

A Survey of Vocabulary Learning at OJJC and Evaluation of Ways to Further Improve Vocabulary Acquisition, Retention and Production.

David Bramley

**大阪女学院短期大学における語彙学習の調査ならびに
さらなる語彙習得、維持、運用についての検討**

デイビッド・ブラムリー

Abstract

Since 1998 a vocabulary component has been a requirement of the first year discussion class at OJJC. In addition both first and second year students are able to take specialized Academic Vocabulary courses. Finally second year students are required to learn vocabulary in their Topic Studies III classes. This paper discusses what it means to know a vocabulary item. It goes on to look at how vocabulary learning is incorporated into certain courses at OJJC. Finally it discusses ways of teaching vocabulary receptively and productively.

Key words: receptive productive vocabulary acquisition lexical phrases

(Received September 12, 2002)

抄 録

大阪女学院短期大学では1998年度より語彙が1年次ディスカッションクラスの必須項目となっている。加えて1、2年生どちらも Academic Vocabulary のコースを履修することが可能である。さらに2年では Topic Studies III の授業で語彙を学ぶことが必須となっている。本稿は「語を知っている」ということがどういう意味をもっているのかについて論じる。さらに大阪女学院短大のコースにおいて語彙学習がどのように組み込まれているかを検証する。しめくくりを受動的語彙と能動的語彙をどのように教えるかについても論じる。

キーワード: 受動的 能動的 語彙習得 語句

(2002年9月12日 受理)

Introduction

During the last four years, there has been an increasing amount of interest in vocabulary acquisition among the teaching staff at OJJC. Numerous articles have been written in past *kiyos*. These are summarized in Cornwell and Bramley (2002) elsewhere in this journal. In addition a number of steps have been taken to address vocabulary learning in OJJC's course materials. This paper discusses what it means to know a vocabulary item. It goes on to look at how vocabulary learning is incorporated into certain courses at OJJC. Finally it discusses ways of teaching vocabulary receptively and productively.

What does it mean to 'know' a vocabulary item?

Nation (1994) suggests that the following list comprises knowledge of a word.

Being able to understand the spoken form of the word

Being able to pronounce the word

Being able to spell the word

Being able to write the word

Knowing the underlying meaning of the word

Knowing the range of meanings of a word

Knowing the grammatical patterns the word fits into

Knowing the affixes a word can take

Knowing the grammatical patterns a word fits into

Knowing the words that fit into the same lexical sets

Knowing the typical associations of the word

Knowing the range of collocations of the word

Knowing whether the use of the word is limited by considerations of politeness,

Gender, age, country, formality, and so on.

Knowing whether the word is commonly used or not

Being able to use the word receptively and productively

(pp.121-122)

Productive knowledge of a word, as suggested in Nation's last point, means what a learner can do with the words, the degree to which learners can use and manipulate the words in different lexical environments. Productive knowledge of a word depends on the writer or speaker to perform tasks that require use of words. Although by no means an exhaustive list, the following suggested tasks might be considered indicators of ability to use a word productively.

Writing Tasks

Being able to:

arrange words in a meaningful sentence.

choose a word and insert it into a sentence in its correct context.

write a word you hear with errors permitted as long as the word is recognizable.

write a word you hear with completely correct spelling.

write a word naming an object or activity you see in a picture.

write a word you see a picture of in a sentence with errors permitted as long as the word is recognizable.

write a word you see a picture of in a sentence in its correct context with grammatical errors permitted as long as the communicative meaning of the sentence is unmistakable.

write a set number of words in a sentence in a meaningful sentence.

write a description of a picture incorporating a list of words you have previously studied and can see.

write a description of a picture incorporating a list of words which you have studied but cannot see.

write a short story incorporating a series of given words used correctly.

fill in blanks in a passage with words using contextual clues.

Speaking Tasks

To say a word that you see a picture of with good pronunciation.

To say a word you see a picture of in a sentence in its correct grammatical context.

To give an oral report of something you wrote about before using a set number of vocabulary items.

To retell a story you heard or read an hour before featuring a number of required vocabulary items which you can see.

