Welcome to the Winter 2023 issue of VERB. In this issue, we present three articles that contribute valuable insights to the field of vocabulary research.

The first article, "Exploring the use of vocabulary notebooks at a private senior high school in Japan" by **Shane J.C Cleary**, investigates how vocabulary notebooks can aid students' performance in English proficiency exams. This study offers practical findings on the impact of structured vocabulary learning in a high school setting.

Our second article, "Japanese high school student's knowledge of the most frequent words of English" by **Seamus Johnston**, examines the alignment of vocabulary wordbooks with the New General Service List and its effect on students' lexical knowledge. This research provides a closer look at the relationship between educational materials and student vocabulary proficiency.

In "Words that sing: An exploration of narrative song lyrics", **Craig B. Lucas** explores the lexical characteristics of narrative folk and country songs. The study assesses the suitability of these songs as learning tools for CEFR B1 level language learners, adding a creative dimension to vocabulary teaching methods.

We are also pleased to reflect on the successful 2023 Vocabulary Symposium at Osaka Jogakuin University in October. The event featured a range of presentations on classroom vocabulary learning and formulaic expressions. We thank all participants for their engaging presentations and discussions. Please see the SIG News section for a more detailed summary.

Thank you to our contributors, reviewers, and readers for your ongoing support and dedication to vocabulary studies. We hope the articles in this issue will be a valuable addition to your research and practice.

Michael McGuire & Jenifer Larson-Hall, VERB editors

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About VERB:

The Vocabulary Education and Research Bulletin (VERB) is a biannual publication focusing on short research articles relating to the role of vocabulary in second language learning. VERB is produced by the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) Vocabulary Special Interest Group (SIG).

The JALT Vocabulary SIG provides a venue for discussion and research into second language vocabulary acquisition and assessment, particularly as they pertain to language education in Japan.

VERB salutes the cooperation and hard work of our reviewers:

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Exploring the use of vocabulary notebooks at a private senior high school in Japan

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Background

With the rise in popularity of the lexical approach in the early 1990s, many applied linguists advocated for more deliberate learning and recording of vocabulary (Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995; Lewis, 1997; Nation, 2001; Thornbury, 2002). They assert that recording lexical items into some kind of vocabulary notebook should be promoted as that they can contribute to vocabulary learning and wider language acquisition. Experts generally agree that the keeping of vocabulary notebooks requires classroom training and that notebook entries should contain information such as the word, meaning, collocations, example sentences, L1 translation, synonyms and antonyms (McCarthy & O'Dell, 1994; Schmitt, & Schmitt, 1995).

In terms of published studies describing the practical use of vocabulary notebooks in real teaching contexts, Fowle's (2002) research at a secondary school in Thailand was very positive. He found that using vocabulary notebooks allowed his students to improve their lexical competence and promoted autonomous modes of learning. McCrostie's (2007) study of using vocabulary notebooks at a Japanese university, however, faced many problems. McCrostie found that his students recorded lexical items that were either too difficult or irrelevant for their course. He argued that teachers should provide students with a list of words within a student's proficiency bracket.

In my teaching context of teaching at a senior high school in Japan, success on English proficiency exams is a high priority. The Eiken proficiency exams, for instance, are recognized for course credit and admission at over 2,500 high schools, colleges and universities throughout Japan (Eiken, 2021). The headteacher of this school has stated that he wants as many students as possible passing the Eiken grade 3 exam.

With this objective in mind, I wanted to conduct research to see if vocabulary notebooks could be a good tool for my students to improve their chances on their exams. Numerous studies suggest that the very banding of English language proficiency tests is often closely corresponded to the difficulty and number of vocabulary items (Gu & Johnson, 1996; Meara & Milton, 2003; Milton & Alexiou, 2009). Considering this, it seems intuitive that if a learner systematically focused on increasing their vocabulary knowledge, then they should naturally have a higher chance of success on proficiency exams.

Aims

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of vocabulary notebooks at a Japanese senior high school to see whether my students enjoyed using them and if they perceived that using them attributed to their performance on a proficiency exam. I was also open to exploring and discovering other issues that may arise.
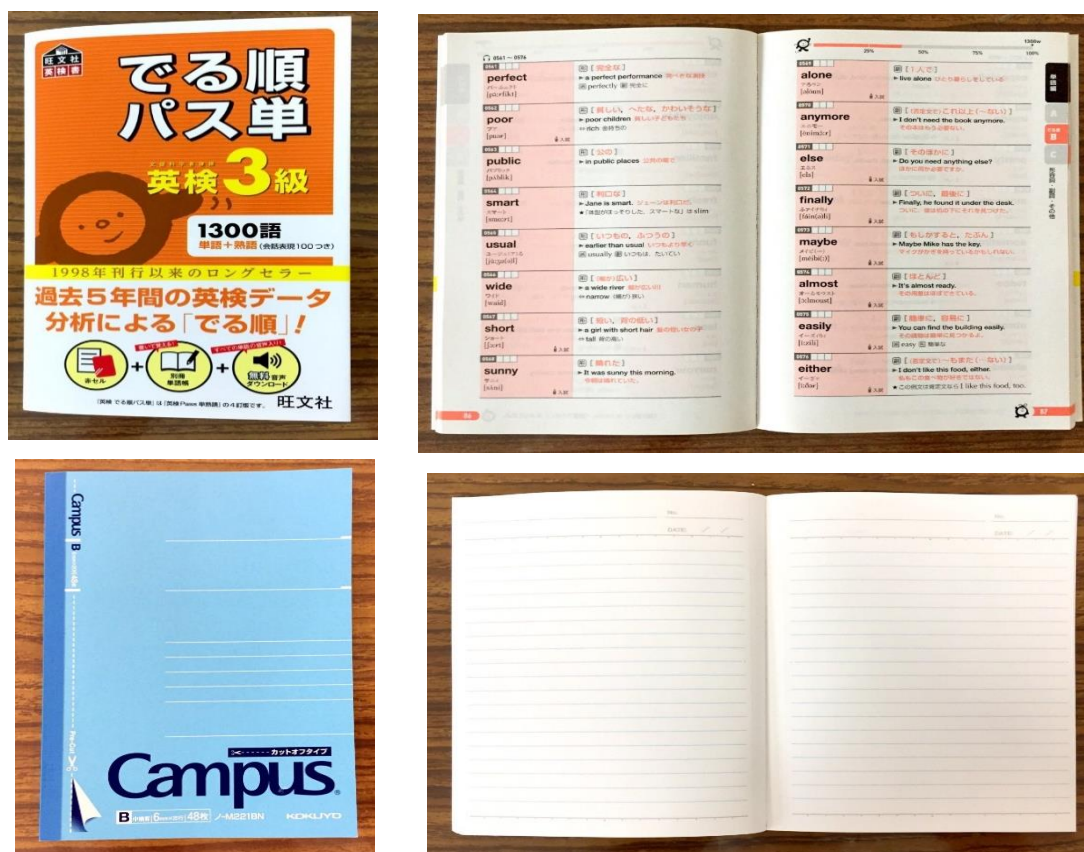

Figure 1. A sample image of a vocabulary builder book and an A6 notebook.

Methods

My research included a sample of 14 students from three different classes. I taught my vocabulary notebook procedure to all of the students in all three classes, but I only collected data from the students who had provided me with parental permission to participate.

Before training my students in the vocabulary notebook procedure, I gave them a short vocabulary and grammar multiple-choice test, taken from a past paper of the Eiken exam for their respective levels. After having the students use the vocabulary notebooks for five weeks, I had them complete the exact same test for a second time. I wanted to ask

the students after the second test if they felt that using the vocabulary notebooks had affected their performance on the test.

