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Between the Keys

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The Coordinator's Column

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Salutations,

Quick Quiz for MW Members:

1. What is the world's largest selling textbook series?
2. Approximately how many copies of that series have been sold?
3. Who is the author?

According to David Nunan's website¹, his ELT textbook series "Go for It!" "has become the largest selling textbook series in the world with total sales exceeding 1 billion copies".

If this information is correct, it would mean that there is one copy available for approximately every six people on Earth, and I do not even own a copy! I am amazed, shocked, and, honestly, jealous. Sales of his textbook are astronomical compared to sales of my books and probably yours, too. What are we going to do about this?

My suggestion is to analyze his textbooks and other successful textbooks. Look for reasons why individual teachers, administrators, and publishing companies would choose those books. Scrutinize the directions, the pace, the activities, the contents, etc. Then, dissect and compare your own writing. It will probably be a beneficial exercise.

Of course, keep in mind that the textbooks that sell the most copies are not necessarily the most pedagogically effective books. Many wonderful teaching activities are not likely to make it into textbooks sold by the major book publishers.

¹http://www.davidnunan.com/news/news_0701.html

An editor once told me that his company wants a textbook to be written so that a teacher who has not prepared for a lesson can walk into a classroom, open the book, and know in a second what to tell the students to do.

Finding the right balance between simplicity, clarity, and pedagogical effectiveness is the holy grail of our field. So I announce to the brave materials writers of the MW SIG: “Go forth and slay the dragons of textbook mediocrity with your digital pens. Build shiny new castles of learning built upon the foundations of your glossy textbooks”.

To encourage all of you, I promise to treat any MW member whose textbooks outsell David Nunan’s to a gorgeous and very expensive dinner. This generous offer expires by December 31, 2011.

From the Editor

SIMON COOKE
Materials Writers Publications Chair
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Dear Reader,

As the new academic year begins, we can all make good use of new and fresh ideas to help invigorate and motivate ourselves and our students on the path to publication/graduation i.e. success in the classroom and beyond. We hope that the features in this issue can help to inspire you and your students to reach for those goals.

In this issue, you will find the first installment of what we hope will be a regular feature of BtK: “Writer’s Point” in which Brian Cullen will be exploring different types of materials writing projects and which will feature comment and insight from materials writers from around the world. For the inaugural entry, Brian relays the profile of Sarah Mulvey and her varied writing and publishing experiences.

Offering ways to help construct or select pieces of reading which are suitable for our students, John Honisz-Green offers some ideas on the benefits of lexically profiling a text for class-use and gives details on how to go about lexical profiling using free online software.

Another author whose ideas I shall certainly be pilfering for use in my own classes is Jared Baierschmidt. Jared's piece details the development of a set of worksheets designed to help his students overcome the difference in usage of "could" and "was able to".

Finally, Scott Peterson introduces Quia, an alternative to Moodle that provides tools for building and delivering three types of exercises on the Web: activities, quizzes and surveys.

From all at BtK, we wish you all the best for the start of the 2010/2011 academic year.

Event **ELT Publishing & You**

On May 30, The MW-SIG will joint host an event with JALT's Sendai Chapter. Steve King and John Wiltshier will talk about various aspects of the ELT publishing industry from the view points of a publisher and an author respectively. The admission to this event is free to all MW-SIG members. *Sunday, May 30 2:00 – 5:00 p.m.*

Topics

Publishing: Past, present and future

Speaker **Steve King** Marketing Research Manager, Pearson Education Asia Pacific

My learning curve

Speaker **John Wiltshier** Miyagi Gakuin Women's University, Co-author: English Firsthand (Longman)

See <http://jaltsendai.terapad.com> for full details.

Abstracts and speaker biodata

PUBLISHING: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Steve King (Longman/Pearson)

Abstract How did educational publishing get to where it is today? What is the current state of educational publishing in terms of where authors, publishers, educators and students stand? How will this look in five, ten or fifteen years from now and what clues do we have today that can shape any predictions we can make about the future?

In this talk, the presenter will take a short tour through the history of how educational publishing has developed into the multi-billion dollar industry it is today and examine several case studies from the present that make up a snapshot of how this industry will grow and develop in the coming years.

Biodata Steve King is the Market Research Manager for Pearson Education in Asia, the world's largest educational publisher. He completed a post-graduate Diploma in Publishing Studies in 2008 from the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen and is a frequent speaker on publishing related topics on the Japan ELT conference circuit.

ELT PUBLISHING: MY LEARNING CURVE

John Wiltshier (Miyagi Gakuin University)

Abstract John first self published back in 1997 and joined the author team on English Firsthand in 2005. He will speak from his experiences of both.

Biodata John Wiltshier has been a teacher for 20 years and became a co-author 4 years ago on the English Firsthand Series. John has presented nationally and internationally in Europe and the U.S. He has been a guest presenter at Teachers College Columbia University- Japan, invited speaker on the ETJ Teacher Training Tour, plenary speaker at PAN-SIG 2007 and Featured-Speaker at JALT2007 and MICELT2008(Malaysia). From April this year John has joined the English department at Miyagi Gakuin Women's University.

Writer's Point

BRIAN CULLEN

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Welcome to Writer's Point. This is a new column which will explore different types of material writing projects and feature materials writers from around the world. All comments and suggestions are welcomed. Email the editor at: cullen.brian@gmail.com

1 Featured Writer

For this column, I interviewed Sarah Mulvey, a Canadian teacher and materials writer living in Japan. Sarah started writing EFL materials for young learners when she was working for a large Japanese children's EFL school with branches all over Japan. The school was developing in-house learning materials for the students, and Sarah became part of that team for several years. When she later returned to Canada, she worked at a language school in Vancouver which catered mainly for Asian and South American university students who came to Canada to study for a few months. Again, she was part of a team which developed in-house learning materials, this time for young adult reading, listening, and writing courses. More recently, she has returned to live in Japan and published a conversation/presentation textbook for Japanese university students in 2007.

