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To All Vocabulary SIG Members,

We are proud to present you with volume 1 issue 2 of the Vocabulary Education & Research Bulletin.

If you recall back to the inaugural issue published earlier this year, we summarized many of the posters that were presented at the first JALT Vocabulary SIG colloquium in Fukuoka, Japan. The colloquium took place in March, 2012 when the SIG was just getting off the ground. We may be a young SIG, but we are clearly a popular one. The JALT Vocabulary SIG will celebrate its first birthday this November, and we have seen steady growth of membership as the months go by. The SIG started with 26 members last November after the JALT National conference, and less than a year later, as of September 1st, 2012, we stand at 101 members! Not bad for being the new kids on the block.

In this issue, we have a variety of interesting articles that should keep you satisfied until the next issue. Phil Bennet & Tim Stoeckel start us off by analyzing a multiple-choice test in terms of willingness to skip items. Tadamitsu Kamimoto is next and investigates the effects of using stems (i.e., a short, non-defining sentence) on the Vocabulary Size Test. Following Tadamitsu, Masaya Kaneko explores the Center Test to discover what vocabulary size is needed for a 95% comprehension rate. After that, Kris Ramonda discusses Nation's four strands of vocabulary learning, and how to incorporate research and practice by using teacher belief information. Next, Raymond Stubbe searches for a boundary of acceptability of false alarms in yes/no tests (i.e., endorsing a word, when the word is not a real word). Last but not least, Yuka Yamamoto explores the notion that initial vocabulary level doesn't influence target vocabulary acquisition.

After the main course, for your vocabulary dessert, the SIG News section has up-to-date information including news on the SIG Symposium that is scheduled for June 2013 (call for poster presentations will be open until January 31st, so please submit to share your research and make the symposium even more successful!), a report by Mark Howarth on the mini-conference which took place in May, and information about the SIG poster session and annual general meeting, both of which are taking place at the JALT annual conference.

Finally, we would like to thank all of the contributors for their hard work and cooperation, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their time and effort. It is because of all of you that VERB is possible.

See you at the JALT Annual Conference!

The VERB editors
Tomoko Ishii & TJ Boutorwick

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Short Papers

Variations in format and willingness to skip items in a multiple-choice vocabulary test

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Background

One problem often cited with multiple-choice (MC) tests is that test-takers are capable of inflating their scores by guessing (Milton, 2009; Schmitt, 2010; Stewart & White, 2011). The response to this issue in popular diagnostic vocabulary tests has been either to provide an instruction not to guess, as in the Vocabulary Levels Test (Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001), or to adopt a penalty system, as in many yes/no tests (Meara, 1994). Another, less common, approach has been to add a choice to each test item so that examinees can directly indicate that they do not know the target word, as in an online version of Nation and Beglar's (2007) Vocabulary Size Test (http://my.vocabularysize.com).

The authors encountered the problem of frequent guessing while developing a MC test of basic vocabulary. In early test versions, examinees were instructed to skip completely unknown items but to answer if they were unsure but felt they might know the correct choice. This followed Schmitt et al. (2001), whose Vocabulary Levels Test has similar instructions. Nagy, Herman, and Anderson (1985) argue that since word knowledge is acquired incrementally, and no tests can capture all aspects of this knowledge, a demonstration of partial understanding should be considered acceptable in tests of word recognition. However, our early test results had a very high ratio of wrongly-answered to skipped items, suggesting that random guessing was common among many examinees.

Aims

The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether two changes in test format would affect participants' willingness to skip unknown words rather than guess at them. First, a penalty for wrong answers was applied, and second, a fifth option, "I don't know this word," was added to each item (hereafter choice E). Specifically, the original (bilingual) instructions on Form A read: Please read the sentence and circle the letter (a, b, c or d) next to the meaning that you think matches the word in bold. If you are not 100% sure, but you think you know the answer, you can try to guess. If you really do not know the answer, please just skip the question.

On Form B, the last sentence above was replaced with, "If you really do not know the answer, circle letter 'e' (I DON'T KNOW THIS WORD). Incorrect answers will lose points, so please do not guess if you don't know the answer." It was hypothesized that these changes would increase skipping of unknown items.

Methods

Two versions of a test designed to estimate receptive knowledge of the written forms of (a) Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List and (b) a revised version of West's General Service List (available at http://www.lextutor.ca/freq/lists_download/) were used. These 90-item test forms were made according to the same blueprint except for the changes in Form B outlined above. Participants completed Form A at the end of their first semester of study and Form B one semester later. Examinees were informed that these tests did not count towards their course grade.

For purposes of analysis, items answered correctly were classified as known, and those answered incorrectly or skipped as unknown. Incorrect here refers to items which were answered wrongly, and skipped to items that were either answered with choice E (Form B) or not answered at all (either form). For each test, examinees were categorized as low (0-10%), medium (>10-50%), or high (>50%), according to the proportion of unknown items that they skipped.

Sample

Participants were 69 first-year students (48 female, 21 male) enrolled at a four-year liberal arts college in Japan. All were Japanese except for three South Korean males.