For the vocabulary notebook procedure, all of the students were given a vocabulary builder book for their respective level of the Eiken exam and an A6 notebook as shown in Figure 1. Table 1 gives an outline of the procedure.

Table 1

The vocabulary notebook procedure

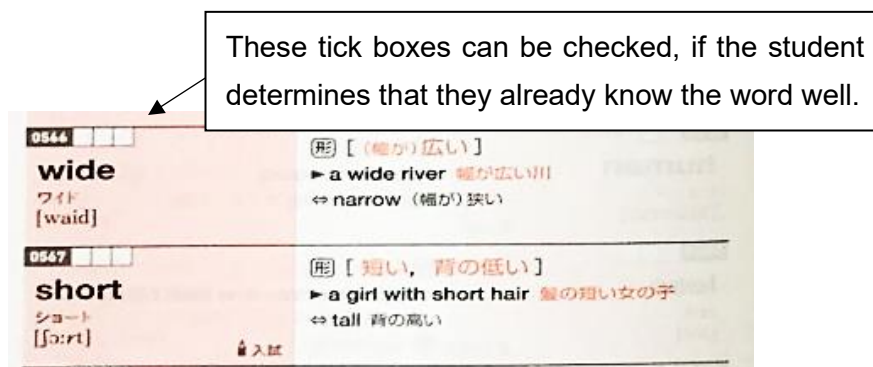| |
|---|
| **Step 1:** The teacher distributes an Eiken vocabulary builder book that is at the appropriate Eiken grade for the students' respective levels and a A6 sized notebook to the students. |
| **Step 2:** The teacher informs the students that they are going to read through the words in the book, one-by-one, in word order from the beginning of the book to the end of the book. |
| **Step 3:** The teacher instructs the students that if they read a word that they already know, then they can write a little tick in the box provided and move on to the next word (Figure 2). If the word is unknown or semi-known to the student, then the student should write an entry of that word into their A6 sized notebooks (Figure 3). |
| **Step 4:** In the notebooks, the student should write the word in English on the left-hand side of the page and on the right-hand side of the page, they should write the example sentence that is written in the vocabulary builder book (Figure 3). |
| **Step 5:** The students should be encouraged to write additional information such as the L1 translation, collocations, pronunciation form, antonyms, synonyms, and the type of word. Students are free to include or omit any additional information depending on their preference. |
| **Step 6:** Once the student has recorded the word, they can then move on to the next word in the vocabulary builder book. The student continues to carefully fill their A6 sized notebook until they have read through all of the words in the vocabulary builder book. |
| **Step 7:** The teacher should encourage students to experiment with their own recording styles. For example, students can record synonyms, antonyms, collocation lists and even draw pictures or tables. |

These tick boxes can be checked, if the student determines that they already know the word well.

Figure 2. Words as displayed in the vocabulary builder book

Information such as L1 translation, pronunciation form, and common antonyms can be recorded.
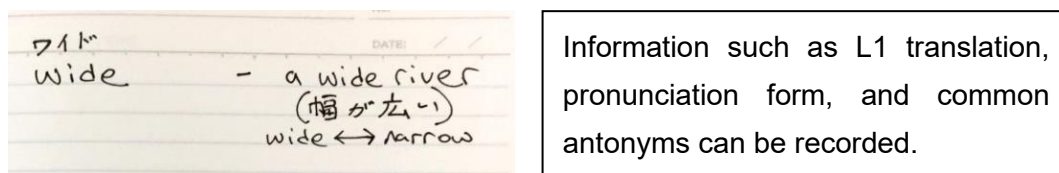
Figure 3. A typical entry of a word in the A6 sized vocabulary notebook

After five weeks, questionnaires were collected asking the sampled students about whether or not they:

-enjoyed using this procedure, and

-felt that using this procedure had contributed to their test performance.

The questionnaires included a comments section, and both group and one-to-one interviews were also conducted to allow students to expand on their answers from the questionnaires. Finally, vocabulary notebook entries from the students' notebooks were analyzed to see how exactly the students were creating them.

Results

After five weeks of using the vocabulary notebooks, Figure 4 shows that all of the students of the sample stated that they enjoyed using the vocabulary notebook procedure to some extent.

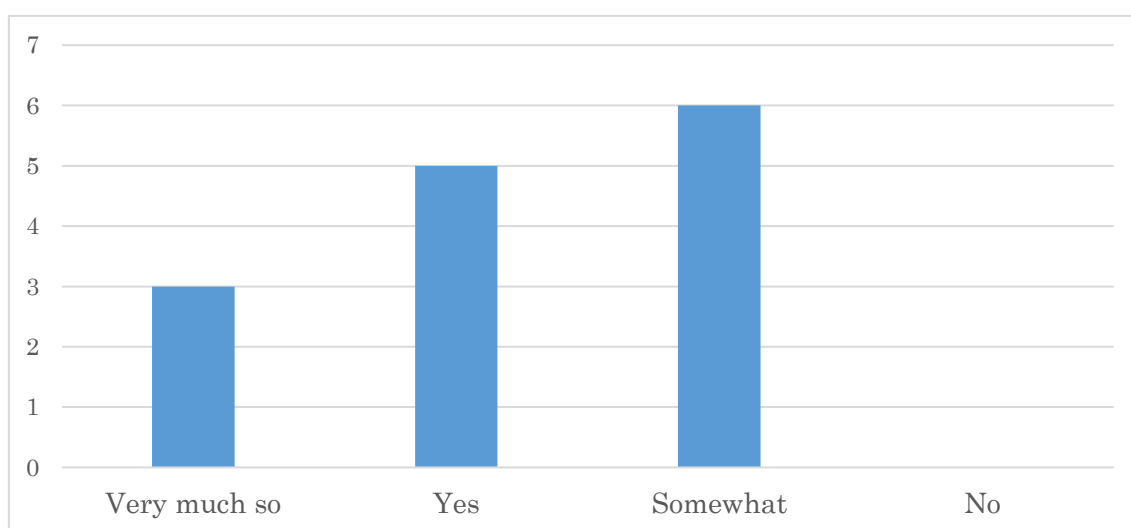*Figure 4.* Students' enjoyment using the vocabulary notebooks

When asked in the interviews why they enjoyed using the vocabulary notebooks, Table 2 shows that many of the students stated that they enjoyed learning new words and found the notebooks practical to use, relaxing and motivating.

Table 2

Reasons for enjoying using vocabulary notebooks

Reasons	Number of mentions
Enjoyed learning new words and phrases	10
Practical, easy to review words quickly	3
It was relaxing / motivating to use	3
It improved English ability	1

Student 6 stated during the interviews, "I thought it was interesting when I learned new phrases that I did not know before." From reviewing the written comments, Student 4 wrote "the words, meanings and example phrases in the vocabulary notebook made it easier to learn." Similarly, Student 12 wrote "I found out how to use the words."

Student 13 made a good point in the interviews. He expressed that he felt that systematically learning new words in order allowed him to fill in the gaps in his knowledge as there is, basically, a finite number of vocabulary items for their needs of passing the Eiken grade 3 exam. He wrote "If I continue to keep writing the words that I don't know, eventually I will know most of the words on the test … The more that I use the vocabulary notebook, the number of words that I don't know (in the vocabulary builder book) will become fewer."

When asked if there was anything about the procedure that they did not enjoy, Table 3 shows that most students did not provide many answers. Two of the students did, however, make a comment about how this process was a little overwhelming. During the interviews, Student 11 said, "There are many words that I have to remember, it makes me feel over-whelmed." They also mentioned a preference for more communicative activities and pair work.

