first time; establishing previously-encountered vocabulary; enriching previously-met vocabulary; developing word-decoding and recognition skills; and developing fluency with known vocabulary. Each of these is elaborated upon, with examples drawn from experience with Japanese learners of English. A list of questions to be asked in evaluating computer software for vocabulary development is presented. Questions address such issues as cost, evidence of effectiveness, instructional level(s) and language skills targeted, volume and variety of activities or exercises, integration of communication skills and multiple sensory input (multimedia capabilities), means and speed of student evaluation, printing capabilities, access via local area network, and general student response to computer-assisted instruction. Desirable features of English vocabulary instruction are outlined briefly. A chart and a form for evaluating software are included. Contains 19 references. (MSE)

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING ESL/EFL VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

John Paul LOUCKY

According to one of the latest TESOL texts, *New Ways in Teaching Vocabulary*, the vocabulary component of a language course should be carefully planned ahead of time for the following three reasons.

Firstly, because different vocabulary gives greatly different returns for learning, it is important to make sure that the learners have good control of the high frequency words of the language before moving on to the less frequent vocabulary. . . Secondly, most language teaching courses make vocabulary learning more difficult than it should be as a result of the way vocabulary in the course is sequenced. [or due to lack of any intentional, naturally sequenced development of vocabulary!] Thirdly, vocabulary learning opportunities and the quality of vocabulary learning can be greatly increased through the careful design of both vocabulary and other skill activities. (Nation, 1994: i-vii)

New vocabulary can be met in various communicative activities, but most likely will come to language learners' attention through meeting new words either in listening or reading contexts. The written explanations of these language activities become very important channels for vocabulary instruction. Teachers must therefore carefully consider *how to best represent new vocabulary input so as to make it most easily remembered* in terms of visual representation (both graphic and schematic arrangement, known as "Concept Mapping"), and also in terms of auditory memory cues.

With today's "Multi-Media Power Personal Computers," the use of moving video pictures as well as still graphic images can

help to make learning much more vivid and memorable. Also students can use computers to record or hear digitally recorded sound representations of any text simultaneously. They can even be taught how to record their own voices to compare them with native intonation and pronunciation, seeing their own voice wavelengths displayed! This is done when creating individual student "Reading Profiles," such as the Grady Profile (1992) does.

When evaluating the vocabulary component of an ESL/EFL program, three questions should be asked: 1) What to look for, 2) How to look for it, and 3) How to include it in a more effective vocabulary instruction and learning program. A good

basis for such an evaluation is Table I of Nation's 1994 text, entitled *New Ways in Teaching Vocabulary*, which can help teachers develop a more effective ESL/EFL Vocabulary Development Program. Students should also be taught how to actively access new word meanings, and then be encouraged to use them more actively in various productive tasks for real communication. Figure I shows the "Five Essential Steps to Learning New Words," from Hatch and Brown (1995: 374). Teachers need to help language learners learn what these basic steps are and how to use them as often and actively as possible in order to A. Access and Acquire, B. Recognize and Remember, and C. Activate and Generate new word meanings to maximize vocabulary development.

Although there are many other important areas to consider when one contemplates vocabulary development in an ESL/EFL program, these five major components are crucial: 1) Meeting new vocabulary for the first time; 2) Establishing previously met vocabulary; 3) Enriching previously met vocabulary; 4) Developing vocabulary strategies; and 5) Developing fluency with known vocabulary. These may be summarized as follows:

1) *Meeting new vocabulary for the first time* -- Besides meeting new words in formal class presentations, language learners most often meet new vocabulary through extensive reading and extensive listening activities. Some listen to English tapes, music, radio or T.V. programs, or English news or movie videos even outside of class. Extensive Reading by definition encourages

broader reading for pleasure. As Nation characterizes this, "During extensive reading, including reading of simplified texts or graded readers, new words should not be met at a rate greater than one or two new words per hundred known running words if learners are to gain pleasure from reading" [similar to their Independent Reading Level]. (Nation, 1994: v-vi) One can combine this recommendation with Betts' (1946) three reading levels to design three "Reading Level Guidelines for ESL/EFL Students" as follows:

- I. Independent Level-- Only 1-2 new words per 100 words of text
- II. Instructional Level-- 3-5 new words per 100
- III. Frustration Level-- Avoid more than 5 unknown words per 100

Elley (1989: 174-187) found that students often enjoy learning new words through the context of listening to stories. Such an enjoyable activity can be a "useful means of vocabulary learning, particularly if the person reading aloud or telling the story gives the new words a little attention such as briefly explaining them or noting them on the board without interrupting the story too much." (Nation: 1994: vii)