Preliminary results

Table 1 is a contingency table with each examinee placed into one of nine cells based upon their rate of skipping unknown items on the two test forms. A Bhapkar test of overall marginal homogeneity revealed a significant relationship between test form and category of skipping, χ^2 (2, $N = 69$) = 33.12, $p < .001$, $V = .49$. After applying Bonferroni's correction, McNemar tests for each level of skipping indicated that the changes in test format were significantly associated with the proportion of examinees classified as possessing low and high skip rates. As hypothesized, the proportion of examinees classified as low decreased, while those categorized as high increased, with large ($V = .55$) and moderate ($V = .39$) effect sizes respectively (Table 2).

Table 1
Examinees Classified by Proportion of Unknown Items Skipped on Two Test Forms

		Form B			
		Low 0-10%	Medium >10-50%	High >50%	Total
Form A	Low	14	18	11	43
	Medium	1	4	7	12
	High	2	1	11	14
	Total	17	23	29	69

Table 2
McNemar Tests of Marginal Homogeneity for Each Category of Skipping

	Frequency		Proportion				
Level	Form A	Form B	Form A	Form B	χ^2	*p*	V
Low	43	17	.62	.24	21.12	<.001	.55
Medium	12	23	.17	.33	4.48	.03	
High	14	29	.20	.42	10.71	.001	.39

Conclusions and future directions

The results suggest that the changes in test format brought about an increase in willingness to skip unknown items. Perhaps the changes – especially the addition of choice E – were effective because many test-takers are overly familiar with the MC format; not until the option to skip items is available as an answer choice do some examinees realize that skipping is a viable alternative.

Penalties for incorrect answers are not uncommon in MC formats, but offering examinees the choice of directly

indicating lack of knowledge has yet to receive much attention in SLA. As such, it is unfortunate that these two changes were made at the same time in this study because it is impossible to separate the effect of one from the other. It would, therefore, be informative to investigate the difference between two test forms limited to the presence of choice E on one of them.

As an offshoot of a separate research project, this study lacks the rigor to make definitive claims about ideal vocabulary test formats. However, the results do imply that merely asking examinees to skip unknown items is less effective in discouraging random guessing than the inclusion of a penalty and the option to indicate lack of knowledge.

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Effects of items with stems or without in a vocabulary test on students' performance

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Background

Nation and Beglar (2007) developed the Vocabulary Size Test (VST) to measure receptive written vocabulary size. The test samples from the most frequent 14,000 word families of the British National Corpus (Leech, Ryan, & Wilson, 2001) and adopts a multiple choice format. Beglar (2010) carried out the first comprehensive validation involving a full range of frequency word levels in the test. Analyses based on the Rasch model suggested that that the VST would be a big asset to the vocabulary tests available.

The VST can be regarded as a refinement of the Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation, 1990; Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001), having several advantages over the VLT. Among them, the most salient is the adoption of a multiple-choice format. The multiple-choice is better than the matching-format of the VLT for the following two reasons. First, items in the VST are independent of each other unlike the matching format of the VLT (Nation, 2007). Second, items in the VST are presented with context, as shown below, whereas the VLT presents items without context. In regards to writing guidelines for stems, Beglar (2010: 104) explains that each item is placed in a short non-defining context. What Beglar implies here is that whether test items are provided with stems or without, students' scores should not be significantly affected.

1. marsupial: It is <a marsupial>.
   a. an animal with hard feet
   b. a plant that grows for several years
   c. a plant with flowers that turn to face the sun
   d. an animal with a pocket for babies

Aims

The aim of this interim paper is to examine whether Beglar's implication holds true. The hypothesis tested here is that performance on the VST with stems would be practically equal to performance on the VST without stems.

Method and sample

A total of 110 Japanese EFL university students participated in this study. In order to control for L2 reading proficiency, the bilingual Japanese VST form was employed. This form is referred to as the original (ORG). Then stem sentences were omitted to develop the form without stems, which was referred to as a modified form (MOD). These two forms were randomly distributed to the participants. Each group of 55 students took the ORG form or the MOD form. Word levels used here included up to 8K. Since one word level had 10 items, the maximum score possible was 80 points.

Preliminary results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations (SDs) of the performance of the two groups. Means were 50.38 for the ORG group and 52.60 for the MOD group, yielding a difference of 2.22. A *t*-test showed that the difference was statistically significant ($t = 2.233$, $df = 108$, $p < .05$, two-tailed). It was concluded therefore that the hypothesis that there would be no difference between the tests was not supported. Far more startling, however, was that a fair number of stems did not work in students' favour. Students performed much better on the test without stems than on the test with stems.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Two Groups

	ORG ($N = 55$)	MOD ($N = 55$)
Means	50.38	52.60
SDs	5.28	5.13

Notes: MOD = modified (no stems); ORG = original (with stems).

In an attempt to probe which items fluctuated widely between the two forms, item facility (IF) values of the same items were compared. To calculate the difference index, the IF for the MOD form was subtracted from the IF for the ORG form. The differences ranged from -0.20 to +0.38 with a mean of -0.03.

Table 2 shows the frequency counts of the IF differences according to the word levels. There are two notable features in this table. First, the total number of items in the lower half of the table (below 0, 49 items) is larger than the total number in the upper half (above 0, 23 items). This clearly indicates that students found the items easier on the MOD form than on the ORG form. Second, although about three fourths of a total number of the items were concentrated within the rather narrow band of less than ±1.0, there were 21 items whose IF differences exceeded ±0.10 (six above, and 15 below). A subsequent study is necessary

to explore conceivable causes for such a wide distribution of the IF differences.