2 Writing for a Book Packaging Company

Last year, Sarah was involved for six months in a type of work that may be of interest to many material writers. For a series of children's books, she was asked to write 60 stories which were to be used as the primary text in each unit of a multi-level series. The work was commissioned by what

is sometimes called a “book packaging company,” a company that specializes in putting together learning materials for a publishing company. The book packaging company often outsources all of the work and hires writers, editors, illustrators, and any other required personnel for that particular project, and then “packages” it all together in an appropriate form for the client (the publishing company) who publishes it under their own brand name. The packaging company sometimes even arranges the printing and delivers the completed product to the publisher. Packaging companies are not a recent phenomenon and have been responsible for well-known series such as Nancy Drew.

Hiring a book packaging company makes a lot of sense for book publishers who perceive strong demand for a particular kind of book but do not have the resources to produce the book themselves. In other cases, the publisher represents a celebrity whose name is likely to sell books, and the packaging company offers an efficient way of providing ghostwriters.

As with Sarah’s case, book packaging can also provide interesting opportunities for freelance work. Jenny Glatzer (www.jennaglatzer.com) has written several books with advice for writers on how to turn their words into money and says that book packaging “remains an unsaturated market for ambitious freelance writers.” While Glatzer is not talking directly about EFL materials, for EFL materials writers who are looking for steady work, book packaging companies can be less competitive to enter than traditional publishers and Glatzer notes that “packagers often work with the same writers over and over, too, so there’s plenty of possibility for regular assignments.” The work is generally offered as a work-for-hire. In other words, the writer receives a fixed sum for producing the materials and does not receive royalties regardless of the number of copies ultimately sold. In Sarah’s case, her name was featured along with the two other writers on the front cover of the final textbooks, but in many cases the writer may remain anonymous and receive no mention at all in the book.

3 Not Kids' Play!

Although texts for kids learning English have to be simple, this does not mean that the writing of those texts is simple. On the contrary, Sarah was faced with very strict conditions for each text which made it very challenging to write the stories. Some of these conditions included:

- Each story had to be based on a true incident that had occurred and that had been reported in at least two different sources on the Internet.
- The themes of the story had to be interesting with a fun twist, or a good moral which could act as a suitable lesson for young children. One story was about a cat who worked as a ticket seller in a small Japanese railway station. Another story was about an octopus who didn't like to sleep with the lights on, so he used to spray water at the electrical circuits in order to turn them off. Animal stories like these are obvious favourites for kids, but the themes of the stories had to be varied and there was a quota on the number of animal stories. Other themes included an eating contest and a three year old child who wandered far away from home one night.
- The story had to be under 90 words for the lower levels of the series and under 160 words for the higher levels. These words had to appear on a very controlled vocabulary list and special words outside that list had to receive specific approval.
- The story had to be written in the simple present tense.
- Each story had to include art briefs for nine pictures that would accompany the story in the textbook.

An example of a story is shown below:

Erden loves nature. He wants to visit beautiful places around the world. "How can I travel without using gas?," Erden wonders.

Using gas hurts nature. Ships and airplanes use gas. Cars and buses use gas. Can Erden travel without gas? "I know!" Erden shouts. I can use my own power. I can walk up and down mountains. I can ride a bike along the roads. I can row a boat across the ocean. Erden rows a boat from America to Australia. It takes a long time. Erden climbs and rides and rows around the world for many months. Erden feels tired sometimes, but he doesn't stop. He says, "I can do it." In the end, Erden sees the world and keeps it beautiful, too.

An art brief for the sentence "It takes a long time" might read:

In the middle of the picture is a globe. On the top of the globe, Erden is hiking. He has a pole in his hands and a backpack on his pack. He wears hiking boots and a wool hat.

As can be imagined, writing under these constraints was quite challenging. Sarah says that the most difficult aspects were trying to confine a full interesting true story to the limited amount of words allowed and keeping the story in the simple present tense at all times. Preparing the art briefs was also challenging, and she adds "I was never sure how much or how little the illustrator would need." As the project proceeded, it became increasingly difficult to find interesting and simple stories that could be fitted into the tight writing parameters. In addition, another of the main writers was also based in Japan, and they often found that they had inadvertently chosen the same story and one of them had to start from scratch again. However, the editor of the project was very supportive and available for advice and feedback at all times. Despite the challenges, Sarah found that writing for a packaging company was very interesting work of a type that she had never done before or even considered. She felt that it was a great opportunity and learning experience and would certainly do similar work again if the opportunity arose.

4 Interested?

A lot of writers are interested in steady work and packaging companies certainly offer some interesting opportunities. Sarah offers the practical advice to “be careful not to get a backlog of work. . . keep a set routine every day.” If you are interested in learning more about the opportunities to write for book packaging companies, Glatzer’s informative article can be found at: www.underdown.org/packaging.htm. But how do you get started and where do you find these companies? A simple Google search doesn’t reveal all that much because book packaging companies tend to stay out of the limelight, just like the ghostwriters that they employ. Sarah’s case seems to be quite typical. The work was offered to her through a personal contact. Keep writing, showing your materials, and talking to publishers, and the right opportunity may arise. When it does, Glatzer says that most book packaging companies like “to see a cover letter detailing your interest and availability, a resume, and relevant clips or writing samples.”

How to Control Vocabulary Input to Aid Student Fluency and Vocabulary Acquisition

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Note: This paper has been adapted from a presentation at the JALT National conference in 2009

This is part one of a two-part paper that highlights the benefits of lexically profiling any text that learners are exposed to in their language study. Part one briefly highlights the problems that uncontrolled vocabulary can have on learners and on a task's outcome. It looks at the issue of vocabulary thresholds and what vocabulary learners need to be able to comprehend a text at a meaningful level, before detailing step-by-step, how to lexically profile a text using free online software. Part two (to follow) offers ideas on how to implement vocabulary activities into a course, with ideas on how to present the text in a structured template, build vocabulary sub-skills and offer basic ideas for in-class activities, assessment and grading.