2) *Establishing Previously Met Vocabulary* -- Beyond first meeting with new words, language learners especially need repeated meetings with new words both in order to fix the new meanings into their Passive Vocabulary memories, and also to add these new meanings to their Active Vocabularies through actual expressive use. The teacher or vocabulary materials developer needs to build 'spaced repetition of target

vocabulary' into the course materials. They need to make sure that such target vocabulary is established, so that time and effort originally spent on presenting new words in the first place is not "wasted through the absence of later attention," as Nation (1994:vii) cautions. He also gives three excellent practical suggestions any teacher can use to improve their teaching of new vocabulary words. These are: "1) by setting aside class time for revision [review], for example reviewing learners' vocabulary notebooks; 2) by periodically and systematically testing previously met vocabulary and following up on the results, and 3) by planning the recycling of previously met vocabulary through pair and group activities." (Nation: vii-vii)

3) *Enriching previously met vocabulary* --Because there are so many things to learn about any new word, teachers need to help students distinguish between infrequent, less important words that can be guessed from context or given in a note, and frequent, important new words to learn by pre-selecting them for study or review. A variety of new contexts is best for learning and fixing important new word meanings.

4) *Developing vocabulary strategies* -- From the time students begin to learn a new foreign language, they should be taught both word-decoding skills and also vocabulary recognition skills. It is only upon these foundational building blocks that any comprehension and critical reasoning skills can be built. Far too many Japanese students have not developed fluent phonetic skills or sufficient vocabulary necessary to be able to read orally with any degree of natural

expression or fluency, or silently with an adequate speed or rate necessary for comprehending academic English. As Nation (1994:viii) suggests, language learners need "to be able to use strategies to cope with unknown vocabulary met in listening or reading texts to make up for gaps in productive vocabulary in speaking or writing, to gain fluency in using known vocabulary, and to learn new words in isolation."

5) *Developing fluency with known vocabulary* --The key to developing fluency in another language seems to be to MAXIMIZE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTIVE AND MEANINGFUL USE OF NEW VOCABULARY IN ACTUAL COMMUNICATIVE TASKS.

These language learning tasks should stress the exchange of actual meaning in active communication, but not be too difficult intellectually. Finding the proper balance between language learning goals and course content objectives is a constant challenge for those teaching English for academic or special purposes. Nevertheless, the level, interest and ability of each student must first be ascertained and always kept in mind to help them make maximum progress. In the end even vocabulary learning is an individual thing, with each student having a different word bank and level of reading and vocabulary strategy skills. But unless teachers actively teach and test these skills, language learners will continue to be deprived of the most important tools for language development. Nation (1994: viii) states that:

Vocabulary learning is not an end in itself. A rich vocabulary makes the skills of listening, speaking, reading,

and writing easier to perform. Learners' growth in vocabulary must be accompanied by opportunities to become fluent with that vocabulary. This fluency can be partly achieved through activities that lead to the establishment and enrichment of vocabulary knowledge, but the essential element in developing fluency lies in the opportunity for meaningful use of vocabulary in tasks with a low cognitive load.

#### Flow-Chart for Computer-Assisted

#### Language Education Software Evaluation

Some major factors to check before investing in any CALL software would be the following:

1. Cost--for both individual disc or CD versus for site license.
2. Effectiveness--Does any published research support its use?
3. Instructional Level and Language Skill Areas Addressed.
4. Volume and Variety of Activities or Exercises--How many are included? At how many different levels of difficulty? How much computer memory is required to run the program? Can your school's computers use CD-ROMs or Internet? A CD-ROM with 600 megabytes of language activities offers much more than any low memory disc software can.
5. Integration of Communication Skills and Multiple Sensory Input--Is Multimedia being used for instruction addressing various sensory modalities? Are the four communication skills addressed, or only one or two? The higher the degree of integration of physical senses and communication skills achieved, the better for the language learners involved. Thus, Multimedia Power PCs have great potential!

6. Means and Speed of Evaluation--Can the program itself make and record individual and class performance profiles and progress records? If so, this asset can greatly assist the teacher in administration and evaluation of the program and of each student's progress.

7. What are the program's printing capabilities? Can students see and submit their work?

8. Can one's school use programs only individually, or also as a class via a "Local Area Network," or LAN, such as Ethernet? Can files and letters be exchanged with other schools via electronic mail and Fax /Modem services, such as via Internet or America Online?