Table 3

Reasons for not enjoying vocabulary notebooks

Reasons	Number of mentions
Ineligible answer / no reason given	12
Overwhelming / too many words	2

For the second question, Figure 5 shows that all of the students said that they believed that this procedure positively contributed, to some extent, to their test performance.
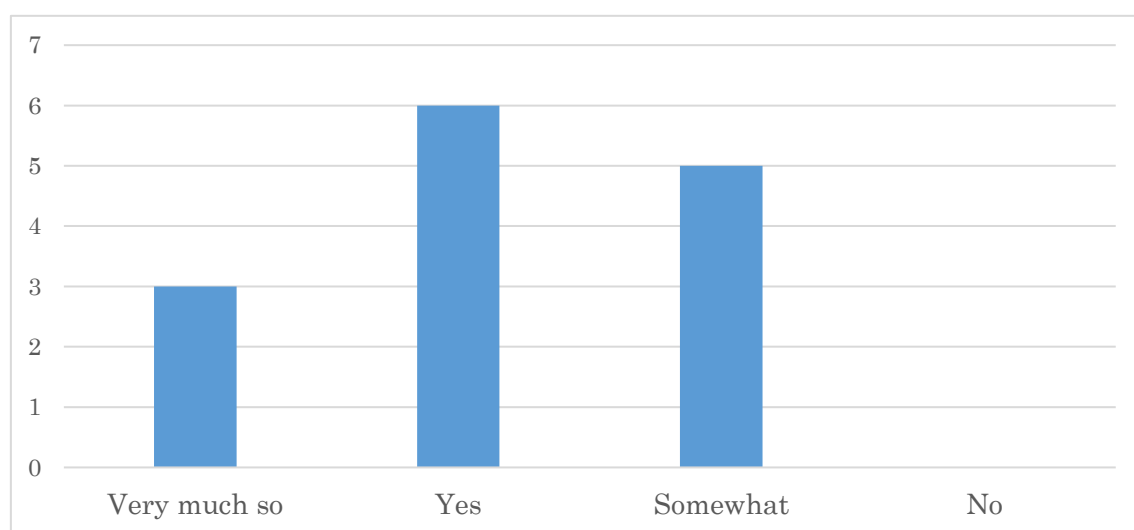

Figure 5. Vocabulary notebooks contributing to test performance

When asked how it helped them on the tests, Table 4 shows that the most common answer was that of being able to understand more of the words that appeared on the test.

Table 4

Reasons for how vocabulary notebooks attributed to test performance

Reasons	Number of mentions
Could better understand words on the test	12
Could better understand the reading questions	1
Ineligible answer / no answer given	1

From reviewing the written comments, Student 5 wrote "From using my vocabulary notebook, I could understand words that I previously did not know and answer them correctly when they appeared in the test.". Similarly, Student 8 wrote "I was able to answer questions on the test by remembering the meaning and example phrases from the vocabulary notebooks." When asked if there were any other learning methods that they found helpful for the proficiency tests, there were not many comments. Table 5, however, shows that some students said that they wanted more time to use the vocabulary notebooks.

Table 5

Other methods that attributed to test performance

Reasons	Number of mentions
Ineligible answer / no answer given	11
Wanted more time to use vocabulary notebooks	2
Preference for learning phrases	1

During the interviews, Student 13 elaborated "I have only been using the vocabulary notebook for a short time and it has helped me, I am thinking of making a habit of using it and see if it helps me more in the future". This statement suggests this student may have needed more time to better judge the efficacy of the procedure, but that he can see the potential in its use.

Finally, from analyzing the notebooks of the students, I found that the recorded vocabulary entries varied in terms of style and level of comprehensiveness. Student 5's notes were very comprehensive and well presented. Figure 6 shows that she included information such as the meaning of the word, antonyms, the type of word used, example phrases and L1 translated example phrases.

Figure 6. Student 5's notes

Figure 7. Student 1's notes

Student 1's notes were a little simpler. He used a color code by writing the main word in blue, but also wrote the pronunciation form of the words in katakana and an example phrase.

Student 12 made many entries per page. Figure 8 shows that he mostly just wrote the word and the example phrase.
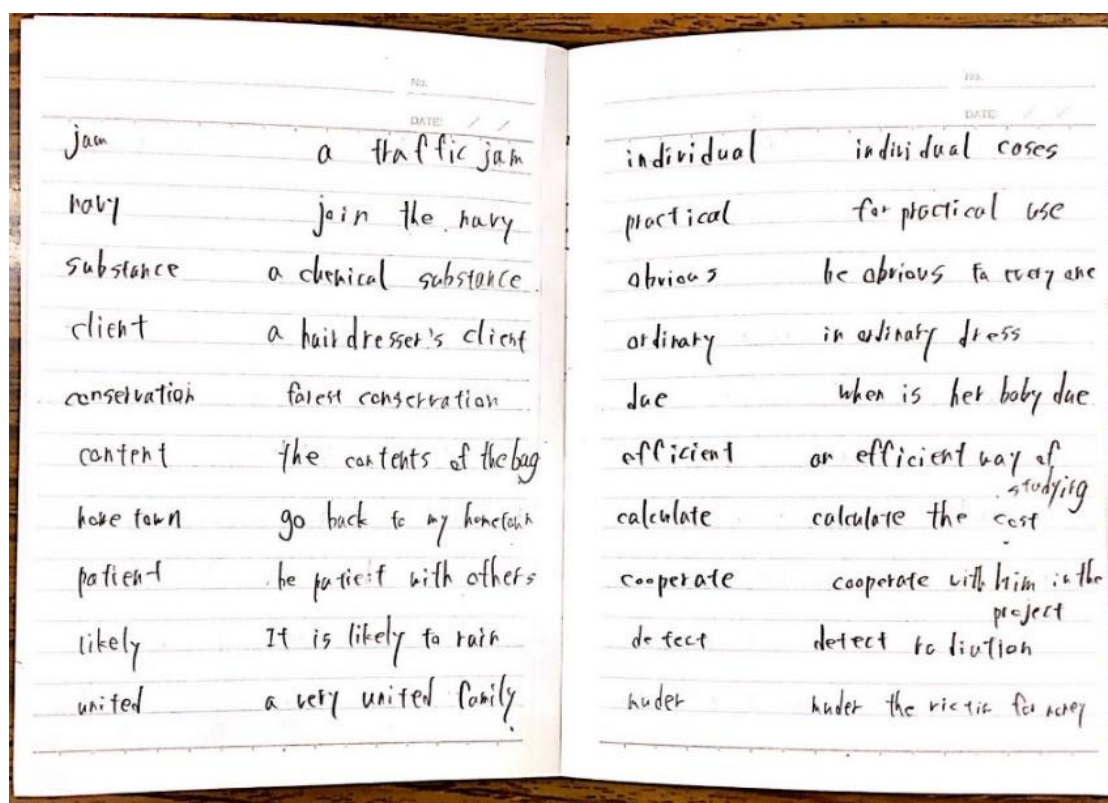
Figure 8. Student 12's notes

This implies that the students were making their own independent decisions about what to include when making entries. This is reminiscent to what Fowle (2002) stated in his study about vocabulary notebooks promoting autonomous modes of learning.

Conclusions

This study demonstrated that students perceived using vocabulary notebooks to be enjoyable and valuable to improving their performance on English proficiency exams. There was also evidence of this procedure promoting autonomous modes of learning which has been observed in similar studies.