1 Part 1: Lexical Profiling

Introduction

The technique of using academic texts focussing on specific themes is well established in academic discussion courses where it is generally assumed that the learners should be discussing and debating topics that are relevant to their major area of study. While this can indeed be useful for students, this author suggests that this is not an ideal approach for the majority of learners entering university, where they have compulsory English classes. Two assumptions about Japanese learners based on the author's experience and observations seem clear and are likely applicable to many first year

university students:

1. Learners entering university usually struggle with the increased workload, and the change of teaching styles forced upon them in a new context.
2. It is beneficial to all stakeholders, that a course or programme has clearly defined goals and objectives for a class, which should include elements such as a coordinated vocabulary focus appropriate to the level of the learners, enabling them to comprehend what they read and be able to use it as a result.

Regarding assumption 1, students usually do struggle to manage the increased workload in the first semester and possibly year of university and often have difficulty moving from the common high school teacher-centred approach to the usual university student-centred approaches in the English classroom. Much more is often expected of them in tertiary education. Part of an educator's job in these early days may be to help students learn how to develop the basic foundation skills of critical analysis of topics and how to formulate and articulate opinions. With this in mind, we should now consider assumption 2. It is usually the desire of educators to remove obvious hurdles to learning and to stage learning in suitable, manageable chunks. Thus, using texts as prompts for a discussion class that are not at a suitable input level for students will raise the learner affective filter. Texts that are too lexically dense, or full of idiomatic language can affect the amount that learners can comprehend about the text, and rob them of the opportunity to develop and work with the text, for example on their abilities to formulate clear opinions or solutions about topics or to develop and use skills of paraphrasing or attribution using the text. Not least, uncontrolled vocabulary will require the learners to do an increased amount of unstructured and unplanned vocabulary work thereby turning the focus of a text for discussion, into a text for vocabulary work.

This is not to suggest that we should not challenge learners to improve and use a more suitable or academic vocabulary, rather this author suggests that as educators, we should carefully choose the vocabulary that we want

our learners to study, then design suitable materials for them to notice it, learn it and acquire it in a deliberate and planned way, rather than assume that vocabulary acquisition happens in a vacuum. Planned vocabulary courses establish a standard for all, whether at a course or departmental level and can provide a strong foundation to work and build from for future courses thereby creating vertical integration of language and skills.

2 The 4 Goals of this Paper

This article has four goals: the first is to briefly highlight the issue of learner vocabulary needs. It briefly draws from current research and suggests a suitable vocabulary goal for materials. The second goal is to instruct, step-by-step, how to lexically profile texts using free online software, thus allowing material developers the opportunity to control and plan the vocabulary their learners are exposed to. The third and fourth goals (part two) will show examples of materials that have been lexically profiled and techniques showing how to highlight key vocabulary for study. Basic vocabulary practice activities and assessment ideas will also be given.

3 Goal 1. Vocabulary Needs & Suggested Goals

In the author's own various teaching contexts over the last 6 years, the vast majority of the freshmen learners, with TOEFL scores ranging from approximately 330–480, did not have the vocabulary ability to go beyond a basic global understanding of the average text used in a discussion class or formulate meaningful analysis of topics to have prolonged discussions about them (average text refers to a newspaper/journal article approximately 500 words in length). With this in mind, and with the decision to continue using texts as input, I felt vital questions needed to be considered and answered regarding best practice and the learners' inability to use the text prompts in the manner previously prescribed.

4 Questions to consider & My approach/possible answers

1. What kind of topics and vocabulary do the learners need?

1st year learners studying social policy and economic subjects: thus semi-academic texts such as newspaper or journal articles are a suitable starting point. However, most students lack the vocabulary to be able to deal with this type of text effectively.

2. How should vocabulary learning be dealt with in the classroom context?

- (a) Vocabulary should not be explicitly dealt with in the classroom because the class is an academic speaking class, not a vocabulary class. Thus any vocabulary work should be done as homework prior to the class to positively enhance the learners' performance in class.
- (b) Deliberate and personalised learning of vocabulary at home can be much more effective than the deliberate teaching of non-personalised vocabulary in class.

3. Vocabulary – What and How?

- (a) Lexically profile texts and control the input to a desired level, aiding the lowering of the affective filter. Avoid exposing learners to texts that are too lexically dense or incomprehensible (see paragraph below).
- (b) Clearly define what the vocabulary goals are for the course and materials and homework activities, and the words that will be focused upon (Ex: 1500 - 2000 word threshold & AWL).
- (c) Design activities around the homework texts that allow learners to focus on the vocabulary goals.

4. Should vocabulary work be graded in a speaking class?

- (a) Although a speaking class, the vocabulary work should carry some grade, to make it meaningful and add face validity to it.
- (b) Learners' homework should be collected and holistically graded by the teachers for the amount of work done. Grades can skills such as text marking, vocabulary work, vocabulary cards and vocabulary quizzes.
- (c) Vocabulary quizzes can assess if the learners are learning the targeted vocabulary and can also act as a deterrent so that learners cannot claim they did not do the vocabulary work because they knew the words already. The quizzes therefore should carry a significant grade to reward the learners for their work, or indeed for knowing the vocabulary

5. What are the benefits of adding vocabulary work to a speaking course?

- (a) Identifying what key vocabulary learners need to achieve in a course sets a minimum standard of achievement for all. It also gives them a very solid foundation to work from for the future and can be built on (vertical integration).
- (b) Lexically profiling texts by controlling the vocabulary in them will make texts more accessible to learners so they can focus on using the texts to develop their critical analysis of topics and formulate clear opinions and solutions.
- (c) Controlled vocabulary and vocabulary cards have the potential to be horizontally and vertically integrated throughout the curricula curriculum.
- (d) Has the potential to empower student and make them more confident, and also has backwash potential with gains in areas such as TOEFL/TOIEC test performance.