9. What is the general student response and reaction to CAI/CALL? Students' responses should be evaluated both subjectively as to their satisfaction and motivation levels, and also objectively, in terms of their actual average rate of learning or degree of improved performance when using particular software programs.

10. Do the above considerations, including both informal observations and more formal research studies or test results, support such an investment of time and money in the proposed computer hardware or software programs? If so, how can a language education school or department afford not to investigate the potential benefits of CAI/CALL for their students? Just consider how much more language students could learn if traditional Language Labs were revamped, equipped with more language-learning software and CD programs, and kept open and available for students

to use outside of class hours as well!

Vocabulary and English Education in Japan, as increasing research shows, should be more:

1) Interactive or Communicative--Focused on Production!

2) Intensive--stressing active, daily use of all four skills.

3) Integrated--Using all 4 skills in a balanced,complementary manner will help to build up actual communicative competence or fluency in English.

4) Intentional-- There must be definite, measurable language learning objectives in each of these four communication skill areas, including clearly set vocabulary learning goals and strategies.

5) Individualized-- diagnostic and pre/post testing help us to better prescribe to each one's level.

6) More Immersion or Exposure-- to native, natural English is needed. Acknowledging these barriers, foreign language learners need to be given more chances to receive regular daily English input.

7) More International Content-- with greater historical depth of insight, and breadth of cross-cultural exposure, especially in the Target Language, with and about English-speaking countries. Use Internet Keypals!

8) More Internalization-- of new concepts and vocabulary by requiring more active use of the Target Language in a greater variety of content-based, language-learning tasks. ESL/EFL learning should always balance content objectives with language-learning goals, considering the following  
THREE TYPES OF VOCABULARY:

A. ACTIVE/PRODUCTIVE VOCABULARY-- Frequent/Daily/Basic/Essential

B. RECEPTIVE/RECOGNIZED VOCABULARY--known but seldom used.

C. INFREQUENT / UNIMPORTANT / TECHNICAL VOCABULARY-- Ignore/Guess it!

9) More Immediate Feedback-- tends to improve both students' performance and motivation levels. Here CAI and computerized test analyzers can greatly help to speed up teacher evaluations, and hence also feedback about individual student results or needs.

10) More Interdisciplinary Learning-- not only the four communication skills need to be better integrated. Also subject areas can be better blended to support one another's content and language-learning goals and course objectives. Here greater departmental communication and sharing in curriculum development is needed, requiring more honest and humble communication and learning among colleagues from one another. Unfortunately, most college teachers are known more for their extreme independence, rather than for cooperative planning and team-teaching or joint course development. This is a great barrier to educational progress.

11) More Innovative and Internet-Linked-- Finally, English Education in Japan should become much more open to innovative ideas at all levels. There is much more potential for creative variety in teaching by using the new and exciting media becoming increasingly available in today's modern world. Besides TV and video, more interactive Multimedia Power Computers have the greatest capabilities for helping to teach

and learn a language in a more interesting and engaging way. Learners can proceed at their own natural pace, and interact with computerized sound and graphics programs, including moving videos on their computer, if it can read CDs.

Guidelines for CALL Software Evaluation:  
Improving English Vocabulary through  
the use of Effective Reading, Listening,  
and Writing Software

Computerized dictionaries and other CALL software are especially useful for helping students to improve their English reading, vocabulary, listening, and writing skills. Trying any of the programs available and asking questions about them as one uses them "hands on" is the best way to learn their incredible potential, and to evaluate both strengths and weaknesses of any particular program.

Just as the "Computer Revolution" is breaking down the traditional classroom's four walls, so CALL will gradually help to improve, intensify and better integrate the teaching and learning of all four language communication skills together. As language teachers we need to be as aware as possible of both the benefits and dangers of these new high-tech educational tools. As an aid to newer teachers for such Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) software evaluation, the following two tools were developed by the author:

A. 10 point "Brief Flow-Chart for CALL Software Evaluation Checklist" can be overviewed very quickly.

B. Software and CD Evaluation Form--  
This has 4 parts:

- 1) Cosmetic Quality
- 2) Technical Quality
- 3) Instructional Quality
- 4) Language Skill Assessment

The educational scene is rapidly being changed by computers and the WWW which can link students worldwide by a variety of media and almost unlimited communication possibilities. Computer-enhanced media and educational methods will hasten and make all the more urgent the development of greater fluency in English as the most international medium for global communication.

