

Vocabulary Education & Research Bulletin

Summer 2021

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Hello and welcome to the Summer 2021 issue of VERB. In this issue, **Jeffrey Martin** looks at some interesting variation in the saliency of words within frequency bands. The deadline for our upcoming Winter 2021 issue will be September 15th, 2021, and we are looking forward to your submissions. Please see the call for papers on page 11 for details.

We are excited to announce that we intend to hold our 2021 Symposium in-person on December 4th, 2021, at Doshisha University in beautiful Kyoto. Be sure to have a look at the symposium poster on page 9 and the call for poster presentations on page 10. The rate of vaccinations seems to be picking up, so we are quite hopeful that everything will work out. After so many online conferences, it will be great to meet and talk face-to-face again... we have missed it dearly.

Stay cool this summer and see you all in-person in December!

Michael McGuire & Jenifer Larson-Hall, VERB editors

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Short Paper

Conflict within the Band: Influences on the Saliency of Words in Addition to Word Frequency

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Background

While L2 words that occur more frequently in communication tend to be more readily learned (Beglar, 2010; Laufer & Nation, 1999), vocabulary testing consistently shows variation of learner knowledge for words within frequency bands. As with meaning-recall, the learnability of L2 vocabulary form and usage can vary for reasons such as: (1) polysemy and homonymy (Nation, 2013), (2) connection between loanwords and their L2 equivalents (Daulton, 2008), and (3) the processing advantages of more concrete words (Crossley & Skalicky, 2019; Salsbury et al., 2011). By building awareness of the irregularities of learners' productive lexical knowledge as measured against a given word frequency list, researchers can better mind the multivariable nature of vocabulary learning. Further, language teachers can make predictions and better preparations for when they give vocabulary instruction.

Aims

The study utilized a written form-recall vocabulary level test sampled from a list of the 2500 most frequently occurring words derived from corpora data. The scores for individual items were analyzed in relation to general effects of word frequency. The aim was to answer the following research questions:

- In relation to what could be expected based on a word's frequency band,
- What aspects of a word can make it more learnable?
- What aspects of a word can make it less learnable?

Methods

Within an EFL learning context at a university in Japan, 105 Japanese L2 learners of English completed a written form-recall vocabulary level test online at VocabLevelTest.Org (McLean & Raine, 2019). When creating vocabulary level tests on this site, a user chooses between meaning-recall and form-recall. Other specifications are set, such as the frequency list, the range of word bands measured, and the sample size per band. The form-recall test presents carrier sentences, one by one, in English with the

target word missing. Test takers are prompted to enter the appropriate English word for each sentence. In place of the missing English word in the sentence, an equivalent Japanese word matched for part of speech is presented. An acceptable form-recall for the target must be congruent to part of speech and the requirements of spelling, grammar structure, and collocation. No hints, such as the first letter of a target word, are provided. This is to maintain the ecological validity of independent language production. In the case of some closely synonymous responses to target words (i.e., *large* versus *huge*), the test taker is prompted for the more accurate response. No multiple-choice options are presented, and users complete each test item within 30 seconds.

The form-recall test created for this study was of 150 test items ranging the most frequent 2500 words according to a SUBTLEX frequency list. This lemmatized word frequency list was compiled from a revised version of the SUBTLEX_{US} corpus (Brysbaert & New, 2009), which is composed of captions and subtitles from US television and movies. This version of the corpus was further cleaned, lemmatized, and tagged by Geoffrey Pinchbeck of Carleton University using the CLAWS4 tagger and the CLAWS7 tags (<http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/claws/>). The test was structured into 500-word bands of 30-word samples each. With five 500-word bands and 30 words sampled per band, the 150 test items were administered to participants and completed in under 75 minutes.

VocabLevelTest.Org was utilized for three reasons: the format helps ensure item independence by not featuring item clustering or multiple-choice options (McLean & Kramer, 2015), the format also avoids overestimation of lexical knowledge that can result from test taking strategies or guessing (McLean et al., 2015), and its interface for test takers allows for increased accuracy of vocabulary level estimates by making use of advancements in web-based technology to seamlessly and efficiently gather a larger sample size per frequency band than otherwise possible given the restricted timeframes of a typical language class period (see Stoeckel et al., 2020, about sample size per frequency band).

The idiosyncratic responses to test items were identified and further investigated through error analysis and by referring to corpus data. Attention was given to target words that were correctly answered by the participants to a degree much higher than the mean score of all the words in its frequency band and to target words that were consistently answered incorrectly despite their high frequency.