5 Vocabulary Thresholds

Current vocabulary research suggests that for learners to fully comprehend any extended reading text, they must have a vocabulary size of around 3000 words (Hu and Nation, 2000, Nation 2008). Nation (2008) posits that having a vocabulary of this size gives learners 95% coverage of a text: meaning that 1 word in 20 will be unknown (or one word in every two lines.) The 3000 words necessary for comprehension consists of the first 2,000 high frequency words, the 570 Academic Word List (AWL) (Coxhead, 2000), and up to 1,000 other proper nouns and words relating to a learner discourse community or academic specialty. (See Nation, 2008, for a detailed explanation of this research). Taking into account the research and the difficulties that freshmen often have engaging basic text, a logical target for material developers to aim for as a vocabulary goal is the basic foundation of 3,000 words posited by Nation. With this goal in mind, any text being used can be lexically profiled to assess its suitability and, where necessary, techniques of glossing or substitution used to control the vocabulary within them. Learners can then focus on the highlighted vocabulary and move towards a level of ability that will ensure comprehension of most texts and the ability to then use and discuss them meaningfully.

6 Goal 2. How to Lexically Profile a Text

1. Go to Lextutor's Vocab Profiler (<http://www.lex tutor .ca/vp/eng/>). See Figure 1.
2. Copy your text (making sure it is less than 2000 words) and paste it in the open window that says INSTRUCTIONS (see Figure 1). Make sure that you first delete all the pre-existing text from the window.
3. Click on the 'SUBMIT' tab (on the right side under the text window).
4. What follows is a breakdown into percentages of all the words within your submitted text, in regards to whether they are in the first 1000, second 1000, AWL or are off-list (see Figure 2).

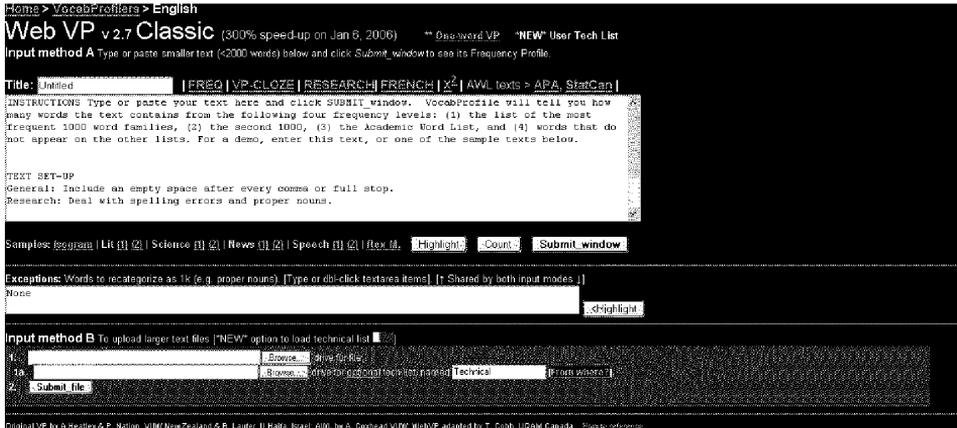


Figure 1: Lextutor’s Vocab Profiler

Home > VocabProfilers > English (Alt-arrow-left to preserve settings) > Output

WEB VP OUTPUT FOR FILE: Test run

Words reategorized by user as 1k items (proper nouns etc): NONE (total 0 tokens)

	Families	Types	Tokens	Percent
K1 Words (1-1000):	60	68	98	72.06%
Function	...	...	(49)	(36.03%)
Content	...	...	(49)	(36.03%)
> Anglo-Sax	...	...	(22)	(16.18%)
=Not Greco-Lat/Fr Cog	...	...	...	...
K2 Words (1001-2000):	8	10	11	8.09%
> Anglo-Sax	...	...	(4)	(2.94%)
1k+2k	...	...	...	(30.15%)
AWL Words (academic):	10	11	15	11.03%
> Anglo-Sax	...	...	()	(0.00%)
Off-List Words:	2	11	12	8.82%
78+?	98	136	100%	

Words in text (tokens):	136
Different words (types):	98
Type-token ratio:	0.72
Tokens per type:	1.39
Lex density (content words/total)	0.64
<i>Pertaining to onlist only</i>	
Tokens:	124
Types:	87
Families:	78
Tokens per family:	1.59
Types per family:	1.12
Anglo-Sax Index:	60.48%
<small>(6 Sax tokens + 4 families / total tokens)</small>	
Greco-Lat/Fr-Cognate Index: <small>divisor of above</small>	39.52%

Figure 2: Breakdown of Submitted Text

Integral text: instructions type or paste your text here and click submit window vocabprofile will tell you how many words the text contains from the following four frequency levels number the list of the most frequent number word families number the second number number the academic word list and number words that do not appear on the other lists for a demo enter this text or one of the sample texts below text set up general include an empty space after every comma or full stop research deal with spelling errors and proper nouns size limits web input is normally limited to number number characters use upload method below for larger files up to number kb as dec number must be txt send in straight from your own hard drive text is not stored on web vp server

Figure 3: Colour-coded Word List

5. Figure 3 shows a list of all the words (or tokens), types and in families as they appear, colour-coded for each section of the word lists.
6. Figure 4 shows an alphabetical breakdown into tokens, groups and families into the distinct word list bands.
7. Check the ‘off-list’ words and do the following:
 - (a) Remove any proper nouns and high-frequency course words that you can assume students will know.
 - (b) Remove any words that are ‘off-list’ but important for the input within the lesson. Maybe consider glossing these.
 - (c) Consider ways to gloss or switch words from the ‘off-list’ into the ‘K1’, ‘K2’ or even ‘AWL’ list, by using synonyms, simplification or elimination. Also consider any idiomatic language or phrases that may cause the learners problems.
8. Copy the words to be removed from the analysis into a separate document (Word or Notepad, for example) and press the back tab on your browser to return to the original menu screen. Finally, press ‘Refresh screen’ which will allow you to manipulate that screen.
9. Copy and paste the unwanted words (from 8) into the ‘Non-Lexical Proper Nouns’ box you see the Text Window (see Figure 5).
10. Set the title (if required) located above the text window. Then press ‘Submit’ for the second time.
11. The second time around, all you need to concentrate on is the initial percentages table at the top. However, it is worthwhile printing out

Token List

0-1000 [families 60 : types 66 : tokens 98] a after an and and and appear as be below below characters contains deal do drive enter every families following for for four from from full general hard here how in include is is larger levels limited limits many most must not not number number number number number number number number of on on one or or other own proper second send set size space stop stored tell that the the the the the the the the the this to to type up up use will window with word word words words you your your