To retell a story or explain or present something you heard in the past incorporating a set number of vocabulary items.

To use previously studied words on a particular theme in a discussion on a given topic.

It is clear that the tasks above are classroom-based rather than real world tasks. They are aimed at getting students to demonstrate their competence in using words they have studied in classroom settings. The controlled nature of the tasks attempts to allow students to demonstrate the degree to which they have active mastery of vocabulary items.

How is Vocabulary Learning Incorporated into Classes at OJJC?

1. Core Studies III (Discussion) First Year Classes.

In redesigning the first year courses at OJJC in 1998, the necessity of having a vocabulary component was addressed for the first time. The four units of the new Curriculum now include a total of eight vocabulary lists containing key words related to the topics the students are studying. Vocabulary learning is a required part of the first year discussion course. It is dealt with in a five part cycle which is designed to build and reinforce students' receptive, and to some degree active vocabulary knowledge. As the components are dealt with in another article in this Kiyō (Cornwell and Bramley, 2002), the five parts of the cycle are briefly summarized here.

Word Lists

Students study a list of words unassociated with any meanings. This provides initial exposure to the words to be learned. The words are taken from the video lectures. There are two of these in each unit and they are compulsory.

Matching Activities

Students are required to match the same set of words with a set of meanings. Teachers and students check the answers together in class thus reinforcing the students' knowledge and acceptance of the words.

Video lecture

Students listen to the lecture for the unit and answer comprehension questions about the lecture. This is a passive recognition exercise.

Vocabulary in Context

Students see sentences that contain definitions of the words they have studied in different contexts than the video lecture. They have to replace the definition with a suitable word. In addition they may have to change the form of the word to make it fit suitably into the sentence. This exercise allows students to take the first step to achieving a more active knowledge of the word.

Vocabulary Quiz

In this quiz students see twelve words and hear 10 definitions. They have to match the correct word to the definition they hear.

2. Topic Studies III Classes

These are current affairs classes in which second year students study a news topic in some depth. The vocabulary component of this course is very important, accounting for not only part of the students' weekly grade, but also for one third of the total score of the final examination.

Vocabulary Matching Exercise

In this course vocabulary is highlighted at the beginning of each topic. Teachers in charge of preparing materials for a topic choose approximately twenty words that appear in a two-minute TV news report. They use these words to make a vocabulary matching exercise along the same lines as the vocabulary matching exercises found in the Core Studies III (Discussion) classes. As in the first year course students will encounter the words on the list as they negotiate their way through the comprehension questions for the topic.

Transcript Writing Exercise

Students have to listen to, and transcribe parts of the news report. As far as the vocabulary component of a unit is concerned, the words in the vocabulary matching exercise will be repeated and thus reinforced. In addition to recognizing the vocabulary items they hear, students will be required to write some of the vocabulary items down, thus bringing basic active vocabulary skills into play.

Discussion Activity

Students are required to discuss certain aspects of the topic. As they prepare the discussion questions for homework, it is likely that they will find the need to use some of the words in the vocabulary list to express themselves more completely. In addition, as they discuss some of the questions in the class activity it is possible that they may find the need to say some of the words on the list. This activity therefore provides an opportunity for students to use vocabulary actively.

Vocabulary Quiz

At the end of each topic vocabulary is tested in a short quiz. This quiz uses exactly the same format as the Core Studies III (Discussion) vocabulary quiz.

Vocabulary Test in the Final Examination

The final examination tests students on a total of thirty vocabulary items taken from the units studied during the term. The format of the vocabulary section of the final examination is similar to the class quiz except students see groups of 6 words and hear five definitions per group.

3. Academic Vocabulary Classes

Academic Vocabulary courses are designed differently by different teachers according to a common set of objectives. They are taught at both the Intermediate and Advanced Level.