Results

As expected, the combined scores of the 105 participants showed that correct form recall for items was more likely for higher frequency words. Averaged by word band, a general step pattern was revealed (Figure 1). However, there was pronounced variation

among each 30-word sample. Table 1 displays word-band averages and their standard deviations plus four selected items that exemplify the word-to-word variation. These exemplars overlay the word-band averages in Figure 1 to give an idea of the degree of other influences on learnability that can outweigh the influence of word frequency.

Table 1
Results by Band plus Select Exemplar Items

	500-Word Band				
	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5
<i>M</i>	0.71	0.55	0.53	0.42	0.32
<i>SD</i>	0.25	0.35	0.31	0.28	0.26
Exemplar	while (37%)		bear (95%)		opera (88%) recover (6%)

Note: *k* = 30 (word sample per band); *N* = 105; Exemplar items presented with percentages of test takers answering correctly.

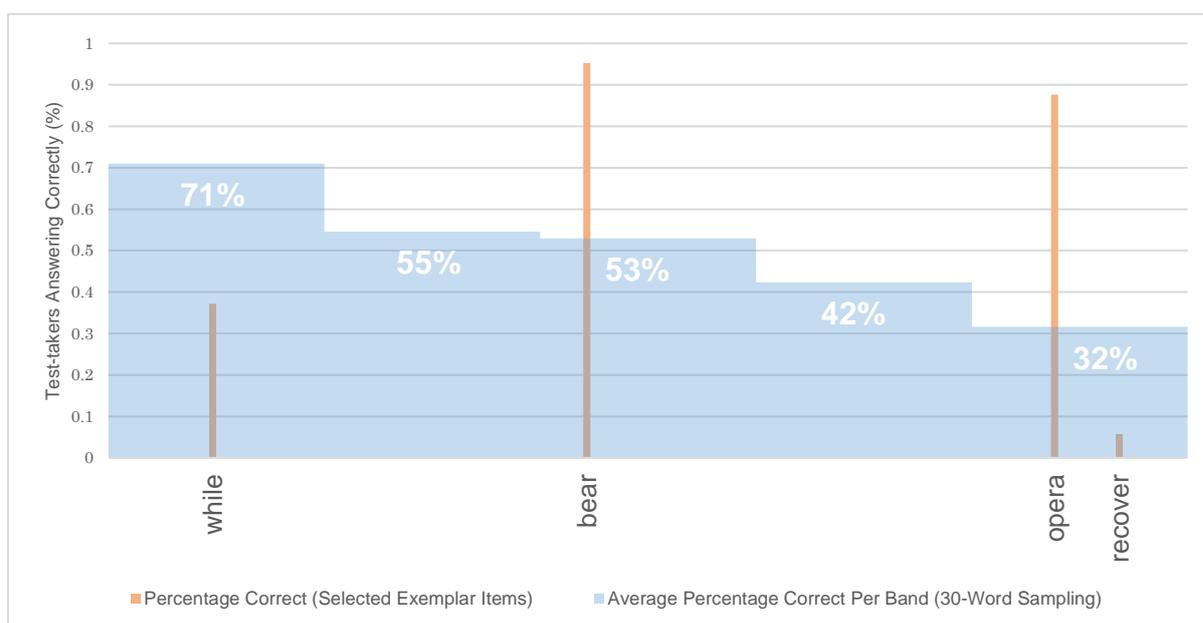


Figure 1. Average Lexical Knowledge by Frequency Band with Exemplar Items Highlighted

Two of the exemplars were recalled at much lower rates than that of their word frequency bands. From the band of most frequent words (recalled at 71%), the form of *while* was recalled by only 37% of the participants. Its carrier sentence was: *He came here その間 I slept.* The other responses of *between* (15%) and *during* (9%) are semantically

similar but are incorrect because these words can only appear before noun phrases. *While*, an adverb subordinator, allows for the clausal elaboration of *I slept*. Although *while* is a commonly occurring word, its appropriate use appears less salient. Another word that was recalled at a lower rate than its word band (32%) was *recover* at 6%. Its carrier sentence was *It takes time to 治る from a cold*. The most common response was *heal* (30%), but this answer is not preferred as a collocate to the words in the carrier sentence's prepositional phrase. Two searches on <https://www.english-corpora.org/> using the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) presented the most preferred collocations for *recover* and *heal*. The search “* from a cold” resulted in only *recover* as an appropriate collocate. The output from the search “heal PREP” overwhelmingly stemmed from *heal from* and was of more socially situated contexts that appear to be metaphorical extensions of the healing of bodily injuries. Such examples in context included *heal from a loss* and *heal from an economic downturn*. There were also literal uses such as *heal from a knee injury*. In line with usage-based theories (Ellis, 2002), *recover* is a less occurring word so perhaps extended exposure would make its preferred collocations more salient to the participants.

