

語彙学習の導入：生産的語彙習得と語彙学習方法の教育

Introducing A Vocabulary Learning Requirement: Productive ability and learning strategies

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Abstract

学習者の英語運用力を開発する使命を持つ英語集中プログラムが始まった。ためらわずに英語コミュニケーションができるようになるためには、使用頻度の高い語彙を知ることが不可欠であるため、英語集中プログラムの目標の一つはNGSLという英語語彙リストを学ぶことである。本稿は生産的語彙習得とそのため必要な語彙学習方法の教育を特徴とする語彙学習課題の実行に関する研究ノートである。語彙学習方法を教える補習授業についての学習者の評価によれば、語彙学習方法を教えることには重要な意味がある。

1. Introduction

With the advent of a new university aiming to build future leaders with “a global perspective and advanced practical expertise” (<http://www.u-nagano.ac.jp>), a new intensive English program was developed. The English program has the responsibility to inspire learners to improve their English ability “to operate and communicate in English.” An important element of practical English ability is knowledge of the most frequently used words. Learning a list of the 2801 highest frequency words of contemporary English, called the New General Service List (NGSL), is a requirement of the program. This paper reports on implementing the vocabulary learning requirement with an emphasis on productive vocabulary knowledge and teaching learning strategies. The report will explain the vocabulary learning requirement, method of assessment, and measures that were taken to assure that all students learn the foundational vocabulary of English.

2. Intensive English program

The intensive English program consists of accuracy-focused classes taught by Japanese instructors of English, and fluency-focused classes taught in English by instructors from English-speaking countries. All learners are required to

take both classes every term during the first two years. Each class meets twice a week for 100 minutes, resulting in about seven hours of English instruction a week.

The expectations on the English program are high. The president of the university would like to see all students attain a 600 on the Test of English for Intercultural Communication (TOEIC) by the end of the two-year program. Additionally, in the middle of the second year, all students will participate in an overseas program planned by the university and tailored to the students' fields of study. There are nine overseas programs in six countries. Some programs expect learners to have an English level equivalent to a Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B2, and the ability to give an English presentation.

In order to direct learners to meet these expectations, mastering the most frequently used English words (NGSL) is one goal of the English program. The NGSL is a list of 2801 of the most frequently used English words created by Browne, Culligan and Phillips (Browne, 2013). The original General Service List, published in 1953, provided a list of about 2000 words evaluated to be the most useful words for learners of English to master. For many decades writers of English textbooks used the list, however as English use changed the list began to lose its authority. Thus, Browne, Culligan and Phillips began research for an updated list using the 273 million-word

Cambridge English Corpus which consists of various genre of British and American English, of which 60% of the data is dated after the year 2000 (Browne, 2013; Stoeckel, Ishii, & Bennett, 2018). The result is a list of 2801 of the most commonly used words in modern English that is estimated to cover 90% of English language in use.

Mastering the most frequently used words of a language is necessary for basic communication (Nation, 2001). The extent to which a learner knows these high frequency words will influence all four language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. If a learner has not mastered the NGSL, when reading they will come across too many unknown words to be able to understand a text, when listening there will also be gaps of incomprehensible language, and when speaking and writing the learner will be unable to express their ideas about basic topics due to a lack of foundational vocabulary. The amount of English vocabulary Japanese university learners can recognize has been evaluated to be about 3,700 word families (Mochizuki & Aizawa, 2000; Nonaka, 2004; McLean, Hogg, & Kramer, 2014). McLean et al. analyzed the vocabulary level of over 3,000 Japanese learners in three different levels of universities (*hensachi* under 50, between 51–60, and over 61). Even though they found that learners could recognize on average 3,700 word families, “the results show a lack of consistent knowledge among the most frequent 2000 word families found in the BNC (British National Corpus). This emphasizes the need to focus on supporting high-frequency vocabulary acquisition regardless of the university rank” (McLean, et al. 2014, p. 53). Thus, requiring learners to master the high frequency words in the NGSL is an appropriate and necessary task for fluency in communication, and performing well on tests.