Academic Vocabulary courses have a total of 10 classes. They are taught once a week. The aim of the course is for students to study the meaning of vocabulary as it is used in context and then to show that they not only understand the words, but can also use them

productively by writing them in sentences in different contexts with the same meanings. In addition there is a focus on formal understanding of words. Students are required to understand what kind of words they are. This means that they must also practice dictionary skills. The tasks which students are involved in foster both receptive and productive use of English. I approach my Academic Vocabulary classes in the following way:

Reading Passages

The vocabulary comes from a variety of books and newspaper articles. Students are required to read the passages for homework and choose fifteen or more words which they want to learn. This motivates students by giving them a free choice of what to learn.

Dictionary Work And Vocabulary Notebooks

Students find the words they have chosen in an English-English dictionary and in their vocabulary notebook they write the word, what part of speech it is, the definition of the word, and an example sentence showing how the word is used in the context they originally found it in their reading passage. In addition they are free to find out the Japanese definition of the word if they want to. This formal work enhances students' dictionary skills, and in addition makes them focus on the meanings of words in context, rather than as isolated items.

Preparing a Class Dictionary and a Word List

A selection of the words that the students choose is written in the class dictionary along with definitions and meanings. This entry in the class dictionary forms a word list that will be used to prepare further exercises and quizzes. Ideally this list should be chosen by the students. However due to time constraints this is usually done by the teacher.

Vocabulary In Context Exercises

These are given in the week following the vocabulary notebook work and follow the same formula as those given in Core Studies III courses. The definitions used in the vocabulary in context exercises are the same as those which appear in the class dictionary.

Vocabulary Quizzes

These are given in the week following the Vocabulary In Context exercise. They follow the same pattern as the vocabulary quizzes given in Core Studies III and Topic Studies III. The items are selected from the Vocabulary in Context exercise.

In the Academic Vocabulary course therefore students are exposed to the same words a number of times over a period of three weeks. (See sample Class Schedule in Appendix 1). They first encounter the words in reading passages, then find them in dictionaries and write them in a vocabulary notebook with the same meanings but in different contexts. Next they are required to use them again in a vocabulary in context exercise and finally they have to take a short quiz using the items. In addition, at the end of the course, each

student is presented with a class dictionary containing the words selected for word lists they have studied throughout the course.

This constant and repeated exposure to vocabulary items is one thing that helps students to learn them. According to Nation (1990) learners may have to encounter a word between five and sixteen times before it is learned. While greater exposure to the words is obviously desirable, this is not possible to achieve within the framework of this course. The class exercises make students employ various receptive and productive skills. They are required to wrestle with the meaning of vocabulary as it is used in a particular context rather than just memorizing a definition that is not connected to any specific context. They have to consider a number of possible definitions of a word and choose the correct one. This action can help to widen students' perceptions of the possible meanings of a word. Productive vocabulary exercises such as using words in sentences that students create themselves means that students are also learning how the word fits into a grammatical framework.

It is clear from these three examples that the learning of vocabulary has a definite role in courses at OJJC. However in order for students to completely know vocabulary it is important that activities are geared towards acceptable and proven definitions of what constitutes knowledge of vocabulary in both a receptive and a productive sense. Therefore one important thing to do now is to look for receptive and productive ways of working with vocabulary. This paper will conclude by looking at some ways students receptive and productive vocabulary may be enhanced further and what kind of materials may be employed to achieve this.

Improving Receptive Vocabulary

Nattinger (1991) suggests that receptive knowledge of words can be improved by enhancing understanding, enhancing storage in memory and through perception and action (P. 62-67). In order to enhance understanding it is important for learners to recognize *context clues*, as this is the most often used method of understanding unfamiliar words. Guesses can be guided by such things as the title, the topic and other words in the discourse. Clarke and Silberstein (1977) demonstrate ways in which context clues can help students understand the meanings of unfamiliar words. They suggest exercises that get students to guess the meanings of words according to the type of sentence they are in. For example in a cause and effect sentence such as the one below students might be able to guess the meaning of 'averted'.

By raising workers' wages and improving their conditions the company *averted* the threatened strike.

Or by association, with words such as 'barman' and 'beer' they might be able to guess the meaning of 'tankard.'

The barman removed the *tankard* from the shelf and filled it with beer.