Table 2
Frequency Table of IF Differences between the Two Groups: by Word Levels

				1K	2K	3K	4K	5K	6K	7K	8K	total
	0.30	～	0.39				1					1
	0.20	～	0.29					1	2	1		4
	0.10	～	0.19		1							1
IF diff	0	～	0.09	1	1	4	3	2	2	2	2	17
(ORG	0			3	1	1	2	1				8
minus	0	～	-0.09	2	7	4	2	5	2	5	7	34
MOD)	-0.10	～	-0.19	1				1	3	2	1	8
	-0.20	～	-0.29	3		1	1					5
	-0.30	～	-0.39				1		1			2

Notes: MOD = modified (no stems); ORG = original (with stems).

Preliminary conclusions and future directions

This study showed that the stem factor played an obscure but important role in the VST. Some stems were beneficial to students while a good number of stems were detrimental. What this study implies is a need to examine the effects of the short non-defining stem on performance. It may, therefore, be worthwhile to pursue this line of study as part of a whole validation study. Future research is warranted on the examination of the items which had large IF differences between the two forms (with stems and without). One approach that has strong potential for assisting in addressing these concerns is an extensive review of multiple-choice item functioning and distractor analysis.

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How large a vocabulary is required for the National Center Test?

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National Center Test

The National Center Test (NCT) began in 1990. Since then, the test has been highly influential to senior high school students and their teachers because the test is required for those who wish to enter national universities in Japan such as the prestigious Tokyo University and Kyoto University. Many private universities also adopt the test scores as one of their admission policies.

This study aims to explore how large a vocabulary is required for the NCT. There are several studies regarding the NCT (Matsuo, 2000; Hasegawa, 2003; Chujo & Hasegawa, 2004; Tani, 2008), however, these studies did not specify how large a vocabulary is necessary for the test. These studies compared the vocabulary of the past NCTs with the vocabulary of English textbooks for junior high and senior high school students to examine whether these textbooks can provide sufficient vocabulary required for the NCTs.

Concerning the research on exploring how large a vocabulary is required for the NCT, very few findings have been reported except two studies (Chujo, 2004; Hasegawa, Chujo, & Nishigaki, 2006). Using a criterion of 95% text coverage required for comprehension, Chujo concluded that knowledge of approximately 3,000 words were required for comprehension of the test. However, 95 percent text coverage might not be sufficient to gain adequate comprehension of a text (Schmitt, Jiang, & Grabe, 2011). Thus, as Schmitt et al. suggested, this study too assumed 98 percent text coverage as the optimal coverage. Second, by applying more recent research findings and examining larger sizes of test samples, a more accurate vocabulary size goal required for the NCT will be estimated.

Methods

Though it employs a methodology similar to Chujo's, this study used Nation's BNC fourteen 1,000 word-family lists (2006) while Chujo used her own lemmatized high frequency word list (2004). Additionally, this study examined all the past NCTs excluding the latest 2012 year version of the NCT, which was not available at this time, in contrast to two tests of 2001 and 2002 in Chujo's study (2004). Furthermore, since 2006, the NCT has incorporated the listening portion. Thus, this study explores how large a vocabulary is required for the written and listening portions respectively.

RANGE and the BNC fourteen 1,000 word-family lists

RANGE was designed by Nation and Coxhead, and programmed by Heatley (2002). The program provides text coverage by certain words or word families on the General Service List (West, 1953), Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000), and fourteen 1,000 word-family lists made from the British National Corpus (Nation, 2006). The BNC 14,000 word-family lists contain 14,000 word families plus proper nouns, interjections, exclamations, and hesitation procedures which are common in spoken English. In this study, the vocabulary coverage of the past 22 years of the NCTs was examined with the RANGE program.

Text coverage

According to Nation (2006), text coverage is defined as "the percentage of running words in the text known by the readers" (p. 61). Earlier research suggested that 95 percent text coverage is required to gain adequate comprehension (Laufer, 1989). However, Hu and Nation (2000) reported that 98 percent text coverage was necessary for the participants to

gain adequate comprehension. Schmitt, Jiang, and Grabe (2011) also found that 98 percent text coverage is more reasonable.

Applying this recent finding, this study examines how large a vocabulary is required to reach 98 percent text coverage by the BNC fourteen 1,000 word-family lists.

Results

How large a vocabulary is required for the written portion of the National Center Test?

The total tokens for the past 22 written tests were 70,896. Concerning the text coverage by the BNC 14,000 word-family lists, the first 1,000 word families accounted for 59,961 of the total running words. This made up 84.58 percent of the total tokens. The second 1,000 word families accounted for 5,321 tokens, or 7.51 percent. The third 1,000 word families accounted for 1,732 tokens, or 2.44 percent. The fourth 1,000 word families accounted for 763 tokens: 1.08 percent. The fifth 1,000 word families accounted for 406 tokens: 0.57 percent. There were also 1,625 proper nouns, equal to 2.29 percent.

From this result, if the proper nouns are easily understood from the context, using the comprehension criterion of 98% coverage, 5,000 word families are required, rather the approximately 3,000 suggested by the 95% coverage criterion.

How large a vocabulary is required for the listening portion of the National Center Test?