Future Directions

While this research was mostly positive, there was also some evidence of limitations, as some students stated it was overwhelming at times and mentioned a preference for pair work. Accordingly, perhaps using vocabulary notebooks as pairs can be explored in future research. It may also be a good idea to measure vocabulary test gains over time after using the vocabulary notebooks to obtain data on actual test achievement. A more longitudinal study with a larger sample would make the data more generalizable and representative of this teaching context.

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Japanese high school student's knowledge of the most frequent words of English

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Background

Empirical studies over the past circa 35 years have revealed how vocabulary knowledge is a strong indicator of general language mastery (Meara & Buxton, 1987; Milton, Wade, & Hopkins, 2010; Stæhr, 2008). Given the amount of vocabulary extant in the English language, this sounds like bad news for English language learners. Fortunately, corpus linguists have created frequency lists of the most common English words, discovering that over 90% of the tokens a person will ever encounter are the same 2,500–3,000 words. The field of vocabulary frequency lists has branched out beyond general collections of words, to lists compiled from more specific datasets such as Coxhead's (2000) and Gardner and Davies' (2013) academic word lists.

Japanese junior high school and university students' command of the most common words of English has been found to be lacking (Hashimoto et al., 2015; Ruegg, 2007). The study presented in this paper aims to determine if and why the same is true for Japanese high school students. Browne et al.'s (2013) New General Service List (NGSL), which provides 2809 words that cover about 92% of most general English texts, and Stoeckel and Bennett's (2015) New General Service List Test (NGSLT) were used to inform this study, which examines the coverage of the NGSL by three wordbooks used in Japanese classrooms and how the vocabulary profile of those books affects the vocabulary profile of a sample of Japanese high school students.

Participants, Materials, and Methods

This study took place in a Japanese high school involving 84 first-year students, 80 second-year students, and 69 third-year students. The second- and third-year students were part of a school initiative that offered more English classes per week than usual. As the first-year students had no equivalent classes, the 84 highest performing students on the NGSLT were chosen for comparison.

The students used three different wordbooks. The first-year students used *Chunk Standard* (Tono, 2015). The second and third-year students used *Target 1200* (Muroi et al., 2011) during first year of high school and *Target 1900* (Miyakawa & Usami, 2011) from second year onwards. Each book covered varying amounts of the vocabulary found in the NGSL. To determine how many words in the wordbooks were represented in each

frequency band of the NGSLT, Compare Two Lists (CTL) was used. CTL (http://barc.wi.mit.edu/tools/compare/) allows the user to input any two wordlists and determine what words are unique to each list and what words are common to both.

The NGSLT was used to examine the students' understanding of the words present in the NGSL. The test contains 100 questions divided into five sets of 20. Each set represents a frequency band informed by the NGSL, where band one contains the highest frequency words in the list and band five the lowest (Stoeckel & Bennett, 2015). A score of less than 80 per cent (16 out of 20) was established as failure to reach mastery on any one frequency band (Hashimoto et al., 2015; Stoeckel & Bennett, 2015) indicating a gap in a student's knowledge. The students were given 40 minutes to complete the monolingual (all English) paper version of the NGSLT (Form A), which can be accessed at https://unii.academia.edu/TimStoeckel. The students were given no introduction to the test other than a brief explanation five minutes before starting. Permission was granted from the school and the students to administer the NGSLT.

Results

Assessment of Wordbook Coverage

Table 1 shows the coverage provided for each band of the NGSL by *Chunk Standard*, *Target 1200* and a combination of *Target 1200* and *Target 1900*. This latter combination is justified by the third-year students having used both books for a longer time than the second-year students, who had more recently begun using *Target 1900*. The number and percentage of words in each frequency band is shown.

Table 1

Coverage of the NGSL provided by the wordbooks

	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Overall
Chunk standard	139 (25%)	228 (41%)	205 (37%)	160 (29%)	129 (23%)	861 (31%)
Target 1200	328 (59%)	325 (58%)	223 (40%)	145 (29%)	114 (20%)	1144 (41%)
Target 1200+1900	347 (62%)	398 (71%)	355 (63%)	328 (58%)	290 (52%)	1739 (62%)

Chunk Standard showed little coverage for the first frequency band, peaking on the second frequency band before steadily declining. In comparison to the second- and third-year students, the first-year students therefore had little explicit coverage of the most

frequent c. 560 words and equal or less explicit coverage of any of the frequency bands other than band five, where they had three per cent more coverage than the second-year students had during their first high school year.

In comparison to *Chunk Standard, Target 1200* provided more coverage of the first two bands of the NGSLT before a sharp decrease for the remaining bands. When *Target 1200* was combined with *Target 1900*, it produced substantially more coverage of bands two to five. These data suggest that, if students' vocabulary knowledge is not appropriately cultivated, gaps will appear in their knowledge of the most common words of English.

Assessment of Student Test Scores

Table 2 shows the average test results for each year group. Each band refers to those tested by the NGSLT. The table shows that, generally, there were gaps in the student's knowledge on each frequency band, leading to a low overall score for each year group.

Table 2

Average scores on the NGSLT for each year group

	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Total
First Year	11.88 (60%)	8.24 (41%)	9.76 (49%)	8.95 (45%)	7.14 (36%)	46.07 (46%)
Second Year	14.63 (73%)	11.55 (58%)	10.75 (54%)	9.85 (49%)	7.34 (37%)	54.11 (54%)
Third Year	14.93 (75%)	12.70 (63%)	11.90 (60%)	11.49 (57%)	8.52 (42%)	59.54 (60%)

The first-year class returned the lowest scores for each band and overall, and the third-year class the highest. The gap between the first- and second-year students was substantial, and the gap between the second- and third-year students was smaller, following the pattern suggested by the coverage of their wordbooks. The second- and third-year NGSLT results followed the content of the students' wordbooks more closely than those of the first-year students.

Discussion

Regarding the vocabulary profile of the wordbooks, neither *Chunk Standard*, *Target 1200*, *Target 1900*, nor the latter two combined covered enough of any frequency

band to provide the students with mastery. Although some students outperformed what was covered by the wordbooks, likely due to influences external to the wordbooks, this was still insufficient for most students to achieve mastery on any of the five frequency bands. Fewer than half of the students mastered one or more frequency bands, and most of those did not achieve mastery beyond the first frequency band.

When the focus of the wordbooks shifted towards relatively lower-frequency words, as with *Target 1900*, improvement in knowledge of higher-frequency words became negligible, as evidenced by the performance of the second- and third-year students. Conversely, improvement of the knowledge of the relatively lower-frequency words between the same two groups of students was clearer, matching the coverage of the two *Target* books.

The opposite trend can be seen when comparing the performances of the first- and second-year students. There was little difference in their knowledge of bands four and five (reflecting the content difference between *Chunk Standard* and *Target 1200*). However, *Target 1200* covered much more of those words found in the first two frequency bands, and the second-year students duly scored better on these.

There appears to be a need for more time spent studying the most frequent words, as evidenced by gaps in the students' knowledge of each frequency band. However, the average score on the first frequency band may be an unfair reflection as it includes many function words that are not sampled in NGSLT. Although, on average, a steady downward curve representing knowledge from high-frequency to the lower-frequency words was seen, individually, more than half of the students' scores fluctuated from band to band suggesting more revision was necessary. Some students had even mastered a particular frequency band but failed to master those preceding it (individual results can be seen in Appendices A, B, and C). One possible cause for this could be guessing, whether blind or using construct-irrelevant test strategies. It is therefore possible that the students' results exaggerate how much of the NGSL the really know, demonstrating another limitation of this study.

Such knowledge gaps can affect even the highest-performing students, as seen in the first-year group, where the student with the highest score did not achieve mastery of any individual frequency band (Appendix A). Unfortunately, this typical of many Japanese students (Browne & Culligan, 2008; McLean, Hogg, & Kramer, 2014).