Up until now, . . . teleconferencing has been expensive and the quality of the picture poor. With a system developed by Cornell University (CU), teleconferencing has suddenly become cheap and easy. The CU-See Me system uses 'streaming data' that allows real-time audio and video to be sent thru the Internet. It consists of a small camera and a program called Maven, which is the audio portion of the system.

Lilienthal is clearly right in saying that reading a book or listening to a lecture [passively] is completely different from actually dealing with the subject [in real life]. So those teachers, schools and language programs that use the WWW and CU-SeeMe Systems will make subjects "come alive," making them more immediate, more real and exciting for their students. By linking people and resources worldwide, our own local problems and opinions can be linked with global problems and hopefully more solutions found together.

*Extensive vs. Intensive Reading Skills  
Practice and Instruction --*

Although some researchers such as Krashen (1989) with his 'comprehensible input model' have suggested that language acquisition just occurs automatically when messages are understood, Lebauer points out that others such as Eskey and Grabe (1988) have found that such extensive or free reading alone is not sufficient, especially for second language learners. This is confirmed by the experience of most foreign language reading teachers, especially by those who are native speakers and readers of English. In Lebauer's words, "guidance and practice in useful reading strategies is also necessary. Ultimately, awareness of theories and research should drive our decisions about what we do in the classroom." (Lebauer, 1998)

Although it is true that much vocabulary development, especially in one's own native language, takes place incidentally through exposure to new words in meaningful contexts (See Day, Omura & Hiramatsu, 1991), such incidental development appears to be very insufficient in both quantity and rate of development for most students learning a foreign language where there is little chance for exposure and no significant degree of immersion in the target language.

Most college English students in Japan do not get a systematic and concentrated approach to vocabulary and comprehension-building strategies necessary to become independent language learners. Thus even most college English majors fail to pass either of the higher level EIKEN Proficiency exams. Many English teachers have not

even taken or passed them! As a result, few English majors become very fluent during their college years, and not many secondary teachers attain native-level proficiency. This is a shame considering the huge expenditure of time and money in English language education made in Japan, which still usually comes in last when compared with students of other countries studying English. Something is clearly wrong with the English education system, including wrong core assumptions about language learning, lack of proper teacher training and expectations for English teachers in Japan, and lack of a simple basic framework that is interesting and well-integrated, having systematic progression in the development of basic English skills, including both essential structural and semantic knowledge.

There is clearly too little vocabulary load, and a lack of any clear system of vocabulary teaching which is both educationally and linguistically sound present in both secondary and college English language education in Japan. The 2,000 word list approach of Mombusho has clearly failed, and is much too meagre and insufficient to meet the growing needs of a much more international and internet-connected world of the 21st century, which will predominantly rely on English as the means of global communication. Both grammar and vocabulary instruction clearly must be more contextualized and relevant to these student needs, and better integrated with actual productive communication skills across the board. If our students cannot learn how to communicate around the table using practical English, how can they ever hope



to communicate around the world or contribute to global interchange of information, products and diplomacy? Clearly a much more intentional and concentrated, well-integrated vocabulary development program is needed by almost all English students at every level of education in Japan!

Language learners clearly need to learn more meaning-accessing strategies in all four skill areas. In the area of reading comprehension these include: 1) learning how and when to guess from context, 2) dictionary referencing strategies, both computerized as well as text-based, using monolingual as well as bilingual dictionaries or data banks, 3) using both classroom desktop computers as well as portable laptop or pocket-sized "word tanks," 4) knowing when and how to ask teachers when words cannot be found. These strategies are especially important if our goal is to help develop more independent language learners, who can go on learning for themselves for life even on their own after graduation. How many are actually prepared to do so by their language education today? Certainly the more independent language accessing skills and strategies students learn the higher will be the degree of language proficiency that they can develop.

Language-accessing skills include comprehending of both form and meaning, learning how to recognize and comprehend meaning of both words, sentences, paragraphs and arguments. It also involves gaining ability to move beyond passive recognition to active production, or generative activation of meaning. In so doing, one truly assimilates a foreign language, for by

making English a part of their own thinking and communicating it becomes a real part of their own life. This process also fixes new concepts in one's memory by becoming part of the learner's own experience.