The total tokens for the six listening tests were 10,315. The first 1,000 word families accounted for 8,970 words, or 86.96 percent. The second 1,000 word families accounted for 637 words, or 6.18 percent. The third 1,000 word families accounted for 194 words, or 1.88 percent. The fourth 1,000 word families accounted for 130 words, or 1.26 percent. The fifth 1,000 word families accounted for 41 words, or 0.4 percent. There were also 141 proper nouns, equal to 1.37 percent. Assuming the proper nouns do not interfere with readers' comprehension, then approximately 5,000 word families are necessary to reach 98 percent text coverage.

Discussion

This finding implies that a series of textbooks for junior high and senior high school students might not provide sufficient vocabulary necessary for the NCT.

Chujo (2004) revealed that *New Horizon Series* and *Unicorn English Series*, the most widely used textbooks for junior high school students and advanced-level senior high school students, contain approximately 3,200 words. She also found that 3,100 to 3,200 words from her BNC lemmatized high frequency word list were required to reach 95 percent text coverage in the 2001 and 2002 NCTs (2004). Using these results, Chujo concluded that the NCT is appropriate for high school graduates in terms of the vocabulary level (2004).

The present study also confirmed that 3,000 word-families were necessary to reach 95 percent text coverage, however, as the recent research finding showed, 95 percent text coverage may not be sufficient to gain adequate comprehension (Schmitt, Jiang, & Grabe, 2011). Classroom practitioners should keep in mind that they need to supplement with another 2,000 word families, which may not be able to be acquired from textbooks, in order for high school students to prepare for the NCT.

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The four strands of vocabulary learning: Reaching a crossroads of practice and research

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Background

Nation (2007) proposes that the four strands of language learning for vocabulary be given roughly equal attention to optimize the learning of new words. The four strands include: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. Recent research related to these four areas has pointed to a number of pedagogical implications that could be applied in the classroom.

Meaning-focused input

Acquiring new words from meaning-focused input refers to vocabulary learned incidentally through classroom activities involving reading and listening. Research in this area has shown that learners often fail to guess the meaning of new words correctly (Nassaji, 2003). Moreover, other

studies (Waring & Takaki, 2003; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006) have found relatively low pick up rates for learning new words incidentally. For these reasons, Schmitt (2008) maintains that the meaning-focused input strand is more conducive to consolidation of previous explicitly taught words rather than for acquiring new words.

Meaning-focused output

Meaning-focused output includes classroom tasks such as communicative activities and prepared writing. These tasks allow learners to use the words that they know productively. One study (Lee & Muncie, 2006) found that productive output tasks were more likely to lead to productive mastery than were receptive input tasks. This suggests that structured productive practice might have advantages for vocabulary acquisition in terms of active vocabulary.

Language-focused learning

The first 2,000 most frequent words in addition to the words on the Academic Word List merit intentional instruction due to the utility of knowing common and useful words (Nation, 2001). Furthermore, repeated, spaced exposures have been found to be an efficient means of direct teaching of vocabulary (de Groot, 2006). Taken together, consideration for word frequency and careful, spaced planning will increase the likelihood of learners to acquire the most needed words first.

Fluency development

It is difficult to understate the importance of recycling previously learned vocabulary. In fact, Nation (2001) goes as far as to say that consolidation is more important than learning new words because a forgotten word is a lost time investment. Furthermore, as working memory is limited and new semantic information can inhibit comprehension and fluency (Barcroft, 2002), reading easy graded readers or listening to easy passages eases the cognitive burden on working memory and allows for learners to further develop their automaticity, strengthen lexical access to existing words, and deepen their word knowledge. Schmitt (2008) notes that the form-meaning link is only the first step towards learning a new word, and fluency development is necessary in order to learn often overlooked aspects of work knowledge.

Aims

The current study examines self-reported teacher beliefs about teaching vocabulary and compares and contrasts those beliefs with pedagogical implications from recent research as it relates to the four strands in vocabulary learning.

Methods

22 English teaching faculty at a Japanese University in Kyushu were surveyed about their teacher beliefs with regards to vocabulary instruction. The four strands of learning as it relates to vocabulary (Nation, 2007) served as the framework for the survey design. Each strand was illustrated through example activities and techniques in case there were participants who were unfamiliar with the four strands. Participants were asked to rank from one to four each strand in order of most important to least important (see table 1 for more details). Furthermore, participants had to justify their ranking by explaining their most and least important ranking. Finally, participants were asked to explain what methods they used in the classroom to teach new vocabulary items. Participant responses included quantitative and qualitative data, the latter of which was coded and assigned categorically to correspond to one of the four strands.

Sample

Participants included both full-time and part-time lecturers of English at university level. Of the initial 22 respondents, responses from 17 were included in the final quantitative analysis. The remaining five were excluded because of misinterpretation of one or more survey items.

Results to date

As shown in Table 1, results indicated that participants favored language-focused learning the most and fluency development the least as part of classroom curriculum. 7 of the 17 respondents chose language-focused learning as their most favored strand and none of them ranked it as least favored. The strong preference for language focused learning stemmed in part from the respondents' belief in its efficiency for learning vocabulary.

Table 2 shows some examples of participant responses to the questionnaire. It can be seen that in addition to respondents citing faster vocabulary growth of the most relevant words as a result of teacher-led language focus, facility of evaluation as a result of testing pre-determined words, direct intervention for pronunciation issues, and teacher guided skills development as a means to push the learner towards autonomy were also mentioned.