For the intensive English program the NGSL was divided into five sets, which the learners would be responsible to learn in the five quarters before the overseas program. In Quarters 1 and 2 the set is 700 words, in Quarters 3 and 4 the set is 500 words, and in the first quarter of the second year the set is 401 words. As the words are in order of frequency, highest to lowest, the first set

has the most commonly used words. In order to hold learners accountable to learning the NGSL, there is a test at the end of each quarter on which learners must receive 80% to pass the test.

A. Productive tests

Most vocabulary tests have questions that ask the test-taker to only recognize the meaning of a word and choose an answer. A correct answer on a receptive test like this may show knowledge of the target word; however, it may only show familiarity, or a guess. Receptive knowledge is recognizing a target word form or its meaning (Schmitt, 2010). Schmitt discusses the receptive and productive notion, and suggests that receptive knowledge may be “the first step” in learning a word (2010, p. 87). However, for communication by speaking or writing, the next step of productive knowledge is necessary. Productive knowledge requires the learner to retrieve and produce a word, involving understanding of usage, register, and spelling. Nation writes, “Productive vocabulary use involves wanting to express a meaning through speaking or writing and retrieving and producing the appropriate spoken or written word form” (2001, p. 25).

Due to the washback effect in assessment, if a test asks for recognition of target words, then learners will only study enough to be able to recognize the meaning from a group of words. Likewise, if the test requires learners to recall meaning and write the target word, learners will need to study the words’ meaning, spelling, and usage. Because the university’s aim is to develop students who can communicate their ideas in English, a test that asks for recall and production of target words best aligns with the objectives. Nation states, “If productive use is needed, there must be productive learning” (2001, p. 32), and productive learning is motivated by a test with productive questions. Thus, asking our students to show productive knowledge of the most frequently used words of English became a characteristic of the end-of-term NGSL tests. The tests consist of 40 productive questions where students write a word (two-letter hint supplied) to complete a sentence, and 40 receptive questions

where learners choose the English meaning for a target word. Examples of receptive and productive questions are,

Receptive Question:

Circle the letter that fits the mean of the word in **bold** letters

1. **previous**: That was my previous job.
 - a. earlier
 - b. most important
 - c. normal
 - d. favorite

Productive Questions

2. My mother wo_____ in a bank in Ginza when she was younger.
3. I have to write many rep _____ for my classes at university.
4. Our company emp _____ many workers.

Answers: 1. a 2. worked, 3. reports,
4. employs

B. Individual study with learning strategy instruction

Another characteristic of the vocabulary learning element of the English program is that study of the NGSL is primarily individual study, because vocabulary knowledge varies among learners. Resources such as NGSL lists and an explanation of how to study vocabulary were given to the learners in the first class. Nation, in *Teaching Vocabulary* (2008), delineates the teacher's role and the learner's role. Primary among the teacher's responsibilities is planning vocabulary learning into the curriculum, followed by teaching learners strategies for learning vocabulary, testing high frequency vocabulary until it is known, and lastly, teaching high frequency words. The intensive English program aligns with Nation's advice in requiring the learners to learn the most frequent English words (NGSL), testing these words, and teaching learning strategies.

A supplemental class was created to explicitly teach vocabulary learning strategies to learners who do not pass the end-of-the-term NGSL tests. Instructors thought that learners who fail the NGSL test would benefit more from a study skills class than a second test. Vocabulary learning strategies are needed due to the many aspects of

learning a word, and the large of amount of words that need to be learned (Nyikos & Fan, 2007).

3. Quarter 1 Test Results and Supplementary Class

The first end-of-the-term NGSL test was taken by all 247 learners of whom 212 (86%) passed by receiving 80% or higher on the test. Among the learners who passed, 67% received over 90%, suggesting that the first NGSL set of 700 words was well known. The remaining 35 learners (14%) who failed the test attended a supplementary class at the end of exam week.