First 500 function (49): a after an and and and as be below below do for for from how in is is many must not not of of on on or or or that the the the the the the the this to to up up will with you your your

First 500 content (33): appear every families following full general here include larger levels most number one other own send set stop tell use word word words words

Second 500 content (16): characters contains deal drive enter four hard limited limits proper second size space stored type window

1001-2000 [8:10:11] empty frequency frequent list list lists nouns paste sample spelling straight

AWL [10:11:15] academic errors files input instructions method normally research submit text text text text text

OFF LIST [?:11:12] click comma dec demo kb server txt upload vocabprofile vp web web

Type List

type_(number of tokens)

1k types: [families 60 : types 66 : tokens 98] a_[1] after_[1] an_[1] and_[3] appear_[1] as_[1] be_[1] below_[2] characters_[1] contains_[1] deal_[1] do_[1] drive_[1] enter_[1] every_[1] families_[1] following_[1] for_[2] four_[1] from_[2] full_[1] general_[1] hard_[1] here_[1] how_[1] in_[1] include_[1] is_[2] larger_[1] levels_[1] limited_[1] limits_[1] many_[1] most_[1] must_[1] not_[2] number_[10] of_[2] on_[2] one_[1] or_[3] other_[1] own_[1] proper_[1] second_[1] send_[1] set_[1] size_[1] space_[1] stop_[1] stored_[1] tell_[1] that_[1] the_[8] this_[1] to_[2] type_[1] up_[2] use_[1] will_[1] window_[1] with_[1] word_[2] words_[2] you_[1] your_[2]

2k types: [8:10:11] empty_[1] frequency_[1] frequent_[1] list_[2] lists_[1] nouns_[1] paste_[1] sample_[1] spelling_[1] straight_[1]

AWL types: [10:11:15] academic_[1] errors_[1] files_[1] input_[1] instructions_[1] method_[1] normally_[1] research_[1] submit_[1] text_[5] texts_[1]

OFF types: [?:11:12] click_[1] comma_[1] dec_[1] demo_[1] kb_[1] server_[1] txt_[1] upload_[1] vocabprofile_[1] vp_[1] web_[2]

Figure 4: Alphabetic Word List

Web VP v 2.7 Classic (300% speed-up on Jan 6, 2006) ** One-word VP *NEW* User Tech List

Input method A Type or paste smaller text (<2000 words) below and click *Submit_window* to see its Frequency Profile.

Title: Test | **FREQ** | **VP-CLOZE** | **RESEARCH** | **FRENCH** | X^2 | AWL texts > **APA**, **StatCan** |

INSTRUCTIONS Type or paste your text here and click **SUBMIT_window**. VocabProfile will tell you how many words the text contains from the following four frequency levels: (1) the list of the most frequent 1000 word families, (2) the second 1000, (3) the Academic Word List, and (4) words that do not appear on the other lists. For a demo, enter this text, or one of the sample texts below.

TEXT SET-UP
General: Include an empty space after every comma or full stop.
Research: Deal with spelling errors and proper nouns.

Samples: **Isogram** | Lit (1) (2) | Science (1) (2) | News (1) (2) | Speech (1) (2) | **Rex M.** | **Highlight** | **Count** | **Submit_window**

Exceptions: Words to reclassify as 1k (e.g. proper nouns). [Type or dbl-click textarea items]. [↑ Shared by both input modes ↓]
None | **Highlight**

Figure 5: Unwanted Words Copy and Pasted

EC2 Seminar 2008 - (Basic Academic Discussion Course)

Lesson Print	K1 words %	K2 words %	K1 + K2	AWL %	On-list	Off-list %
1A	85.59	5.44	91.03	6.12	97.14	2.86
1B	91.44	3.53	94.97	3.4	98.37	1.63
2A	89.24	6.25	95.49	3.86	99.35	0.65
2B	86.56	5.08	91.64	6.42	98.06	1.94

Table 1: Profiled Texts

the rest as a reference so you know what vocabulary is and is not being included in texts.

12. Put the data from the percentages table into an excel file and it makes for interesting reading. Below are the results of this analysis of my EC2 Seminar (discussion) 2008 course.
13. To find out how many and which AWL words (tokens), groups and families appear in your texts, copy and paste the AWL tokens from each lesson into a new document (Word / Notepad), delete any repetitions (otherwise counts them separately) and submit that new list through the Profiler as above (1 -11). Examples of profiled texts for EC2 Seminar:

The box above shows example data of text after being profiled, where the on-list words or those words coming from the first 2000 word threshold and the AWL all account for 95% or more of the text. Such an approach ensures easier comprehension of texts and introduces almost exclusively, the vocabulary that learners need to focus on to build Nation's (2008) minimal threshold level for extended reading text comprehension. Needless to say, such on-list numbers can be adjusted to make texts more challenging as the learners' level improves.

7 Conclusion

Part one of this paper has highlighted some of the issues connected to using texts, which may be lexically dense for learners and how that can affect activities and their outcome. It has also discussed what vocabulary levels are necessary for comprehension and identified what would be a suitable goal to implement into a vocabulary component of a course. Finally, it has given a step-by-step explanation of how to lexically profile a text so that material developers can profile their own texts before exposing them to learners. Part two will offer suggestions on how to present texts using a template that highlights the key vocabulary to study and also techniques for classroom vocabulary activities and assessment.

Materials Development Case Study: “Could” versus “Was Able To” Self-Study Worksheets

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1 Introduction

This article will examine and reflect on the development of a set of self-study worksheets designed to help students learn the difference in usage between “could” and “was able to” when describing the ability to do things in the past. The development process will be analyzed from the perspective of Jolly and Bolitho’s (1998) framework of material writing. In their framework, Jolly and Bolitho suggest the following steps of materials development:

1. **Identification** of a student need for materials
2. **Exploration** of the language point that will be taught
3. **Contextual** realization of the materials (exploring and thinking of ideas for how to contextualize the language point)
4. **Pedagogical** realization of the materials (creating activities and exercises, as well as their instructions)
5. **Production** of the materials
6. **Evaluation** of the materials (evaluating to what extent the materials help students learn the language point being taught)

Although Jolly and Bolitho listed these components in a seemingly sequential order, they were careful to point out that materials development occurs dynamically and therefore is an iterative process; any step can be returned to at any time and revision at one point in the process will affect the other steps as well. Still, most materials development begins with an identification of student needs. In this sense, materials development is not unlike curriculum development. As Graves (1996) states, teachers need to “find out what the learners know and can do and what they need to learn or do so that the course can bridge that gap” (p. 12).