Two exemplars were recalled by participants at high rates compared to their frequency band averages. Garnering correct answers at twice the rate of its band (1001–1500-word frequency), 95% of the participants recalled *bear*. This target word was elicited with the following carrier sentence, *It is a クマ*, and its recall rate is arguably due to its concreteness of meaning. The animal is easily recognizable, and its semantic features are closely shared between the corresponding word in Japanese. Generally, concrete L2 words are more readily learned because they closely share semantic features across languages (Kaushanskaya & Rehtzigel, 2012). *Opera* was another highly recalled word even though it was within the least recalled frequency band. This was likely due to its equivalent use in Japanese as a loanword. 88% of the participants correctly recalled the word, carried in the sentence *I want to see the オペラ*. In fact, most of the errors occurred only due to misspellings such as *opela*. Daulton (2008) outlined that many loanwords in Japanese hold the same meaning as their L2 equivalents. オペラ and *opera* is one such pairing, but it is important to note that false equivalents are also present, such as タバコ (“*tabako*”) and *cigarette*. Japanese L2 learners of English can mistakenly think that *tobacco* is equivalent to *cigarette*. Cases like these may interfere with the cross-lingual advantages of processing more concrete words.

Conclusions

Marked word-specific variation found in this study indicated aspects that make a word more or less learnable. In this case, the focus was on the saliency of word production

compared to a SUBTLEX frequency list. *Recover* and *heal* were an example of semantic overlap which saw five times more students providing the mismatched collocate (*heal*, 30%) than the correct one (*recover*, 6%). *While* also illustrated the difficulty of differentiating similar words. Nearly all students recalled *opera*, which showed how the saliency of L1 loanwords can greatly outweigh the influence of word frequency. Lastly, the word *bear* was recalled by almost all participants, likely due to its semantic concreteness. Overall, the saliency of words and their correct usage cannot be overly assumed from predictions of a learner's encounters with them.

Future directions

The use of word lists has become a powerful tool in the assessment and learning of L2 vocabulary (Nation, 2013). However, lexical knowledge measured by frequency band not only varies by the learner but also by the word ranking structure of the list. In this regard, Pinchbeck's (2016) study with L1 language learners of English outlines two issues for L2 language learning. First, the definition of the word counting unit greatly changes the rankings and coverage within frequency bands of a word list.

Pinchbeck's study used conventional K-12 vocabulary testing to show that the age of L1 learners determined what word grouping structure correlated to learners' lexical knowledge (the *flemma*-based lists correlated for children under 11 years old and *word family* lists correlated for children aged under 17 years old). The multiple derivational word forms that may accompany the root word of an item on a *word family* list are not guaranteed to be known by learners from the start. The development of morphological competency is a progression, so choices about a word list's structure should be made to optimize its applicability to learner groups. Pinchbeck also reported how choice in corpora (including writing or speaking modalities, and genre) greatly affects a list's word ranking and correlation to learner test data to an extent largely not knowable *a priori*.

These findings applied to L2 learning open more questions when considering the influences of a learner's first language and length of L2 exposure. Such issues have been examined for meaning-recall but have been underexplored for form-recall. In contrast to a simple view of using frequency word lists, consideration should be given regarding a list's construction (by word counting unit and by choice of corpora) and the receptive and productive lexical knowledge of particular learners. Nonetheless, from word to word within a frequency band, surprising variation in the saliency of individual words can be expected alongside its general correlation to word frequency.