**Table 1. Evaluating the Vocabulary Component of an ESL Program**

What to Look For	How to Look for It	How to Include It
Does the teacher know what the learners' vocabulary level and needs are?	Ask the teacher	Use the levels test (Nation, 1990) Interview the learners
Is the program focusing appropriately on the appropriate level of vocabulary?	Look at what vocabulary or strategies are being taught	Decide whether the focus is high, academic, or low frequency vocabulary
Is the vocabulary helpfully sequenced?	Check that opposites, near synonyms, lexical sets are not being presented in the same lesson	Use texts and normal use to sequence the vocabulary
Are the skill activities designed to help vocabulary learning?	Look at the written input to the activities Ask the teacher	Include and monitor wanted vocabulary in the written input
Is there a suitable proportion of opportunities to develop fluency with known vocabulary?	Look at the amount of graded reading, listening to stories, free writing and message-based speaking	Use techniques that develop well-beaten paths and rich maps
Does the presentation of vocabulary help learning?	Look for deliberate repetition and spacing Rate the activities for depth of processing	Develop teaching and revision cycles Choose a few deep processing techniques to use often
Are the learners excited about their progress?	Watch the learners doing tasks Ask the learners	Set goals Give feedback on progress Keep records

From Nation (1994) vi/New Ways in Teaching Vocabulary

**Table 2 : CALL CD EVALUATION FORM--LOUCKY**

<b>A. INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY</b>	<b>RATINGS :</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH LEVEL</b>
1. Objectives Defined				
2. Clear Activities				
3. Interactive				
4. User Interest				
5. Practice Provided				
6. Enough Immediate Feedback				
7. Learner Needs Met				
<b>B. TECHNICAL QUALITY</b>	<b>RATINGS :</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH LEVEL</b>
1. Logical Movement				
2. Learner Control				
3. Printable/Networked?				
4. Individual Needs Met				
5. Sophisticated vs. Simple Program				
<b>C. COSMETIC QUALITY</b>	<b>RATINGS :</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH LEVEL</b>
1. Attractive Graphics				
2. Consistent Buttons				
3. Animated Action				
4. Clear Terms/Directions				
5. Good Sound Impression				
<b>D. EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION</b>	<b>RATINGS :</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH LEVEL</b>
1. Language Skill Focus				
2. Grade or Fluency Level				
3. Type of Practice				
4. How much Instructional Variety?				
5. How much Vocabulary Load? (Frequency, Contextualization, #)				
6. Associative Memory Networks Developed?				

CALL CD EVALUATION FORM--LOUCKY

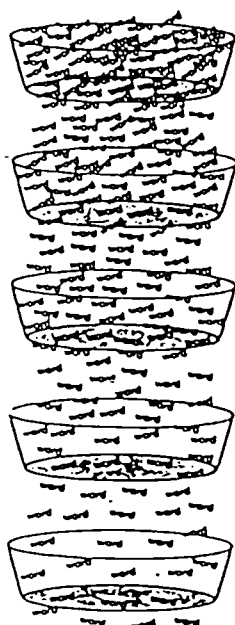
7. Immediate Feedback, Correction & Evaluation ?			
8. Passive Rec. vs. Productive Use/Activation ?			
9. Cost vs. Effectiveness ?			
10. Integrates Communication Skills ?			
General Teacher Evaluation ?			
General Student Evaluation ?			
(Subjective Response/Satisfaction vs. Objective Rate of Improvement ?)			
A. Actual Average Rate of Learning			
B. Degree of Improved Performance			

*HINTS ON IMPROVING YOUR VOCABULARY IN ENGLISH:*

Remember the following five steps which are essential to learning any new words or phrases in a new or foreign language. Then try to practice and use them as much and as often as possible. The more new vocabulary phrases and language forms you can move through each of these steps, the more you will learn and remember! The five essential steps are:

- 1) Encountering new words or phrases,
- 2) Understanding the word's form
- 3) Understanding the word's meaning
- 4) Remembering or Consolidating word's form and meaning in memory
- 5) Using the word yourself actively (especially in speech or writing)

The following Figure from Hatch and Brown's *Vocabulary, Semantics, and Language Education* (Cambridge: 1995: 374) shows these five steps graphically.



Encountering new words

Getting the word form

Getting the word meaning

Consolidating word form and meaning in memory

Using the word

Five essential steps to learning new words

## Software, texts, and CDs available for testing and evaluation

- ABeka Curriculum with English texts for all fields, including full Phonics-based Reading Program, Language Arts, Literature, History and Science. Levels from kindergarten thru college. Free Catalogs available at: ABeka Book, Box 18000, Pensacola, FL, USA 32523-9160. Speed & Comprehension Builders & Values-based Readers with school discounts available at every grade level. [www.abeka.com](http://www.abeka.com).
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Newer Resources:

- PC Private Chronicle*. (1995). Scholastic Inc. (for writing diaries, letters, calendars, etc.) Available for both platforms.
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