In this case, the identification of a student need was quite accidental. The students in my university freshman writing class had just returned from a school trip and that trip happened to coincide with the teaching of descriptive paragraphs in the writing class. Therefore, upon their return, I asked the students to write a descriptive paragraph about their experiences on the trip. When I collected and graded the paragraphs, I was struck by the number of papers containing a grammatical error similar to the following example:

Because I could make a lot of friends, I had a great time
on the school trip.

From the context of the writing it was clear to me that the writer had meant, “Because I *was able to* make a lot of friends. . .” but had incorrectly used “*could*” instead. Had only one or two students made this error I probably would have overlooked it, but it appeared in so many papers that I decided I needed to address the error in class.

Therefore, I moved on to Jolly and Bolitho’s next step: exploration of the language point. While my intuition told me the student sentences were incorrect, I didn’t know how to explain *why*. After consulting a variety of resources, including pedagogical grammar books and online grammar guides, I was able to piece together the rules about the usage of “could” and “was able to”. Although both forms are used to talk about being able to do something in the past, there are some important restrictions which determine whether only one or both forms can be used:

1. Use only “*was able to*” in sentences that talk about events that occur one time in the past
(INCORRECT) He *could* fix the computer after working on it for several hours yesterday.
(CORRECT) He *was able to* fix the computer after working on it for several hours yesterday.
2. Use either “*could*” or “*was able to*” in:
 - (a) Negative sentences
I *couldn't* find my wallet.
I *wasn't able to* find my wallet.
 - (b) Sentences that talk about skills or abilities in the past
I *could* hold my breath for 3 minutes when I was a kid.
I *was able to* hold my breath for 3 minutes when I was a kid.
 - (c) Sentences which show that actions are repeated
We *could* see beautiful sunsets from our hotel room every day during the trip.
We *were able to* see beautiful sunsets from our hotel room every day during the trip.

Now that I knew how to explain why the sentences I had observed in the student papers were incorrect, I needed to think of the best way to present these ideas to the students. Jolly and Bolitho refer to this as the contextual and pedagogical realization of the materials. Contextual realization means thinking of how to best present the language point so that students can understand and relate to it. In this case, contextualization was easy, as I had ample sentences from the students own papers to use in demonstrating the error.

The pedagogical realization refers to how the materials will actually teach the language point in terms of exercises and activities. I decided early on to use an inductive approach to teach the usage rules of “*could*” and “*was able to*”. Inductive learning focuses student attention and helps them make associations with prior knowledge (Williams, 1999), which in

turn helps students retain knowledge in the long-term (Ausubel, as cited in Brown, 2007, 91-92).

Having decided on the contextual and pedagogical approaches, I immediately launched into production. As Jolly and Bolitho state, materials development is a dynamic process. Although I hadn't fully planned out my materials yet, I felt confident enough to begin producing materials and working out any problems as they arose.

2 Worksheets

The first material I created was a worksheet designed to get the students to inductively formulate the rules for using “could” and “was able to”. In the worksheet, I presented the students with pairs of example sentences. In each pair, the sentences were exactly the same except for the use of “could” or “was able to”. Sentences in which the usage was correct were marked with (O) and those that were incorrect were marked with (X). An example of such a pair would be:

(X) I *could* make a lot of friends at British Hills yesterday.

(O) I *was able to* make a lot of friends at British Hills yesterday.

The worksheet instructed the students to analyze the sentences and to guess the rules for the usage of “could” and “was able to”. In total I wrote around ten pairs of sentences for the students to use in order to figure out the rules. After producing this worksheet, I realized some students still might not be able to figure out all of the rules on their own or might make wrong guesses. Therefore, I produced another worksheet that would be distributed after students had attempted the inductive worksheet. This worksheet clearly explained the usage rules and also provided more example sentences for reference.

At this point in the development process, I decided that I wanted the students to develop productive knowledge as well as receptive knowledge

of the usage rules. Therefore, for each rule on the rules reference worksheet I also provided space for students to write their own pairs of example sentences demonstrating the rule in action.

Once these modifications were completed, I decided that as part of assessing how well the students had learned the material, I would create a homework worksheet. This worksheet had several gap-fill sentences in which students needed to decide whether “could,” “was able to,” or both were useable to complete the sentence. For example:

After searching the movie theater twice, I () finally find my cell phone.

- a) could
- b) was able to
- c) both

Upon completing the homework worksheet, I decided that the materials were finished. Therefore, I proceeded to the final step in Jolly and Bolitho’s framework, one which they claim is the most important: evaluating the materials. While evaluation often takes the form of feedback from colleagues, Jolly and Bolitho believe that student feedback is far more important for informing the development process. Although I would have liked to have gotten some feedback from colleagues before trialing the materials, unfortunately I did not have time and instead tested the materials live in class.

The materials were trialed twice, once in my own freshman writing class and once in another freshman writing class when I substituted for a teacher absent from school due to a family emergency. I received a lot of valuable feedback from each of these classes. Overall, the students seemed pleased with the presentation of the materials but pointed out some flaws in them. For example, some students felt that the inductive worksheet did not include enough example sentence pairs for them to guess all of the rules. Also, in the original version, the example sentence pairs were not grouped by rule, making it difficult for students to know which pairs to

compare to each other when trying to puzzle out the rule. In terms of the reference rules sheet, students thought it was too difficult to write their own example sentences having just figured out the rules. They preferred more practice and suggested doing the multiple-choice worksheet that I had originally designed as homework first in order to gain more mastery before attempting to write their own suggestions.