Conversely, few respondents ranked fluency development first among the four strands. Only 2 of the 17 respondents ranked it as the most favored, but 10 ranked it as least favored. The most common explanation cited was that respondents felt fluency development, although important, was something that required little or no teacher guidance, and as a result, it was not viewed as a top priority for use of class time. However, one of the respondents who highly favored fluency development pointed out that most Japanese learners in the English courses have very shallow vocabulary depth knowledge and suggested that fluency development was the primary means through which to deepen knowledge of existing words in the lexicon.

Table 1
Number of respondents selecting "most important" and "least important" (*N*=17)

	Meaning-focused input	Language-focused learning	Meaning-focused output	Fluency development
"most important"	6	7	2	2
"least important"	4	0	3	10

Preliminary conclusion

Although Nation (2007) has suggested a balanced approach of roughly equal attention of all four strands of vocabulary learning in a language course, as a whole the respondents seemed to overemphasize language-focused learning at the expense of fluency development. Results from the data point to the belief that language-focused learning is a more efficient means of teaching, while fluency development is seen more as fine tuning, but not as a priority. These views are not completely surprising, as ESL and ELF textbooks and curriculum tend to ignore development of vocabulary depth knowledge, and usually only give explicit attention to meaning-form links of lexical items. Moreover, the preference for language-focused learning could represent a desire for a teacher-centered approach for explicit instruction of vocabulary as opposed to more of a facilitator role in the classroom.

Future work

Further investigation of specific practices and beliefs of teachers about vocabulary learning will be carried out. These include, but are not limited to: use of the L1-L2 translations in the classroom, L1-L2 vs. L2-L2 dictionary use, number of

desired exposures for intentional learning, and balancing time resources for consolidation of old over acquiring of new vocabulary.

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Table 2
Examples of participant responses

Strand	Most Favored	Least Favored
Meaning-focused input	"Students often learn a lot more from seeing words in context." "I believe this provides the best opportunity for continued negotiation of meaning, and thus continual development, focus, and understanding of schemata, through well-understood, authentic, and rich contexts."	"Incidental learning (of words) is too slow." "Incidental learning takes time."
Meaning-focused output	"Language learning occurs best when used meaningfully in some form. Hearing or seeing a student's output makes checking easier simultaneously check whether the output is comprehensible."	"I often use writing activities because students can make their own connections of meaning. I also believe words should not be taught in lists, individually." "It seems generally accepted that receptive vocabulary is greater than productive, so forcing students to produce may be unnecessary. Also, by forcing production, teachers may force students into incorrect usage."
Language-focused learning	"Students are often assessed on vocabulary lists. Therefore, direct explicit attention to these words seems appropriate. Also, by teaching vocabulary strategies, students should be able to use the strategies in future vocabulary learning." "Explicit instruction is faster."	(no negative remarks for this category)
Fluency development	"The problem is that their knowledge of these words is very shallow."	"Once students are motivated to learn, they will have the desire to read more (and learn vocabulary) without forcing them." "Fluency development is important, but it should be focused on more outside of the classroom, during individual learning time." "Little time for this in class."

Searching for an acceptable false alarm maximum

Raymond Stubbe
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Background

Yes No (YN) receptive vocabulary tests, also referred to as checklist tests, are designed to measure the receptive lexical knowledge of test-takers (Meara & Buxton, 1987). In these tests participants self-assess their knowledge of items which are presented either in context free lists in paper versions, or one at a time in computerized versions. As explained in Stubbe (2012, p. 2):

> One concern regarding this format is the problem of overestimation, where students signal knowledge of words they actually do not know the meaning of. To provide a means of checking for potential overestimation of word knowledge, pseudowords (non-real words) were added to the YN test format (Anderson & Freebody, 1983; Meara & Buxton, 1987). If a test-taker signals knowledge of a pseudoword, this is labeled a 'false alarm' and is interpreted as evidence of also falsely claiming knowledge of real words. The number of pseudowords checked divided by the total number of pseudowords is known as the false alarm (FA) rate.

Lexical researchers appear to use false alarm (FA) data in YN tests in one of two ways: to adjust YN scores

downward (Meara & Buxton, 1987); or to delete, or weed out unreliable forms. Under the adjustment usage, the YN results from participants who claim knowledge of pseudowords are adjusted downwards using a number of formulae, to better reflect the actual vocabulary size (Beeckmans et al., 2001). There appears to be four different adjusting formulas available (see Huibregtse, Admiraal, & Meara, 2002). Under the deletion usage, a certain level of FAs is set as the acceptable maximum and any forms exceeding that limit are excluded from the study. Schmitt, Jiang and Grabe (2011) set their FA limit at three (10% of the total number of pseudowords used in that study) and Barrow, Nakanishi and Ishino (1999) utilized the same cut-off point.

Both of the above usages of FAs (adjustment and deletion) seem to make the assumption zero FAs is the ideal. If participants do not check any pseudowords on the YN test then they are assumed not to have overestimated their knowledge of any of the *real* words on the YN test either, so their scores are not adjusted; nor considered for deletion.

Aim

The aim of this study is to determine whether or not a good boundary for FAs exists for exclusion of YN test forms as unreliable.