Conclusion

According to research, explicit vocabulary study appears to correspond to vocabulary acquisition. The students' vocabulary profiles revealed that many of them struggled to master any of the frequency bands and revealed gaps in their knowledge of

the NGSL. These results suggested that students were being exposed to increasingly infrequent words before they had sufficiently learned those of higher frequency, despite the importance of reviewing previously learned vocabulary for retention (Laufer et al., 2005). Students' failure to master these words may result from teachers feeling compelled to rush the students through material due to pressure applied by proficiency tests and entrance exams amongst other influences. However, the students would be better served by continually reviewing the most frequent words of English as the receptive coverage of most of what they encounter would be improved, including proficiency tests such as the TOEIC (Browne, Culligan, & Phillips, 2103) and the Center Test for entering the Japanese university system (MacDonald, 2019). Further studies on the causes and effects of the speed at which vocabulary is covered represent an interesting avenue for research.

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Appendix A

This table shows the NGSLT scores for each individual student in the first-year. The student numbers on the left were randomly allocated. The class averages can be found at the bottom of the table.

Student Number	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Total
1	11	10	8	9	9	47
2	15	9	11	8	9	52
3	10	10	7	9	7	43
4	11	8	13	11	8	51
5	14	10	8	9	5	46
6	12	11	10	10	11	54
7	12	10	9	5	5	41
8	12	7	7	7	6	39
9	14	13	10	7	6	50
10	15	8	12	6	7	48
11	14	10	11	8	7	50
12	13	10	10	11	7	51
13	9	8	9	9	5	40
14	10	6	10	8	6	40
15	10	7	12	8	6	51
16	11	9	7	9	7	43
17	11	8	11	9	8	47
18	14	12	12	8	9	55
19	15	9	10	7	5	46
20	11	5	11	7	7	41
21	8	12	13	10	8	51
22	13	6	10	7	6	42
23	16	11	9	11	9	56
24	12	10	10	12	10	54
25	16	11	11	11	10	59
26	15	9	9	9	9	51
27	14	7	12	6	6	45
28	13	6	7	12	9	47
29	13	9	11	9	6	48

Student Number	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Total
30	16	11	10	9	5	51
31	14	7	8	9	6	44
32	15	8	6	4	7	40
33	16	9	10	7	4	46
34	14	9	11	11	10	55
35	14	8	11	12	8	53
36	14	8	14	11	9	56
37	14	7	12	6	6	45
38	15	14	11	10	11	61
39	10	7	9	10	4	40
40	10	6	10	11	7	44
41	9	10	9	7	7	42
42	15	9	12	13	9	58
43	8	9	10	11	5	43
44	14	9	10	11	8	52
45	13	8	10	12	8	51
46	14	7	7	12	7	47
47	9	5	9	12	6	41
48	8	7	12	11	9	47
49	11	6	11	7	7	42
50	7	4	10	10	9	40
51	12	8	8	11	6	45
52	9	6	9	6	9	39
53	9	9	8	10	8	44
54	11	7	12	7	5	42
55	13	7	8	8	5	41
56	10	8	9	8	6	41
57	12	5	9	8	5	39
58	11	6	10	7	8	42
59	13	7	8	9	5	42
60	12	9	10	9	8	48
61	9	8	10	10	8	45
62	15	9	13	10	10	57

Student Number	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Total
63	12	10	11	9	4	46
64	8	6	12	9	5	40
65	11	7	10	9	6	43
66	10	6	8	11	4	39
67	6	9	10	5	9	39
68	12	4	8	10	5	39
69	10	5	10	5	9	39
70	10	3	8	10	8	39
71	9	7	11	8	9	44
72	10	10	7	8	6	41
73	12	12	9	11	8	52
74	16	8	7	6	2	39
75	12	5	9	7	9	42
76	9	8	8	8	7	40
77	8	7	7	9	10	41
78	15	12	10	11	9	57
79	14	7	13	9	7	50
80	9	7	10	12	5	43
81	9	10	10	10	5	44
82	14	10	9	4	6	43
83	8	10	7	10	8	43
84	14	11	10	10	11	56
Class Average	11.88	8.24	9.76	8.95	7.14	46.07

Appendix B

This table shows the NGSLT scores for each individual student in the second-year. The student numbers on the left were randomly allocated. The class averages can be found at the bottom of the table.

Student Number	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Total
1	17	12	13	13	11	66
2	16	18	13	10	8	65
3	13	11	8	8	9	49
4	15	8	12	8	9	52
5	10	7	10	11	9	47
6	12	16	16	14	7	65
7	9	6	11	4	6	36
8	15	14	12	7	7	55
9	13	14	13	12	10	62
10	16	9	9	11	8	53
11	16	11	14	11	7	59
12	11	9	5	11	8	44
13	12	10	9	7	8	46
14	17	16	16	13	11	73
15	14	8	9	13	5	49
16	13	9	10	10	6	48
17	17	15	14	11	8	65
18	17	13	8	9	9	56
19	14	8	8	8	3	41
20	11	8	4	6	5	34
21	13	5	6	7	2	33
22	16	11	12	10	6	55
23	18	12	13	12	8	63
24	17	15	12	10	10	64
25	16	13	11	13	10	63
26	18	11	15	14	9	67
27	11	10	9	6	3	39
28	16	12	13	10	4	55
29	16	9	13	12	8	58

Student Number	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Total
30	10	12	8	7	9	46
31	13	9	12	9	5	48
32	13	9	9	6	5	42
33	18	15	13	12	7	65
34	17	11	13	11	6	58
35	11	7	10	10	5	43
36	16	12	11	7	6	52
37	10	3	3	3	0	19
38	14	11	6	10	5	46
39	16	8	8	8	6	46
40	17	13	11	10	7	58
41	12	6	5	6	7	36
42	13	14	9	14	7	57
43	4	8	4	4	1	21
44	18	18	12	13	12	73
45	14	8	11	12	6	51
46	16	11	12	11	5	55
47	18	16	9	10	4	57
48	17	10	10	7	9	53
49	16	10	10	9	4	49
50	17	18	12	12	9	68
51	17	15	13	11	11	67
52	16	14	12	13	11	66
53	12	12	11	8	4	47
54	10	10	8	5	3	36
55	10	8	12	14	6	50
56	16	14	10	13	8	61
57	16	9	8	8	8	49
58	14	10	8	6	4	42
59	13	12	10	10	8	53
60	19	19	16	18	11	83
61	16	14	11	10	11	62
62	18	17	16	13	10	74

Student Number	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Total
63	17	12	11	8	5	53
64	16	13	11	10	9	59
65	20	14	13	14	9	70
66	17	19	14	13	11	74
67	14	14	10	11	4	53
68	15	9	7	6	8	45
69	13	6	6	7	8	40
70	13	12	12	11	14	62
71	11	12	10	8	4	45
72	16	10	13	7	6	52
73	12	11	13	10	11	57
74	15	8	15	9	10	57
75	20	17	15	15	14	81
76	14	13	11	9	9	56
77	11	13	10	12	7	53
78	18	13	12	9	9	61
79	16	12	12	7	6	53
80	16	13	14	11	9	63
Class Average	14.63	11.55	10.75	9.85	7.34	54.11

Appendix C

This table shows the NGSLT scores for each individual student in the third-year. The student numbers on the left were randomly allocated. The class averages can be found at the bottom of the table.