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SIG News: Upcoming Events



JALT
VOCAB SIG

2021 SYMPOSIUM

on Vocabulary & Learning

December 4th, 2021 9:30am - 5:00pm
@DOSHISHA UNIVERSITY, KYOTO
Imadegawa Campus · Shiseikan Building · Room 22
¥1500 General Admission · ¥1000 JALT Members

SESSION 1: Vocabulary Learning

Discussant
David Beglar
Temple University, Japan Campus

with speakers

Brandon Kramer | Kwansai Gakuin University
& **Tohru Matsuo** | Osaka Jogakuin University

Stuart Benson | The University of Aizu
& **Naheen Madarbakus** | Nagoya University of Commerce and Business

Michael McGuire | Doshisha University
& **Jenifer Larson-Hall** | Kitakyushu University

Atsushi Mizumoto | Kansai University

SESSION 2: Vocabulary Assessment

Discussant
Jenifer Larson-Hall
Kitakyushu University

with speakers

Jeff Stewart | Tokyo University of Science
& **Aaron Batty** | Keio University

Stuart McLean | Momoyama Gakuin University

Minkyung Kim | Nagoya University of Commerce and Business

Christopher Nicklin | Rikkyo University

Conference Organizer: Michael McGuire

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2021 JALT Vocabulary SIG Symposium

Call for Poster Presentations

Doshisha University, Imadegawa Campus, Shiseikan Room 22, Kyoto
December 4th, 2021

In order to ensure a strong audience, no symposium 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 (approximately 300 words), to <jaltvocab[at]gmail.com>

Deadline: Thursday, September 30, 2021

Abstracts should follow one of the two following formats:

Ongoing research format:

- Background
- Aims
- Methods
- Preliminary results
- Preliminary conclusions
- Future directions

Teaching and learning format

- Theoretical framework
- Procedure
- Preliminary results
- Preliminary conclusions
- Future directions

Accepted poster presenters will be invited to submit written, extended synopses of their presentation for publication (500 – 1500 words) in an upcoming issue of VERB.

VERB Call for Papers

The VERB welcomes submissions related to vocabulary research and education.

Short papers are peer reviewed and may require rewriting and resubmission for acceptance. They must not exceed 1500 words, excluding references, tables, and titles. Short papers fall into the categories of completed research, ongoing research, and teaching and learning in practice.

Other submissions encouraged are classroom activities related to vocabulary, book reviews, opinion pieces, and event reports and commentary. All submissions are expected to adhere to APA 7th edition formatting guidelines.

Deadline for next issue: **September 15, 2021**

For submissions and all correspondence: <jaltvocabsig.verb@gmail.com>

Latest information: <https://jaltvocab.weebly.com/publications.html>

The following are guidelines for short paper submissions (please include these sections):

Completed research:	Ongoing research:	Teaching and learning in practice:
* Background	* Background	* Theoretical framework
* Aims	* Aims	* Teaching context
* Methods	* Methods	* Procedure
* Results	* Sample	* (Preliminary) Results
* Conclusions	* (Preliminary) Results	* (Preliminary) Conclusions
* Future directions	* (Preliminary) Conclusions	* Future directions
	* Future directions	

**If you are thinking about submitting, but your article doesn't fit into one of the above categories, please email us at the above address and let us know what you would like to submit, and we can work it out.

***Vocabulary Learning & Instruction* Call for Papers**

The Vocabulary SIG's *Vocabulary Learning and Instruction* (VLI) journal is calling for submissions for an upcoming issue. Submissions will be published online upon acceptance and combined into an issue later in the year.

VLI accepts long-form research papers (2000-7000 words) and brief reports, summaries, and commentaries (2000-3000 words) related to vocabulary acquisition, pedagogy, assessment, and lexical networks.

As an open journal, content is indexed on Google Scholar and made freely available on the internet without paywalls. Authors are free to also make their work available on sites such as academia.edu and ResearchGate.

All submissions are subject to a 2-step peer-review process:

A) Editors review manuscripts to ensure basic requirements are met, and that the work is of sufficient quality to merit external review. This process typically takes 1-2 weeks, at which point authors are informed of the outcome.

B) Submissions which meet these requirements are sent out for blind peer review by 2-3 experts in the field. This process takes approximately 1-2 months. Following external review, authors are sent copies of external reviewers' comments and notified of decisions (accept, accept pending changes, revise, and resubmit, or reject).

Please see <http://vli-journal.org/submissions.html> for details

The VERB salutes the cooperation and hard work of our reviewers:

VERB Reviewers: Phil Bennett, Thuy Bui, David Coulson, Tomoko Ishii, Magda Kitano, Brandon Kramer, Jenifer Larson-Hall, Mimi Masson, Stuart McClean, Michael McGuire, Atsushi Mizumoto, Ian Munby, John Racine, James Rogers, Rachel Ruegg, Jeff Stewart, Raymond Stubbe, and Yuka Yamamoto.