(My examples)

Students would obviously need to be trained in such a skill. For example, exercises that prime students to look for such clues in context might be included in pre reading or pre listening questions.

Paying attention to word morphology is another technique which would improve students' ability to guess words. If students memorize the meanings of affixes and word stems, it is possible that they will be able to guess the meanings of words they have never seen before with a fair degree of accuracy. This technique may be unsuitable for inclusion in mainline courses such as Core Studies III and Topic Studies III but it could be a suitable component in an academic vocabulary course.

Various techniques have been proposed in order to improve students' memory of words such as *loci*, in which learners place a visual image of the item in an imagined scene and remember the item by remembering the scene, and *key words* in which learners associate an item in L2 with a similar sounding word in L1 as an aid to remembering it, for example, if students found the word 'cite' in English difficult to learn, they could associate it with a similar sounding word in Japanese, such as 'sai' (Rhinoceros). If learners imagine a large rhinoceros called 'Saito sensei' lecturing to students and making quotations from Plato or Aristotle, it may provide an image for 'cite.' Interesting as these methods are, unfortunately none of them seem particularly relevant or possible to incorporate into classes at OJJC.

The idea of perception and action relies on creating interactional associations among words which are taught and is said to improve the potential of their acquisition (Tulving and Thompson, 1977). *Total Physical Response*, (TPR), (Asher, 1969), uses this kind of interaction. The active component of TPR is said to result in students learning more than they would in a passive situation. However TPR is unlikely to be able to help the more advanced learning which is feature of OJJC as it deals more with action associated vocabulary.

Researchers also suggest that to improve productive vocabulary, learners need to improve the way they use vocabulary, improve vocabulary retrieval and use lexical phrases. (Nattinger, 1991). Learners can be encouraged to produce vocabulary by *pidginization*, or urging students to do the best they can to communicate by using the words they have and to avoid excessive self-monitoring. The skill of *circumlocution* may also be a way of getting students to use what they know about language to get around

words they don't know by producing new words. For example, if they don't know the word 'inability', but produced 'unableness' instead it would allow them to express their meaning. At OJJC students in discussion classes are always urged to communicate, not excessively worrying about the accuracy of their utterances. That is because *communication* is the purpose of the lesson. These methods might allow students to communicate meanings but they would have little effect on the acquisition of accurate vocabulary. They can therefore be discounted as ways of fostering productive use of vocabulary. A different kind of circumlocution, which actually enhances vocabulary acquisition is used in the Introductory unit for discussion at OJJC. In this exercise learners are encouraged to 'talk around' words they do not know by using a definition of the word instead.

In order to produce vocabulary it is important to be able to retrieve what you know as quickly as possible. Devices such as *situational sets* may help students to do this. Situational sets are groups of words that are associated. They may be related to a particular situation, topic or location. For example, a situational set of vocabulary about conflict resolution might include words such as *compromise, withdrawal, prevailing, transcending, emotions and issues*. Organizing words according to this method could be a useful aid to students when they have to write about and discuss this topic. Another way of speeding up vocabulary retrieval are *semantic sets*. These are ways that bring words together according to various types of inferential relationships. For example, they may be grouped as synonyms, such as *compromise* and *win-win situation*, antonyms such as *conflict* and *peace*, and subordinates such as *United Nations* and *NGO*. It is possible that if vocabulary taught at OJJC were organized and taught in the ways above, or in other suitable groupings students would begin to find their vocabulary not only expanded but they would also be able to find words they need more quickly.

Finally learning *lexical phrases* rather than individual words might aid productive use of vocabulary. Bolinger (1975) suggests that language is often retrieved from memory as pre-assembled chunks. Lexical phrases may be composed of two or more words. They may be two and three-word verbs, collocations, or compounds. They may be fragments of sentences. In addition though a whole idiom or a commonly used sentence might be considered as one chunk of vocabulary. To some extent this already happens at OJJC. In the Speaking Keys of the discussion course students are presented with pre-assembled language and fragments of sentences to help them discuss topics. Also vocabulary items of more than one word often appear in vocabulary lists.