I found all of these suggestions reasonable and incorporated them in the subsequent revisions. Through trialing the materials, I had also discovered that not a single one of the students had ever been taught that there was a usage difference between “could” and “was able to” when talking about abilities or skills in the past tense; every student thought the terms were interchangeable. Realizing that this was probably the case with nearly all of our university freshman, I decided to revise the materials one more time and turn them into self-study worksheets to be placed in our university’s self-access learning center (SALC). You can see the results for yourself in Appendices A through F (reproduced with permission from Kanda University’s Self-Access Learning Center).

3 Summary

In summary, the materials development process for these self-study worksheets closely followed the steps in Jolly and Bolitho’s framework for materials development. I began by identifying the need for my students to learn the usage rules for “could” and “was able to”. I then researched the language point and confirmed the rules for myself. Next I decided on the contextual and pedagogical approaches, using an inductive approach and the students own sentences to introduce the rules. Subsequent exercises progressively moved the students from receptive to productive knowledge of the rule. Finally, through student feedback from evaluation trials, I was able to refine the materials and their ordering to best fit the student needs.

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4 “Could” vs. “Was Able To”

Japanese learners of English often confuse the phrases “Could” and “Was able to”. This worksheet will help you to learn the rules for how to accurately use these two expressions.

Below are lists of example sentences using “could” and “was able to”. If the sentence is grammatically correct, it is marked with (O). If it is incorrect, it is marked with (X). For each section below, read the sentences and try to guess the rules of when we use “could” and when we use “was able to”.

Examples of Rule 1:

- (X) Because I made many new friends, I could have a good time at British Hills.
- (O) Because I made many new friends, I was able to have a good time at British Hills.
- (X) I could finish my homework on time yesterday.
- (O) I was able to finish my homework on time yesterday.
- (X) I could find the textbook I lost last week.
- (O) I was able to find the textbook I lost last week.

Rule 1: (Hint: How many times did each event occur?) _____

Examples of Rule 2:

- (O) I couldn't find the textbook I lost last week.
- (O) I wasn't able to find the textbook I lost last week.
- (O) I couldn't finish my homework on time yesterday.
- (O) I wasn't able to finish my homework on time yesterday.
- (O) Because I was sick, I couldn't have a good time at British Hills.
- (O) Because I was sick, I wasn't able to have a good time at British Hills.

Rule 2: _____

Examples of Rule 3:

- (O) I could ride a bike when I was just 7-years old.
- (O) I was able to ride a bike when I was just 7-years old.
- (O) I could play the piano when I was a child, but now I can't.
- (O) I was able to play the piano when I was a child, but now can't.

Rule 3: _____

Examples of Rule 4:

- (O) When we went to Hawaii last year, we could see beautiful sunsets from our hotel room every day.
- (O) When we went to Hawaii last year, we were able to see beautiful sunsets from our hotel room every day.
- (O) When my grandmother was still alive, I could visit her every week.
- (O) When my grandmother was still alive, I was able to visit her every week.

Rule 4: (Hint: How often do the events occur?) _____

5 “Could” vs. “Was Able To” Rules

Use **ONLY** “was able to” in:

Rule 1: Sentences that talk about events *that occur one time in the past*

- (X) “He could fix the computer when he got home from work.”
- (O) “He was able to fix the computer when he got home from work.”
- (X) “Could he fix the computer when he got home from work?”
- (O) “Was he able to fix the computer when he got home from work?”

Use either “could” or “was able to” in:

Rule 2: Negative sentences

- (O) “I couldn’t find any clothes that I liked.”
- (O) “I wasn’t able to find any clothes that I liked.”

Rule 3: Sentences that talk about skills or abilities *over a period of time in the past*

- (O) “By 4-years old, he could read already.”
- (O) “By 4-years old, he was able to read already.”

Rule 4: Sentences that show actions that are repeated

- (O) “We could eat candy every day when we were kids.”
- (O) “We were able to eat candy every day when we were kids.”

6 "Could" vs. "Was Able To" Practice I

1. I () get a good grade on my exam last week.
 - a) could
 - b) was able to
 - c) Both A and B

2. They () arrive on time because they missed their train.
 - a) couldn't
 - b) weren't able to
 - c) Both A and B

3. You said you were going to talk to John yesterday. () talk to him?
 - a) Could you
 - b) Were you able to
 - c) Both A and B

4. No, I () talk to John. I called his cell phone but he didn't answer.
 - a) couldn't
 - b) wasn't able to
 - c) Both A and B

5. When you went to the store, () find a gift for your brother's birthday?
 - a) could you
 - b) were you able to
 - c) Both A and B

6. I went to many stores, and I still () find a good gift for my brother.
- a) could you
 - b) were you able to
 - c) Both A and B
7. When I went to Hawaii, I () hear the ocean from my room every day.
- a) could you
 - b) were you able to
 - c) Both A and B
8. () go on the school trip last year?
- a) Could you
 - b) Were you able to
 - c) Both A and B
9. I () run 12 kilometers easily when I was in high school, but now I can't even run 1 kilometer without stopping.
- a) could you
 - b) were you able to
 - c) Both A and B
10. We () buy tickets to the concert because it was sold out.
- a) could you
 - b) were you able to
 - c) Both A and B

7 **“Could” vs. “Was Able To” Practice I (answers)**

- | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. b (Rule #1) | 2. c (Rule #2) | 3. b (Rule #1) |
| 4. c (Rule #2) | 5. b (Rule #1) | 6. c (Rule #2) |
| 7. c (Rule #4) | 8. a (Rule #1) | 9. c (Rule #3) |
| 10. c (Rule #2) | | |

8 “Could” vs. “Was Able To” Practice II

For each rule below, write a pair of sentences that demonstrates the rule. Examples for each rule are provided. Check your answers with a teacher at the Yellow Sofas or the Practice Center at the SALC!

Use **ONLY** “was able to” in:

Rule 1: Sentences that talk about events *that occur one time in the past*

- (X) “He could win the race yesterday.”
- (O) “He was able to win the race yesterday.”

Use either “could” or “was able to” in:

Rule 2: Negative sentences

- (O) “I couldn’t finish my homework.”
- (O) “I wasn’t able to finish my homework.”