Method

Stubbe and Yokomitsu (2012) report on a study involving student knowledge of 60 loanwords and 60 non-loanwords, sampled from the JACET 8000 frequency listing (JACET, 2003). The results from a YN test of the 120 items were compared with a translation test (Tt) of the same items. Not reported in that study, due to word limit requirements, were 32 pseudowords randomly inserted into the YN test. These pseudowords were selected from *Swansea Vocabulary Tests v 1.1 1992 Test 101-106* (Meara, 1992). In line with Stubbe, Stewart and Pritchard (2010), care was taken to avoid pseudowords which resembled English loanwords in Japanese (*steck* and *fomul*, which resemble *stick* and *formal*, for example). The paper YN test was given in four different classes during November, 2011, and the Tt was given the following week. (For a thorough description of the YN and Tt instruments see Stubbe & Yokomitsu, 2012).

Sample

Participants were all second year students enrolled in a compulsory English classes in a private Japanese university with TOEIC® Bridge scores of 100-140 (n=71).

Results

The 71 participants reported a total of 87 FAs on the 32 pseudowords, for a FA rate of 3.83% (see Table 1). The pseudowords averaged just under 2.72 FAs each, and four of these (*pocock, nonagrate, justal* and *dowrick*) had zero checks. Two pseudo-items were more popular than the other: *twose* and *skene* each received 10 and 9 checks, respectively (see Appendix).

Table 1
Pseudoword Summary Statistics

Item	*n*	FAs	Mean	SD	Range	FA rate
Participants	71	87	1.23	2.22	0 - 11	3.83%

Table 2 presents a comparison of FAs, YN scores, and Tt scores; plus the difference between YN and Tt tests. It can be seen that the YN mean is almost double that of the Tt mean, suggesting that a great deal of overestimation had occurred. Test-takers averaged YN scores that were 28.82 points higher than their Tt results, ranging from one through 67 points.

Table 2
Summaries of FAs, YN scores, Tt scores and differences between YN and Tt results

Variable	*n*	*k*	Mean	SD	Range	low	High
FAs total	71	32	1.23	2.21	11	0	11
YN totals	71	120	59.77	15.54	72	20	92
Tt Score	71	120	29.94	10.01	42	7	49
YN -Tt	71	120	28.82	13.59	66	1	67

Correlations between FAs and the two test forms, as well as with the difference between the two tests are presented in Table 3. The correlations between FA and the two tests are weak, but in an expected direction; FAs would normally inflate YN scores, and be counter to actual knowledge. The highest correlation is with the difference between the two tests, which suggests that the FAs are signaling overestimation of vocabulary knowledge on the YN test.

Table 3
Correlations (Pearson-Product Moment) between FAs, YN scores, Tt scores and YN-Tt

Variable	FAs Total	YN score	Tt score	YN-Tt
FAs Total	1			
YN totals	0.264	1		
Tt Score	-0.363	0.499	1	
YN-Tt	0.565	0.774	-0.162	1

Table 4 presents the mean *YN minus Tt* figures for each level of FA counts. Over 56% of test-takers had no FAs, but their YN scores were still 23.08 points higher than their Tt scores, suggesting that even they were overestimating their actual lexical knowledge on the YN test. This overestimation increases steadily through one and two FAs before leveling off for three FAs and actually dropping slightly for four FAs. After four FAs, overestimation increases steadily, except for the one student who had seven FAs.

Table 4
Overestimation (YN-Tt means) by Number of FAs

Number of FAs	n	YN-Tt Mean	SD	Range	Low	High
0	40	23.08	11.15	44	1	45
1	14	31.64	12.51	48	5	53
2	6	38.33	6.98	18	31	49
3	2	38.00	5.66	8	34	42
4	3	23.67	7.77	15	15	30
5	3	46.67	7.57	14	38	52
7	1	39.00	n/a	0	n/a	n/a
10	1	57.00	n/a	0	n/a	n/a
11	1	67.00	n/a	0	n/a	n/a

Based on the YN-Tt means, a number of independent sample *t*-tests were run to determine the best FA cut-off point. For each *t*-test, the group with FA counts from zero up to and including the cut-off point (low) were compared

to the group with FAs beyond that cut-off point (high). Results suggest that the cut-off point should be set at four, rejecting any YN form for with five or more FAs. These results were confirmed using Effect Size tests (Cohen, 1988) (Table 6).

Table 5
FA Cut-off Means, SDs and t*-test Results*

FA cut-off	n low/ high	low mean	low SD	high mean	high SD	*t* =	*df* =	*p* =
3	62 / 9	27.76	12.09	42.44	16.76	-2.53	9	0.031
4	65 / 6	27.60	11.92	51.50	11.26	-4.95	6	0.003
5	68 / 3	28.50	12.46	55.00	14.73	-3.07	2	0.085

Table 6
Effect Size Tests Results

FA cut-off	*d* =	*r* =
3	-1.005	-0.449
4	-2.062	-0.718
5	-1.942	-0.697

Conclusion

The data presented above suggests that test-takers who report no false alarms averaged 23 cases of overestimation of lexical knowledge on a 120 item YN test (just over 19%), which calls into question the usefulness of pseudowords for predicting overestimation on YN tests. However the predictive ability of FAs for overestimation at the level of five FAs and beyond was strong, suggesting that pseudowords are useful in YN tests. For this small group of participants it appears as if a FA maximum set at four, not three, would yield the most reliable results. These findings must be treated with caution however as the number of participants was quite small (71), and the number in each FA group beyond zero was even smaller. Further research is warranted to determine if an optimum FA deletion count actually does exist.