Student Number	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Total
1	18	12	11	10	10	61
2	14	10	12	11	6	53
3	19	19	13	11	12	74
4	17	12	13	15	10	67
5	14	12	11	10	8	55
6	12	7	8	5	8	40
7	18	18	18	17	15	86
8	17	13	11	12	10	63
9	12	8	6	11	5	42
10	17	19	16	14	12	78
11	10	9	4	5	5	33
12	9	5	6	4	3	27
13	11	14	13	12	8	58
14	19	13	15	11	11	69
15	2	0	1	3	3	9
16	18	15	14	11	9	67
17	15	15	13	13	9	65
18	12	10	8	9	6	45
19	18	13	11	12	8	62
20	16	15	13	13	10	67
21	10	15	17	11	7	60
22	18	11	15	12	8	64
23	19	19	16	17	15	86
24	19	18	13	12	7	69
25	16	17	16	16	11	76
26	19	18	15	15	11	78
27	19	18	14	14	14	79
28	16	15	14	13	11	69
29	18	15	15	15	12	75

Student Number	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Total
30	20	16	15	15	9	75
31	20	15	15	12	15	77
32	18	17	18	16	15	84
33	16	14	15	12	9	66
34	19	17	15	13	11	75
35	16	12	14	13	10	65
36	16	16	13	18	10	73
37	14	13	15	7	9	58
38	15	8	9	8	7	47
39	13	11	14	14	8	60
40	18	16	12	10	9	65
41	12	7	6	3	3	31
42	12	6	7	8	9	42
43	14	11	12	14	7	58
44	17	14	14	15	4	64
45	12	11	9	11	6	49
46	16	11	8	13	6	54
47	19	16	14	15	8	72
48	14	8	14	10	5	51
49	12	14	12	15	6	59
50	16	13	16	10	11	66
51	16	9	5	10	10	50
52	9	9	6	9	9	42
53	17	16	14	13	9	69
54	10	10	8	6	7	41
55	19	15	17	12	9	72
56	12	12	10	12	8	54
57	13	13	10	15	7	58
58	12	9	8	6	2	37
59	12	8	11	9	7	47
60	10	4	3	2	1	20
61	18	18	15	13	11	75
62	13	14	14	16	10	67

Student Number	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Total
63	13	13	14	13	10	63
64	16	17	16	16	11	76
65	11	12	10	10	7	50
66	19	17	15	15	10	76
67	7	3	2	5	6	23
68	19	13	11	10	4	57
69	13	13	13	15	9	63
Class Average	14.93	12.70	11.90	11.49	8.52	59.54

Words that sing: An exploration of narrative song lyrics

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Background

The main purpose of lexical profile studies is to ascertain how much vocabulary knowledge learners require to comprehend 95% and 98% of various types of spoken and written discourse. The figures of 95% and 98% are the theoretical thresholds for a minimal comprehension and a more precise comprehension respectively (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010).

Lexical frequency profile studies have looked at the discourse of movies (Webb & Rodgers, 2009a), TV shows (Webb & Rodgers, 2009b), TED Talks (Coxhead & Walls, 2012), and newspapers/novels (Nation, 2006). These studies use the 1000-word family frequency lists derived from the BNC/COCA corpus by Nation (2017), and it should be noted that they rely on the assumption that vocabulary is generally learned in order of frequency. Recent lexical profile studies on song lyrics have looked at rap songs (Tegge, 2021) and highly influential popular songs across many sub-genres (Romanko, 2017; Tegge, 2017). The findings of these three studies are summarized in Table 1 below. With the exception of rap songs, these studies show that the vocabulary in most popular songs is likely to be largely comprehensible to B1 level learners.

Table 1

Previous Studies of Song Lyrics Corpora

Study	Genre / Corpus Size	95% coverage	98% coverage
Tegge, 2017	Popular Songs (teacher selected) 177,384 tokens (635 songs)	2000 + PN, MW, TC, A	4000 + PN, MW, TC, A
Romanko, 2017	Popular Songs (charts & best of lists) 678,309 tokens (2175 songs)	2000 + PN, MW, TC, A	5000 + PN, MW, TC, A
Tegge, 2017	Popular songs (charts) 180,892 tokens (408 songs)	3000 + PN, MW, TC, A	6000 + PN, MW, TC, A
Tegge, 2021	Rap songs (charts) 102,767 tokens (160 songs)	5000 + PN, MW, TC, A	9000 + PN, MW, TC, A

Note.

PN = proper nouns (e.g. *Lucy, Brooklyn, Cadillac*)

MW = marginal words (e.g. *whoa, yeah,* swear words)

TC = transparent compounds (e.g. *sunrise, weekend, lunchtime*)

A = abbreviations (e.g. *SUV, DJ*)

In the present study, a self-compiled corpus of lyrics from popular narrative songs, or "story songs," released from 1955 to 2023 in the sub-genres of folk and country will be examined. The rationale for investigating narrative songs is that authentic stories are likely to be engaging and motivating for learners (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018; Wolff, 2015). In contrast to longer narrative forms such as short stories or movies, narrative songs provide learners with a "complete" story in only a few minutes, and they can be exploited by teachers for comprehension questions and summary writing activities, for example.

Aims

This study aims to answer three research questions:

RQ1: What kind of vocabulary makes up the lexical load of narrative song lyrics in the corpus?

RQ2: How many word families should L2 learners know in order to gain 95% and 98% coverage of the narrative song lyrics in the corpus?

RQ3: In terms of vocabulary, how many songs are likely to be accessible to learners at each CEFR level?

Methods and Sample

The first step in compiling the corpus was to search for lists of narrative songs on Google, using search prompts such as "story song list," "narrative song list," and "storytelling song list." Lyrics for songs from these lists that belonged to the sub-genres of folk and country were then accessed on Genius.com, and the lyrics made into plain text files that would be readable by the corpus analysis software. The resulting corpus contains 118 folk songs and 204 country songs. 284 songs are by American artists, 22 songs by UK artists, 14 by Canadian artists, and two by Australian artists. The lyrics were checked for errors but were left largely unaltered.

The corpus was then analyzed, both as a whole (Table 2) and each song individually (Table 3), using AntWordProfiler (Anthony, 2014) alongside the accompanying BNC/COCA frequency lists, as well as supplementary lists containing proper nouns, marginal words, transparent compounds, and abbreviations (PNMWTCA). The list of words not appearing on any list in AntWordProfiler was examined, and proper nouns, marginal words with alternate spellings (e.g., *aargh* or *argh*), and transparent compounds (e.g. *footstool*, *flatlands*) were added to the lists. Shortened forms such as *shootin'* for *shooting* were also added to the word lists under the appropriate headword.

In order to make comparisons with the earlier studies outlined above, the unit of counting that was chosen is the word family, which Nation and Webb (2011) suggest is

most suitable when examining receptive vocabulary knowledge. They claim that learners who know the stem form of a word (i.e., the headword of the family) will be able to recognize most derived and inflected forms of that word.

Results

Table 2 shows some examples of the most frequent words that appear in the narrative song corpus. The word lists that the vocabulary appears in are in the leftmost column, along with the approximate corresponding CEFR levels (Nation, n.d.).   The number and percentage of tokens are shown in the middle two columns. The asterisk represents the 95% theoretical threshold for adequate comprehension, and the plus sign represents the 98% theoretical threshold for unassisted comprehension. The rightmost column shows examples of frequently occurring words from the respective list or lists, with the token count shown in parentheses after each word.