Rule 3: Sentences that talk about skills or abilities *over a period of time in the past*

- (O) “He could lift heavy weights when he was a football player.”
- (O) “He was able to lift heavy weights when he was a football player.”

Rule 4: Sentences that show actions that are repeated

- (O) “Every summer we could smell the flowers from our garden.”
- (O) “Every summer we were able to smell the flowers from our garden.”

Introducing Quia

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1 Introduction

Recently, teachers have been using Moodle to deliver exercises to students on the Web. Moodle is an open source Learning Management System that facilitates the delivery of various types of learning materials and activities that students can access over the Internet. Since the materials are on the Internet, students can study anywhere in the world at any time they please. Teachers can get feedback concerning the students' efforts, not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively. The Material Writer's Web site has a working Moodle installation that members can access at www.materialswriters.org/moodle/index.php. Unfortunately, using Moodle can be daunting—not only pedagogically, but also technically. The first impediment is that not all universities provide Moodle for their teachers. Teachers without Moodle access at their own universities will need to find a Web-hosting service that does. In that case, teachers themselves will need to take care of maintaining the site; they themselves will have to perform regular backups. Even though this may not difficult, it can be time consuming, and many teachers have little spare time. I would like to introduce another service called Quia (web.quia.com/web). This service may provide a set of services and functionality that some may find just as attractive as Moodle².

²Just to be clear: The author has no financial interest in this service.

2 Functionality

First, let me be clear that Quia lacks some of the functionality that Moodle provides. Moodle, since it is based on an educational principle of constructivism [1](Cole & Foster, 2008), offers several tools for collaborative work. Teachers can set up blogs, forums, chats, assignments, glossaries, databases, wikis, and tests. Interested readers can find out more by referring to http://docs.moodle.org/en/About_Moodle or *Using Moodle* [1](Cole & Foster, 2008). Teachers of advanced students might find these tools absolutely necessary. However, some may find some the technical impediments insurmountable.

Quia is a Web service that provides tools for building and delivering three types of exercises on the Web: activities, quizzes, and surveys. Teachers build their exercises using a Web interface. Therefore, teachers can begin building exercises at school and continue at home without having to copy files for transfer. If they discover mistakes on exercises while away from their main computer, they need only log onto the Quia site to correct the mistakes. After building the exercises, teachers have several options for delivery. The simplest method is to provide students with the url. Teachers will receive no information about student results using this simple method. Teachers have the option to require that students enter their names before beginning a quiz or activity. For added security, teachers can set a password that students must enter before beginning their study. For the most complete feedback—for themselves as well as for students—teachers can set up classes of students and require that students log on. In this way, teachers will get feedback about results. In addition, if teachers set up a class, students will be able to log in and track their own progress.

Quia offers thirteen varieties of activities. The most feedback that teachers can gain from activities is the length of time that students require to complete the activity. Quia offers thirteen types of activities and most are variations on the answer-the-question type of exercise. The types are: battleships, challenge board, cloze, columns, hangman, jumbled words, matching/flashcard/concentration/word search, patterns, picture perfect, pop-ups, rags to riches and scavenger hunt. Many of these are self-explanatory.

Challenge board is merely a different name for the American television game show, “Jeopardy”. I assume the difference is due to copyright. “Rags to riches” is a renaming of “Who wants to be a millionaire?” “Scavenger hunt” alone is an amorphous type of exercise that might promote constructionist learning.

Quia offers several types of quiz item formats: four non-graded (multiple select, yes-no, pop-up, free response) and computer- or teacher-graded (multiple choice, true-false, pop-up, multiple correct, fill-in, initial answer, short answer, essay, matching, and ordering). Teachers can either build a quiz in Basic mode, Advanced mode or Quiz bank mode. In the last, teachers create items that they tag with key word(s) for subsequent retrieval. In both Advanced and Basic modes, teachers can create quizzes using the formats detailed above. The main difference is that in Advanced mode questions get stored in an item bank. Teachers can reuse the questions on other quizzes or randomly select questions with a certain tag. The tags could indicate the objective of the item, for example, “vocabulary” or “verb tense”. The teacher can then assemble a quiz by building a test that chooses five random items with the tag, “verb tense”. Each student will then get a slightly different test.

As detailed above, teachers have a range of options for reporting results. Teachers have three options for what students see upon completion of a quiz: they can see only the total score, they see the total score as well as the score for each item, or they can see the score as well as the score on each item and the correct answer. Teachers can also choose to administer the quiz one item at a time.

3 Issues

The service is not perfect. One defect is the lack of a facility for grouping a collection of activities into a unit of study. Teachers might want students to work through a string of activities, each of which builds upon the previous one. The collection could culminate in a quiz or a survey. One might simulate such a collection using a frameset, but Quia does not allow people

to capture the exercises in frames. A bigger problem for some teachers will be the old-fashioned teaching approach it embodies. However, one could use it to conduct a survey and have students do some activity with the survey results.

4 Ease of use

Balancing the defect, as mentioned above, is the ease of use. Moodle can have a steep learning curve. However, perhaps a bigger advantage is that the site hosts a sort of Quia community. When teachers create exercises, they have a choice of allowing anybody on the Internet to access the exercise at www.quia.com/shared/. Teachers can search this large collection of material and find different type of exercises they had not thought on their own. One need not subscribe to the service to use this resource. However, subscribers to Quia can copy an exercise to their account and change it however they wish. Since the site includes exercises for a wide range of subjects, students can get a lot of input meant for American students. For example, a geography teacher from Pennsylvania has created a geography-based “Rags to riches” at <http://www.quia.com/rr/32310.html>. A teacher could plan a unit using this kind of exercise, either as an introduction to a topic or a project in which students make the questions.

Material writers are likely always open to new types of exercises as well as new types of delivering their materials. Learning Management Systems such as Moodle open new possibilities, but they also require a certain amount of technical skill for their exploitation. Quia requires little to get started, and teachers can broaden their use of the resource as they gain experience. I forgot one thing: subscription is US\$49.00 a year. It bears checking out.

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