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Appendix
False Alarms per Pseudoword

Pseudoword	Number of FAs	Pseudoword	Number of FAs
twose	10	bundock	2
skene	9	lannery	2
degate	6	ventrice	2
lester	6	wardle	2
mott	5	oligation	1
noot	5	aistrope	1
instere	4	scanlan	1
glandle	4	troake	1
martlew	3	elode	1
youde	3	roscrow	1
curify	3	perryman	1
factile	3	werrell	1
arain	3	pocock	0
colliver	3	nonagrate	0
kitely	2	justal	0
redivate	2	dowrick	0
		total	87
		FA per pseudoword	2.72

Initial L2 vocabulary level doesn't contribute to target vocabulary acquisition

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Background

One of the confounding factors in a study is the learners' L2 language proficiency (Schmitt, 2010). It is relatively well established that initial L2 proficiency level influences learners' lexical growth. Several studies have postulated a positive relationship between learners' level and vocabulary growth especially in reading (e.g., Collins, 2005; Tekmen & Daloglu, 2006). However, not much research has been done to find out how initial L2 vocabulary level influences their lexical acquisition in deliberate vocabulary learning conditions.

Aims

The purpose of this study is to explore whether initial L2 vocabulary level contributes to target vocabulary acquisition in a deliberate vocabulary learning condition.

Methods

Students were given the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000) in sections as homework and were asked to prepare for the in-class vocabulary quizzes. The Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT; Schmitt, 2000; N. Schmitt, D. Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001) was used in the study, to establish learners' overall receptive vocabulary size. Participants were tested once at the beginning of the first semester and again at the end of the semester.

Participants

The study involved 99 first-year students in an academic English course from two intact co-educational classes of students with different majors (Intercultural Communication majors, n = 77; Social Science majors, n = 22) at a high-tier, four-year private university in Tokyo, Japan.

Using the formula created by Laufer (1998) to estimate the number of word families known by a learner, word family estimations were calculated based upon the total raw scores of receptive vocabulary test. Based on the estimated vocabulary size, the top 30 students were placed in the high-level group (4200-4900 word families) and the bottom 30 students in the low-level group (2100-3700 word families).

Results

The data were analyzed using PASW version18.0. Microsoft Excel 2007 was first used to enter and format the data files. The files were then transferred to SPSS for statistical analyses. Prior to the analyses, the VLT scores for pre- and post-tests were examined through various SPSS applications for accuracy of data entry, missing values, and fit of their distributions. The data were examined for univariate outliers and four outliers were deleted. To investigate the students' vocabulary size growth at the beginning and end of the semester, paired t-tests were analyzed. The results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1
Comparison of vocabulary size (N = 60)

		M	*SD*	SEM	*k*	α	Mean Diff.	*t*-value
High-level group (n =30)	Pretest	25.17	3.73	.68	30	.81	1.90	2.90**
	Posttest	27.07	2.96	.54				
Low-level group (n =30)	Pretest	18.70	3.01	.55	30	.70	3.53	6.19**
	Posttest	22.23	2.56	.47				

Notes: k = number of items; α= Cronbach's alpha; ** p < .01, two-tailed

After fourteen weeks of treatment, there was a significant increase (high-level group, t (29) = 2.90, p = .007, two-tailed; low-level group, t (29) = 6.19, p = < .000, two-tailed) in their receptive vocabulary size scores in both groups. Even though the data confirmed that the high-level group already had a mastery level of more than 80% and knew most of the academic words, yet it is still noteworthy that mean difference gains show that the low-level group (MD = 3.53) outperformed the high-level group (MD = 1.90). The mean score gains for the low-level group were close to double than that of the high-level group.

Conclusions and future directions

The results showed that vocabulary list learning did indeed seem to contribute to significant lexical growth no matter what initial vocabulary size the students have. While both groups showed a significant gain, the mean difference indicates that the low-level group gained more academic receptive vocabulary size than the high-level group. This study suggested that initial vocabulary level may not be the crucial factor for vocabulary acquisition through list learning.

Results have important implications for classroom practice. Unlike incidental vocabulary learning condition which requires minimum vocabulary size (e.g., Nation, 2009), teachers may not need to consider learners' level when introducing list learning in class. List learning is helpful regardless of their level.

As with all research, this study suffers from some limitations. First, the study assessed only certain aspects of the lexical knowledge, i.e. receptive vocabulary size. To get further valid and reliable results, similar research is needed to test different aspects of lexical knowledge. Second, this was a one semester study. It is important to see how much vocabulary students can actually retain over time. Future studies need to assess the long-term benefits of vocabulary list learning.

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VOCABULARY EDUCATION & RESEARCH BULLETIN

SIG News

We have some exciting SIG news for you. Above all things, mark your calendar for our 2nd symposium with great guest discussants. We also have events happening at the JALT national conference!

UPCOMING EVENT

2013 JALT Vocabulary & CUE SIG Symposium

Our inaugural SIG symposium last March was a great success, and the upcoming symposium looks to be just as good, if not better. Rainy season will be coming to an end, and the relaxed atmosphere of Fukuoka makes the symposium a much-needed remedy for a long semester of teaching. (Not to mention you get to whet your appetite with a day of vocabulary!)