Table 2

Number and Percentage of Tokens with Vocabulary Examples

BNC/COCA Word List and CEFR Level	Tokens (Number)	Tokens (%)	Examples (token frequencies per type)
1st 1000 (A2)	104,290	88.25	time (304), love (287), boy (178), heart (141), daddy (112), son (110), baby (98), god (88), men (85), lady (80), friend (67), money (65), wife (60), gun (54), mother (54), dad (53), hell (52), country (49)
2^{nd-} 1000 (B1)	4,812	4.07*	mama (109), truck (49), moon (48), soul (44), heaven (40), county (39), beer (34), knees (31), iron (29), angels (28), dust (28), lonely (26), folks (25), fool (25), soldier (25), bridge (24), ocean (17)
3rd 1000 (B1)	1,100	0.93	damn (29), jail (21), ocean (17), fate (15), highway (15), false (14), grave (14), bible (12), guitar (12), whispered (11), leather (9), holy (8), naked (8)
4th 1000 (B2)	1,534	1.30	mercy (41), whiskey (32), devil (29), bold (27), diamond (18), waitress

BNC/COCA Word List and CEFR Level	Tokens (Number)	Tokens (%)	Examples (token frequencies per type)
			(17), handsome (16), preacher (16), cafe (14), roses (14), thunder (13), bullets (10)
5th 1000 (C1)	946	0.80+	porch (15), maid (12), cowboy (11), paradise (10), pistol (10), butcher (9), hay (9), rag (9) sorrow (9)
6th 1000 (C1)	566	0.48	buddies (9), gypsy (9), mule (8), hounds (7), ragged (6), slain (6), eternity (5), foe (5), loft (5), trash (5)
7th – 9th 1000 (C2)	724	0.61	ruby (14), awhile (12), yonder (11), busted (8), headlights (7), motel (7), holler (6), neon (6)
10th – 25th	552	0.47	dime (12), nigh (7), steed (6), desperado (5), brambles (4), miniskirt (4), tailgate (3)
Proper Nouns	2,097	1.77	John (57), Billy (33), Joe (33), Mary (27), Jack (25), Jesus (24), Mexico (21), Texas (19), York (17), California (15), Johnny (14), Orleans (13), Spanish (12), American (11), Arizona (11), Jimmy (11)
Compounds	605	0.51	forever (21), someday (19), midnight (13), moonlight (11), bedroom (9)
Marginal Words	841	0.71	oh (377), la (134), o (53), ooh (24), woah (16), ah (12), whoa (9), mmm (8), shit (7), bitch (5)
Abbreviations	24	0.02	PTA (6), CB (3), FM (3), GI (2)
Not in any list	81	0.07	ragtop (6), mamacita (3), treed (3), negatory (1), swinger (1)
Total	118,172	100	

Note.

* = 95% threshold including PN, MW, TC, A

\+ = 95% threshold excluding PN, MW, TC, A; 98% threshold including PN, MW, TC, A

The results indicate that the 5000 most frequent word families, not including PNMWTCA, provide 95% coverage. If it is assumed that learners have knowledge of PNMWTCA, then the 2000 most frequent word families provide 95% coverage of the lyrics, and the 5000 most frequent word families give 98% coverage.

Table 3 shows the number of songs in which 95% and 98% of words fall within the range likely to be familiar to learners at different CEFR levels (Nation, n.d.). The number of songs is shown in the Y-axis, and BNC/COCA word lists with approximate corresponding CEFR levels shown in the X-axis.

Table 3

Song Vocabulary Comprehensibility across CEFR Levels
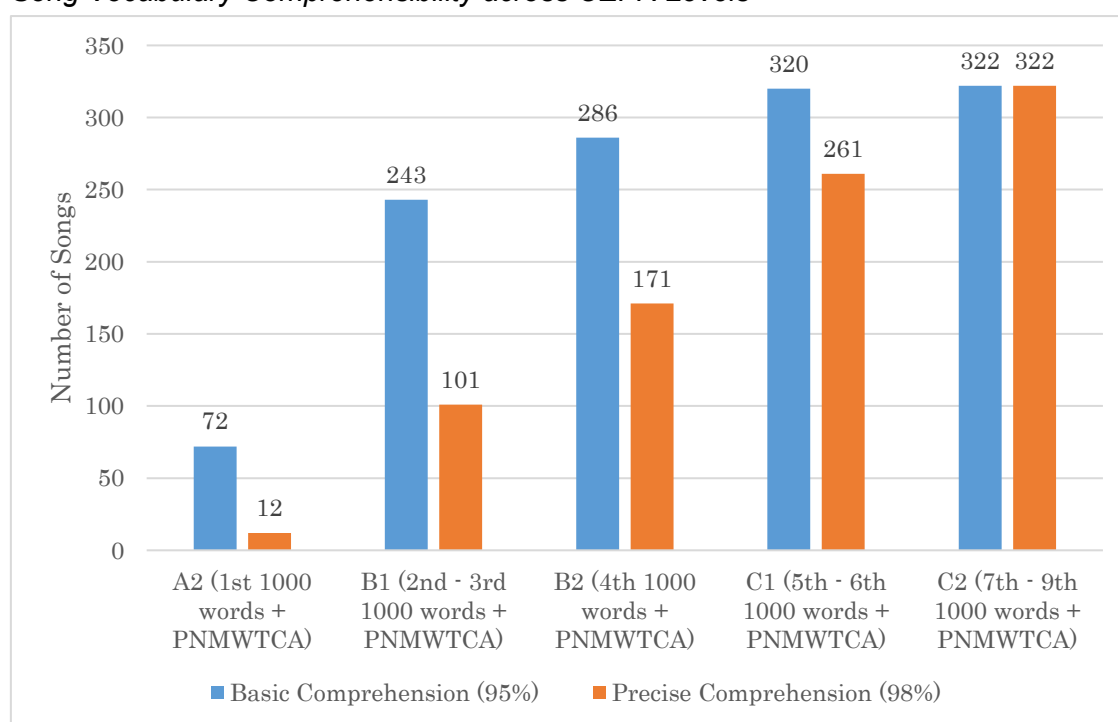
The results show that A2 level vocabulary knowledge (i.e. the 1st 1000 most frequent word families) is sufficient for 95% vocabulary comprehension in 72 songs, with 98% vocabulary comprehension in 12 songs (see Appendix). B1 level knowledge of the 2nd and 3rd 1000 most frequent word families gives 95% vocabulary comprehension in 243 songs, and 98% comprehension in 101 songs. Moving into the B2 level, knowledge of the 4th 1000 most frequent word families brings 95% comprehension of 286 songs, and 98% comprehension of 171 songs. Advanced proficiency levels, C1 and C2, give high comprehensibility of all 322 songs in the corpus, with C1 giving 95% vocabulary comprehension in all but two songs.

Conclusions

Regarding the first research question, vocabulary from the narrative songs often seem to relate to everyday situations (e.g., *truck*, *folks*, *guitar, whiskey, crowd, waitress, beer*, and *cops*.) The emphasis on everyday situations may make the stories more relatable to learners. Words relating to place/location are frequent (e.g., *county*, *bridge*, *sand*, *valley*, *jail*, *highway*, *Mexico*, *Texas*, *California, ocean*), and may help learners to imagine the setting of the story. Words relating to religion or spirituality (e.g., *soul*, *heaven*, *devil*, *preacher, pray*, *bible,* and *voodoo*) are also quite frequent, and may provide learners with insight into the mindsets and backgrounds of the characters and writers of the lyrics. Another potentially distinctive feature of narrative song lyrics is that the most common proper nouns do not usually refer to public figures or celebrities, but rather to characters in the narrative who are introduced in the song itself, such as *Billy*, *Jack*, and *Mary*. Similarly, *mama, daddy,* and *papa* frequently appear in the first and second 1000-word frequency lists. This may make it easier for learners to relate to the characters, since they usually do not refer to anyone specific in popular culture. One further noteworthy feature is the relative non-occurrence of swear/taboo words in this type of song, with only 13 instances of swear/taboo words in the 322-song corpus, compared to the 2,627 instances found in a smaller corpus of rap lyrics by Tegge (2021). Furthermore, the number of "off list" words is very small, at only 81 (0.07%).

