LARC /CALPER Webinar on ASSESSING VOCABULARY
February 19, 2014

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POLL: Your teaching context

In which educational context do you teach?

a. Secondary / high school
b. Intensive language program
c. College / university
d. Other
POLL: The language you teach

Which is the main language you teach?

a. English / EFL
b. Another major European language (Spanish, French, German …)
c. A less commonly taught language (LCTL)
d. Other
To place learners at the appropriate level in a language teaching programme.

To assess learners’ progress in vocabulary learning in a particular course.

To help plan a vocabulary teaching/learning programme.

To evaluate how adequate the learners’ word knowledge is for a specific purpose.

To gain a greater understanding of vocabulary learning processes.
POLL: Using vocabulary tests

In your teaching context, what role(s) do vocabulary tests play (if any)?

a. Placement of students in classes
b. Planning vocabulary teaching
c. Assessing progress in vocabulary learning
d. Measuring end of course achievement
e. Other
Sources of vocabulary to assess

- Words presented in the course textbook
- Words specified in a syllabus or curriculum
- Words from a frequency list
  - General frequency in the language
  - Frequency in a particular domain e.g. academic language
Types of vocabulary

- High-frequency vocabulary
- Mid-frequency vocabulary
- Low-frequency vocabulary
- Academic vocabulary
- Technical vocabulary

(see Webinar handout for definitions and word lists)
What learners need to know about the target vocabulary

The form – meaning link

➔ This L2 word means ‘[L1 equivalent]’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) house</td>
<td>(una) casa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colorful</td>
<td>colorido</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to swim</td>
<td>nadar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linking L2 forms with (L1) meanings is the most basic element of vocabulary learning.

Using effective mnemonic techniques, it is an effective way to build a core L2 vocabulary.

It provides the basis for measuring vocabulary size (also called ‘breadth’ of knowledge).
Vocabulary size tests

- Tests that are used for placement, diagnostic, proficiency and research purposes.
- Based on a sample of words from a relevant word frequency list (see handout for details).
- Knowledge of the sampled words is measured by a simple item type.
- The test score is converted into an estimate of vocabulary size.
Vocabulary size item types

- Yes/No
  - Learners simply report whether they know the meaning of each word or not; a percentage of the items are non-words

- Matching
  - Learners match each word with its definition/synonym/L1 equivalent

- Multiple-choice
  - Learners select the correct word/definition from the four options given
Well-known size tests

Let’s visit a website

www.lextutor.ca/tests

- Nation’s Vocabulary Levels Test
- Nation’s Vocabulary Size Tests
- Meara’s X_Lex and Y_Lex tests
Break

Time to answer some of your questions from the Chat window
The vocabulary size tests we have looked at so far focus on the Form–Meaning Link. But there is a lot more to vocabulary knowledge than that. Having a richer knowledge of words is commonly referred to as depth of knowledge.
Knowing the word *broad*

- Meanings? Collocations?
  
  *a broad street, a broad outline, a broad accent, in broad daylight*

- Part of speech?

- Inflected forms?

- Related (derived) words: adverb? noun? verb?

- Associated words: *wide, extensive, thick* …

- How frequent?
Nation’s word knowledge framework

- **Form**
  - how is it spelled? and pronounced?
  - what parts does it have?

- **Meaning**
  - what is its central concept and range of meanings?
  - what other words are associated with it?

- **Use**
  - what patterns of grammar and collocation does it fit into?
  - how frequent is it?
  - how is it used appropriately?

[See Webinar handout for the full table]

Depth of knowledge has much in common with rich vocabulary instruction, which involves

- Selecting useful, high-frequency words
- Communicating the meaning(s) of each word in an accessible way
- Giving opportunities to hear the word and practise its spoken form
- Giving repeated exposure to the word in different contexts over time
- Providing information on the form, meaning and use of the word
- Giving opportunities to use the word productively in speech and writing
The common dilemma

For both engaging in rich instruction and assessing depth of knowledge, there are common challenges:

- There are so many words for students to learn.
- Each word involves multiple aspects of vocabulary knowledge.
- A lot of time is required for teaching and assessing the words.
- There may be other more effective ways to promote and monitor vocabulary acquisition.

(based on Nation, 2013, pp. 92–93)
Depth of knowledge: three approaches

1. **Precision of meaning**
   How well learners know the specific meaning(s) of a word

2. **Network knowledge**
   How well learners can relate a word to other words they know

3. **Comprehensive word knowledge**
   How much learners know about the form, meaning and use of a word
   (Read, 2004)
1. Precision of meaning

How well learners know the specific meaning of a word
REFECTORY:
We met in the refectory.

a. room for eating
b. office where legal papers are signed
c. room for several people to sleep in
d. room with glass walls to grow plants

Example from the Vocabulary Size Test (Nation, 2007) [www.lextutor.ca](http://www.lextutor.ca)

It is a refectory.
(a) beautiful lake  (b) room for eating  (c) small mirror  (d) teacher’s house
Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS)

Developed by Sima Paribakht and Mari Wesche at the University of Ottawa, Canada for research on

- vocabulary learning in the context of academic reading activities
- the ability to infer the meaning of unknown words.

Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS)

I  I don’t remember having seen this word before.

II I have seen this word before, but I don’t know what it means.

III I have seen this word before, and I think it means _______. (synonym or translation)

IV I know this word. It means _______. (synonym or translation)

V I can use this word in a sentence: ________________. (Write a sentence.) (If you do this section, please also do Section IV)
It is a combination of a self-rating task (Steps I–IV) and a kind of test (Steps III–V).
Step V goes beyond meaning to draw on various other kinds of word knowledge.
In addition, Step V may not provide good evidence that the meaning of the word is known.
The scale does not allow for a word having more than one meaning (or for homonyms).
2. Network knowledge

How well learners can relate a word to other words they know
The word associates format

cooperative
attitude cautious growing helpful humour joint

dynamic
active excitement greedy leader meeting serious

The three semantic relationships

- **edit**
  - arithmetic  
  - film  
  - pole  
  - publishing  
  - revise  
  - risk  
  - surface  
  - text

- **paradigmatic**: the two words are synonyms or similar in meaning, and belong to the same word class e.g. ‘edit’ & ‘revise’.

- **syntagmatic**: the two words could occur one after the other, as a collocation, e.g., ‘edit’ & ‘text’.

- **analytic**: the associate represents one aspect of the meaning of the target word and is likely to form part of its dictionary definition, e.g., ‘edit’ & ‘publishing’.
Word associates formats

- edit
  arithmetic  film  pole  publishing
  revise  risk  surface  text

- conscious

awake  healthy  knowing  laughing

face  decision  effort  student

WAT research contexts

- University learners in New Zealand, Canada, the UK and Japan
- TOEFL test-takers in Canada
- Advanced learners of French in Dutch universities
- Dutch elementary school students in the Netherlands

(see Read, 2012)
WAT items for French

\textit{rive} \hspace{1cm} \textit{artificiel} (artificial) \hspace{1cm} \textit{rive} \hspace{1cm} \textit{bord} (edge)

\textit{bord} (edge) \hspace{1cm} \textit{fleuve} (river) \hspace{1cm} \textit{gauche} (left)

\textit{côté} (side) \hspace{1cm} \textit{gauche} (left) \hspace{1cm} \textit{paquet} (parcel)

\textit{fleuve} (river) \hspace{1cm} \textit{prudent} (careful) \hspace{1cm} \textit{tombe} (tomb)

\textit{vague} (wave)

The associates in both cases are \textit{bord}, \textit{fleuve} and \textit{gauche}.

It is important to orient the test takers in advance to the nature of the task.

Generally WA tests are reliable overall.

The test takers’ willingness to guess is a significant factor in their performance.

Semantically related distractors make the test more difficult.

Syntagmatic associates are generally more difficult than paradigmatic ones.
3. Comprehensive word knowledge

How much learners know about the form, meaning and use of a word
Nation’s word knowledge framework

- **Form**
  - how is it spelled? and pronounced?
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- **Meaning**
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- **Use**
  - what patterns of grammar and collocation does it fit into?
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  - how is it used appropriately?

# Testing derived forms of words

## TEST OF ENGLISH DERIVATIVES

### assume

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>He made an _____ that she likes meat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>He can _____ that she likes meat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>He had an _____ idea that she likes meat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverb</td>
<td>He decided ______ that she likes meat.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### philosophy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>She explained her ______ of life to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>She was known to ______ about her life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>She was known as a ______ person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverb</td>
<td>She discussed her life ______.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Write one word from the list below in each blank. Make sure that you write the word in its correct grammatical form.

In almost all developing countries, the lack of ______ supplies of cheap, convenient and ______ fuel is a ______ problem. Rural ______ depend on kerosene, wood and dung for their cooking and lighting needs. But kerosene is now too ______ for many people and, except in heavily forested ______, wood is in short supply. The search for firewood ______ a large part of the working day and has resulted in ______ deforestation.

adequate / area / community / expensive / major / occupy / positive / quantity / reliable / widespread
Write a sentence for each of the following words to show that you know what the word means and how it is used.

- starve
- principal
- twist
- vegetation
Testing collocations

DISCO: Discriminating Collocations Test
(Eyckmans, 2009)

- Tick the two phrases that are the correct idioms in English:
  - seek advice
  - express charges
  - pay attention

Choose one word from each column to make an appropriate phrase to complete the sentence.

- The quickest way to win a friend’s trust is to show that you are able to
  - tell a/an joke
  - take the secret
  - keep --- truth
Some guidelines for assessing depth of knowledge

- Decisions should be guided by the purpose of the assessment and the utility of the vocabulary for the learners.
- There is a trade-off between assessing multiple aspects of word knowledge and testing a large number of words in a single test.
- Raising learner awareness of the various components of word knowledge may be more important than assessing knowledge of particular words.
If there’s time, some answers to more of your questions…
Thank you for your attention!

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