The purpose of the supplementary class is to help learners with weaker study skills to learn several word learning strategies, and use the strategies on assignments. The first class consisted of three twenty-minute segments in which an instructor explained strategies for learning vocabulary. The first segment focused on the need to repeatedly retrieve the target word from memory using word cards. The second segment showed the value of using monolingual English learner dictionaries, and the value of learning the audio and verbal aspect of English words. The third segment introduced word parts. Each segment had an assignment related to the learning strategy. Learners were required to choose two of the three assignments to complete in the following two weeks. All students completed the assignments.

The supplementary class was not as a punishment, but as the instructor's effort to help the learners succeed in the future. The aim was to show the relevance of strategies for learning vocabulary, and for learners to try out and find a strategy that is helpful for them. Vocabulary learning is on-going, so "Learners need to understand the way they learn best, and be proactive in pursuing methods of learning that are effective for themselves" (Schmitt, 2010, p. 97). This forward looking perspective was evident in the learners' comments about the class. Learners were asked to write comments on the supplementary class. Most of the learners wrote that they learned valuable content, and planned to apply it to the following quarter's vocabulary

learning. A sample of comments follows.

I understood what I need to change; I was a taught a new way to study. The supplementary class was a good opportunity to reflect and change.

Learning ways to study English was helpful. I keenly felt that I need to expose myself to more English. I don't want to attend this supplementary class again, so I will study English.

I realized that there are many ways to study words. I want to find the study method that fits me. I meant to study this time, but it was not meaningful. I want to regularly study and pass the next test. I want to incorporate new ways to study words into my daily life.

Before attending today's supplementary class, I didn't know specifically how to study, but I now understand that there are several ways to study. I want to try out some of the study methods I learned today, find a study style that fits me, and then pass the next NGSL test.

Through the 3 ways to study I was able to see what I need to do. I want to accept these results, evaluate it and study hard enough to pass the test the next time. I haven't used an English (monolingual) dictionary before. I'd like to try using one in the future.

One participant in the supplement class wrote that some students did not learn the words because they were not motivated to learn.

Looking at how learners did on the receptive questions and productive questions shows that productive questions are more difficult to answer correctly. On the receptive questions 98% of the learners successfully answered 80% or more of the questions, whereas on the productive questions 81% of the learners answered with 80% or higher accuracy.

4. Quarter 2 Test Results and Supplementary Class

The NGSL test at the end of the second term was taken by 245 learners with 211 (86%) passing

the test and 34 learners failing to receive 80%. Like the first quarter, learners who failed the test were asked to come to a supplementary class at the end of exam week. Of the 34 learners who failed, 20 learners had passed the Quarter 1 test. These learners attended a supplementary class similar to the one in the first quarter, and were given assignments to apply word learning strategies. The comments the participants wrote were similar to those in the first quarter, expressing satisfaction with being taught several learning strategies, and resolve to do better on the next NGSL test.

There were 14 learners that failed the Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 NGSL tests. Their instructors realized that the learners failed the tests for various reasons including low ability, and low motivation. The instructors met these learners individually or in small groups to counsel them on how to continue in the intensive English program with the NGSL learning requirement.

Comparing the success rates for answering the receptive questions and productive questions again shows that productive questions are more difficult to answer correctly. On the receptive questions 92% of the learners successfully answered 80% or more of the questions, whereas on the productive questions 84% of the learners answered with 80% or higher accuracy. The receptive question success rate decreased from 98% to 92%, perhaps showing that the second set of NGSL words was slightly more difficult to answer.

Conclusion

The intensive English program is tasked with raising learners' English ability to be able to perform well on the TOEIC and to be able to communicate in English. To reach this end learning high frequency vocabulary, particularly the NGSL is a focus of the program. This paper has described the emphasis on productive questions on the end-of-term vocabulary tests, and teaching vocabulary learning strategies. In both the first and second quarter 86% of the learners studied adequately to pass the tests, and those

who did not pass attended a supplementary class where vocabulary learning strategies were taught. Learners who attended the supplementary class evaluated the class as useful for future study. As the program proceeds, instructors will continue to aim for all learners' mastery of high frequency vocabulary to support the learners' communicative use of English.

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