Date: Saturday June 29, 2013
Place: Kyushu Sangyo University, Fukuoka
Featured discussants: **Paul Nation** and **Yo In'nami**

Call for Posters:
In order to ensure a strong audience, no sessions will run concurrent to poster presentations. Proposals for poster presentations will be accepted under two general categories:

1. Ongoing vocabulary related research
2. Vocabulary teaching and learning in practice

Submission:
Please e-mail 1) your name, 2) presentation title, and 3) a brief outline of your proposed topic not exceeding 300 words, to <jaltvocab[at]gmail.com> by **January 31st.**

Structured formats for poster presentation proposals:

Ongoing research format:
- Background
- Aims
- Methods
- Sample
- Preliminary results
- Preliminary conclusions
- Future directions

Teaching and learning in practice:
- Theoretical framework
- Sample population
- Procedure
- Preliminary results
- Preliminary conclusions
- Future directions

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Accepted poster presenters will be invited to submit written synopses of their presentation for publication in VERB 2(2), which is scheduled to be published in October 2013. A call for papers will be sent upon poster acceptance notification.
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Spreading the Good Word: Introducing the Vocabulary SIG

Last May the JALT Vocabulary SIG was lucky enough to have an opportunity to get the word out about the newly formed SIG thanks to our friends in West Tokyo JALT and Oxford University Press. Program Chair Andy Boon and the rest of the kind folks in West Tokyo invited the Vocab SIG to hold a mini-conference, titled "Spreading the Good Word: Introducing the Vocabulary SIG", at Tokyo Keizai university.

The day started off with a brief update on the state of the Vocab SIG by Membership Chair Mark Howarth. Things quickly got interesting with presentations by Rory Rosszell and Charlie Browne. Dr. Rosszell demonstrated ways of using Word Engine, a popular online vocabulary learning tool, to boost students' vocabulary knowledge, while Dr. Browne discussed ways of using authentic video in the classroom and the vocabulary needed for proficiency in listening.

Oxford University Press kindly provided lunch, and then three more presentations took place in the afternoon. Jeffrey Stewart demonstrated ways to create vocabulary word lists more effectively through the use of yes/no checklists. Charles Anderson presented his research on utilizing pictures as a way to learn vocabulary and the important role that feedback plays in the process. Rounding out the day, Dr. Robert Waring discussed his thoughts on developing a curriculum which addresses the receptive and productive vocabulary needs of learners in both form-focused and fluency-focused environments.

Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, so we hope to hold similar events in other parts of the country and continue to "Spread the Good Word".

-Mark Howarth
Membership Chair

Vocabulary SIG Poster Session

JALT NATIONAL

Attention:

There will be a room available for any Vocab SIG members who wish to present a poster on any prior, current or future vocabulary research at the JALT Annual Conference on Saturday, October 13th at 11:00 am (room 31).

This is also an additional opportunity for SIG members to promote a presentation they may be giving later at the conference, and network with other researchers interested in vocabulary acquisition and instruction. All SIG members presenting on vocabulary related topics at National are encouraged to bring printouts of their presentation slides to help generate interest and exchange ideas. Poster presenters from the spring 2012 symposium are especially encouraged to bring their work to share with a wider audience.

If you are interested, please email your name and poster title to: jaltvocab[at]gmail.com. People with posters that will be unable to attend are encouraged to contact us to make arrangements for their display.

Vocabulary SIG AGM

Date: Sunday, October 14th

Time: 11:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Location: Backstage 3, (Pres. No. 669)

Come join us to learn about what we are doing, our upcoming events and how you can be involved and participate further. Current and prospective members welcome.

See you in Hamamatsu!

Publications by Members

This is a list of publications in 2012 from our members (all that we are aware of anyway). Congratulations for getting published! If you don't see yours, please let us know so that we can include it in a future issue.

Barfield, A. (2012). Exploring learners' changing lexical landscapes and learner autonomy. In K. Irie & A. Stewart (Eds.), Proceedings of the JALT Learner Development SIG Realizing Autonomy Conference, [Special issue] *Learning Learning, 19*(2), 18-30. Retrieved 10 September 2012 from http://ld-sig.org/LL/19two/barfield.pdf

Farley, A. P., Ramonda, K., & Liu X. (2012). The concreteness effect and the bilingual lexicon: The impact of visual stimuli attachment on meaning recall of abstract L2 words. *Language Teaching Research*, Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/1362168812436910

Stewart, J., Batty, A. O., & Bovee, N. (2012). Comparing multidimensional and continuum models of vocabulary acquisition: An empirical examination of the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale. *TESOL Quarterly*, Advance online publication. doi:10.1002/tesq.35

Stubbe, R. (2012). Do pseudoword false alarm rates and overestimation rates in Yes/No vocabulary tests change with Japanese university students' English ability levels? *Language Testing*, Advance online publication. doi: 10.1177/0265532211433033

VERB Submission Information

Short Papers

- Short papers must not exceed 1000 words, excluding references and titles. They are expected to adhere to APA 6th edition formatting guidelines. All submissions will undergo peer review, and may require rewriting and resubmission for acceptance.

- The call for papers deadline is:

December 20th.

Member Publication & Event Info

- If you would like to get the word out about your recent publications, please inform us and we will list it in a future issue so that more people will be exposed to it.

- If you know of a vocabulary-related event, or if you are planning to organize an event, please let us know!

Please send your submission to: jaltvocabsig.verb[at]gmail.com
For more information, visit: http://jaltvocab.weebly.com