Regarding the second and third research questions, most narrative songs in the corpus are likely to be comprehensible to learners with knowledge of the 2000 most frequent word families, with PNMWTCA, and that knowledge of the 5000 most frequent word families with PNMWTCA is likely to be sufficient for unassisted comprehension. This is comparable to Romanko's (2017) findings about popular songs from the charts (see Table 1), and indicates that narrative folk and country songs may be more accessible to learners than rap songs (Tegge, 2021). Lexical profiles of each song individually reveal that while 72 songs (22.36%) are likely to be accessible to A2 learners, the number of accessible songs jumps to 243 (75.47%) for B1 learners (see Table 3). As noted by Webb (2021), lexical profiling studies use hypothetical vocabulary sizes made up of the most frequent words, so the 95% and 98% comprehension thresholds should be considered as indicators of likely comprehensibility to learners and as vocabulary learning goals, rather than as definitive pronouncements about what will certainly be comprehensible.

Considering their potential relatability for learners, the relative absence of swear/taboo words that may be problematic in pedagogical settings, and the amount of high-frequency vocabulary that they contain, it is hoped that narrative songs will be considered by teachers and learners as accessible and authentic resources for vocabulary reinforcement and learning. Moreover, for pedagogical purposes, teachers and learners

should bear in mind the importance of learning the 3000 most frequent word families as learning goals, as this level of knowledge will likely allow for adequate comprehension of a substantial number of narrative songs.

Future Directions

This study has investigated the lexical profile of narrative songs, focusing on individual words. In future studies it would be useful to examine the prevalence and role of multi-word units and idioms in narrative songs, and to develop a set of classroom tasks specifically designed for use with narrative songs.

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Appendix A

A2/B1 Level Narrative Songs

95% of words from the 1ˢᵗ 1000 most frequent words (A2 level)

* = 98% of words from the 1ˢᵗ 1000 most frequent words

(1958) Don't Take Your Guns to Town - Johnny Cash

(1968) D-I-V-O-R-C-E - Tammy Wynette

(1968) I Don't Wanna Play House - Tammy Wynette*

(1970) The Noble Lord Hawkins - Nic Jones

(1970) Father and Son – Cat Stevens

(1971) Blow Up Your TV - John Denver

(1971) Edward - Nic Jones

(1971) Famous Blue Raincoat - Leonard Cohen

(1972) Operator - Jim Croce

(1973) Jolene - Dolly Parton

(1973) Street Boy – Rodriguez*

(1975) Don't Cry Joni - Conway Twitty*

(1977) Lucille - Kenny Rogers

(1979) Flowers Are Red - Harry Chapin*

(1979) The Coward of the County - Kenny Rogers

(1980) He Stopped Loving Her Today - George Jones

(1980) Long Arm of the Law - Kenny Rogers

(1980) Sequel - Harry Chapin

(1985) The Chair - George Strait*

(1988) Fast Car - Tracy Chapman

(1989) The Dance - Garth Brooks*

(1991) Love, Me - Collin Raye*

(1991) The Walk - Sawyer Brown*

(1992) Is There Life Out There - Reba McEntire*

(1993) How Can I Help You Say Goodbye - Patty Loveless

(1993) John Deere Green - Joe Diffie

(1994) Don't Take the Girl - Tim McGraw

(1994) I Don't Even Know Your Name - Alan Jackson

(1994) Little Rock - Collin Raye

(1995) Check Yes or No - George Strait

(1997) Enough to Be On Your Way - James Taylor

(1997) That's Why I'm Here - Kenny Chesney

(1997) The Fool - Lee Ann Womack

(1999) He Didn't Have to Be - Brad Paisley

(1999) The Chain of Love - Clay Walker

(2000) The Little Girl - John Michael Montgomery

(2000) We Danced - Brad Paisley

(2001) Austin - Blake Shelton*

(2001) I'm Already There – Lonestar

(2002) Picture - Kid Rock

(2002) Red Ragtop - Tim McGraw

(2002) The Baby - Blake Shelton

(2003) My Last Name - Dierks Bentley

(2003) Walk a Little Straighter - Billy Currington

(2004) Baby Girl – Sugarland

(2004) Me and Charlie Talking - Miranda Lambert

(2004) Skin - Rascal Flatts

(2005) Believe - Brooks & Dunn

(2005) Jesus, Take the Wheel - Carrie Underwood

(2006) Alyssa Lies - Jason Michael Carroll

(2006) Stupid Boy - Keith Urban

(2007) Cleaning This Gun (Come On In Boy) - Rodney Atkins

(2007) Letter to Me - Brad Paisley

(2007) The Ballad of Love and Hate - The Avett Brothers

(2007) You're Gonna Miss This - Trace Adkins

(2008) Cowgirls Don't Cry - Brooks & Dunn

(2008) Down the Road - Kenny Chesney*

(2008) If It Hadn't Been For Love - The SteelDrivers

(2008) In Color - Jamey Johnson

(2008) Last Name - Carrie Underwood

(2010) Raymond - Brett Eldredge

(2012) Two Black Cadillacs - Carrie Underwood

(2015) Boys In the Street - Greg Holden

(2016) Greatest Love Story – LANCO

(2017) Diane – Cam

(2017) Drunk Girl - Chris Janson

(2017) Marry Me - Thomas Rhett

(2020) My Boy - Elvie Shane*

(2021) Silverado For Sale - Morgan Wallen

(2022) Bench Seat - Chase Rice

(2022) Billy Stay - Zach Bryan

(2022) Next Thing You Know - Jordan Davis

SIG News

Here's some news on what has been happening in the SIG:

We have completed the migration of our academic journal, *Vocabulary Learning and Instruction*, over to Castledown Publishing. This move allows us to have a more streamlined and professional process which should come in handy as the journal grows in popularity. In May, Joe Vitta and Mark Howarth presented on behalf of the SIG at JALT's PANSIG event to rave reviews. In October, we held our 11th annual JALT Vocabulary SIG Symposium at Osaka Jogakuin University. It was a great success, with more than 60 attendees and a great slate of speakers and presentations. If you weren't able to attend this year we hope you'll join us for next year's event which is in the planning stages now. We'll keep you posted as details become available.

In November, the Vocabulary SIG held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the JALT International Conference. The officers were ratified at this event for 2024, and are:

Mark Howarth, Coordinator
Jean-Pierre Richard, Treasurer
Aaron Gibson, Membership Chair
Jeffrey Stewart, Program Chair
Stuart McLean, Publicity Chair
Michael McGuire, Publications Chair

We will all continue to work hard to provide you, our members, with a high level of service. Thanks again for your continued support of the Vocabulary SIG. We hope you have a safe, healthy, and productive 2024!

Message to Vocabulary SIG members,

Thank you so much for continuing to subscribe to JALT's Vocabulary SIG. We know that there are many options in terms of which SIGs you decide to join, and we appreciate that you chose the Vocabulary SIG. We hope you are satisfied with your membership of our SIG, and we welcome any feedback to help us improve the services that we provide to our members. Please feel free to drop us a line anytime at jaltvocab@gmail.com.

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.

Summer Issue Deadline: March 15th each year

Winter Issue Deadline: September 15th each year

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 discuss the possibility with you.

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 also free to 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 https://castledown.online/journals/vli/vli-submission-guidelines/ for details