To conclude, While the ideas of context clues and teaching word morphology can help OJJC students to improve their receptive vocabulary, it seems unlikely that the other techniques suggested by the researchers above would be very applicable to the learning and retention of vocabulary at OJJC. As far as productive vocabulary is concerned, the skill

of circumlocution is already taught at OJJC, although in a different sense to the way researchers have suggested. Lexical and semantic sets seem a promising way of organizing vocabulary lists so that items are both easier to learn, retain and produce. Encouraging students to learn lexical phrases; pieces of vocabulary which naturally fit together to become one item, is also a possible direction to take in the composition of some word lists and may lead to better production of vocabulary in both discussion and writing classes.

WORKS CITED

- Asher, J. (1969). The Total Physical Response approach to second language learning. *Modern Language Journal* 53: 3-17.
- Bolinger, D. (1975). *Aspects of Language*, 2nd ed. New York. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich
- Clarke, M and Silberstein, S. (1977). Toward a realization of psycholinguistic principles in the ESL reading class. *Language Learning* 27: 135-154.
- Cornwell, S and Bramley, D. (2002). Vocabulary at OJJC. A review, an update and some future directions. *Osaka Jogakuin Junior College Kiyo* 31.
- Nation, I. S. P. (1990). *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House
- Nation, I. S. P. (1994). (Ed) *New ways in teaching vocabulary*. Alexandria, Va: TESOL.
- Nattinger, J. (1980) A lexical phrase grammar for ESL. *TESOL Quarterly* 14. 337-344
- Tulving, E and Thompson, D. M. (1973). Encoding specificity and retrieval processes in episodic Memory. *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 80: 352-373.

Appendix 1

Schedule For Academic Vocabulary Class Summer Term 2002

- Class 1 Introductory assignment and first vocabulary notebook assignment.
- Class 2 Vocabulary in context exercise on introductory assignment.
Vocabulary quiz on introductory assignment.
Vocabulary notebook checking and corrections.
Comments/Further practice of difficult/problematic words.
Second vocabulary notebook assignment.
- Class 3 Vocabulary in context exercise on first vocabulary notebook assignment
Vocabulary notebook checking and corrections.
Comments/Further practice of difficult/problematic words
Beginning of class dictionary.
Third vocabulary notebook assignment.
- Class 4 Vocabulary Quiz on first vocabulary assignment
Vocabulary in context exercises on second vocabulary assignment
Checking of third vocabulary assignment
Comments/Further practice of difficult/problematic words.
Fourth vocabulary notebook assignment.
- Class 5 Vocabulary Quiz on second vocabulary assignment
Vocabulary in context exercises on third vocabulary assignment
Checking of fourth vocabulary assignment
Comments/Further practice of difficult/problematic words.
Fifth vocabulary notebook assignment.
- Class 6 Vocabulary Quiz on third vocabulary assignment
Vocabulary in context exercises on fourth vocabulary assignment
Checking of fifth vocabulary assignment
Comments/Further practice of difficult/problematic words.
Sixth vocabulary notebook assignment.
- Class 7 Vocabulary Quiz on fourth vocabulary assignment
Vocabulary in context exercises on fifth vocabulary assignment
Checking of sixth vocabulary assignment
Comments/Further practice of difficult/problematic words.
Seventh vocabulary notebook assignment.
- Class 8 Vocabulary Quiz on fifth vocabulary assignment
Vocabulary in context exercises on sixth vocabulary assignment
Checking of seventh vocabulary assignment
Comments/Further practice of difficult/problematic words.
Eighth vocabulary notebook assignment.
- Class 9 Vocabulary Quiz on sixth vocabulary assignment
Vocabulary in context exercises on seventh vocabulary assignment
Checking of eighth vocabulary assignment
Comments/Further practice of difficult/problematic words.
Ninth vocabulary notebook assignment.
- Class 10 Vocabulary Quiz on seventh vocabulary assignment
Vocabulary in context exercises on eighth vocabulary assignment
Checking of ninth vocabulary assignment
Comments/Further practice of difficult/problematic words.