FOCUS ON
VOCABULARY 1
Bridging Vocabulary

Diane Schmitt
Norbert Schmitt
David Mann

PEARSON
Longman

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In honor of your retirements:

To Paul Meara, thank you for helping us to understand how the mind processes vocabulary.

To Paul Nation, thank you for guiding us in how to teach vocabulary effectively.

Focus on Vocabulary 1: Bridging Vocabulary

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To the Teacher

Overview

We know that learners need to have a very large vocabulary in order to be able to function in an English environment. Recent research has shown that learners must know as many as 6,000–7,000 word families to be able to understand spoken discourse in a wide variety of contexts. Furthermore, learners also need to know around 8,000–9,000 word families in order to read a range of authentic texts (e.g. novels and newspapers) (Nation, 2006). Of course, learners can cope to some extent with smaller vocabularies than these, but then unknown words will be a recurring problem.

These figures may seem daunting, but even so, they do not fully reflect the learning that students must do. Each word family includes several individual word forms, including the root form (*reflect*), its inflections (*reflected, reflecting, reflects*), and regular derivations (*reflection, reflective*). Nation (2006) shows that the most frequent 1,000 word families average about six members (types per family), decreasing to about three members per family at the 9,000 frequency level. According to his calculations, a vocabulary of 6,000 word families (enabling listening) entails knowing 28,015 individual word forms, while the 8,000 families (enabling wide reading) entails 34,660 words (Schmitt, 2008). However, it cannot be assumed that knowing one word family member implies knowing (or being able to guess) related members. Schmitt and Zimmerman's (2002) advanced learners of English typically knew only some, but not all, of the noun / verb / adjective / adverb members of word families they studied.

The upshot is that learners must learn a very large number of words to be successful English users. Unfortunately, learners typically fall well short of the size requirements reported here. Laufer (2000) surveyed a number of international teaching contexts and found that some university students knew around 4,000 word families (after 1,800–2,400 hours of instruction). However, the majority of learners she surveyed only knew between 1,000 and 2,000 word families. These learners did know some or all of the most frequent word families in English (often considered the most frequent 2,000) but had woefully inadequate vocabulary sizes compared to the requirements outlined here.

What are teachers to do about this typical deficiency in vocabulary size? Clearly, the long-term goal of 6,000–7,000 or 8,000–9,000 words requires extended study, but in the short term, it makes sense to work towards a more achievable interim objective. For learners who have most of the high-frequency, first 2,000 families in place, the obvious target is the next frequency band, that is, 3,000–4,000.

Focus on Vocabulary 1: Bridging Vocabulary focuses on just this vocabulary. This vocabulary can be considered "bridging vocabulary" as it exists between high-frequency vocabulary (which mainly expresses basic everyday concepts) and the less frequent, extensive vocabulary, which allows the expression of precise, nuanced, and stylistically appropriate communication. After your students have mastered this bridging vocabulary, they should be able to talk about a wider range of topics and use English with more precision. This should put them on the threshold of using English for more academic or formal purposes if they wish. As such, we see this book as a very good foundation for the more academic vocabulary and style found in *Focus on Vocabulary 2: Mastering the Academic Word List*.

In this book, we explicitly teach 504 word families from the 3,000–4,000 frequency band, although the majority of them are from the easier 3,000 band. It would have been possible to include more words in this book, but there is

always a compromise between teaching many words in a cursory fashion and teaching fewer words in greater depth. The words in the 3,000–4,000 band are still relatively high frequency vocabulary, and so need to be learned well. Also, it must be remembered that we are teaching *word families*, and so the number of individual words taught will number in the thousands. In order to help students gain a reasonable mastery of these words, we have drawn on the latest vocabulary research to design the most beneficial exercises. The key rationale behind the pedagogy in this book can be summarized in the following points.

- Words must be encountered numerous times to be learned. Nation (1990) reviewed the literature and concluded that it takes from five to sixteen or more repetitions for a word to be learned. In every chapter of *Focus on Vocabulary 1*, each target word appears at least four times, and most appear many more times elsewhere in the book. The Strategy Practice chapters and Unit Tests provide additional recycling opportunities.
- Learning a word entails more than knowing its meaning, spelling, and pronunciation (Schmitt, 2000). In fact, there are a number of other types of word knowledge, including a word's collocations, grammatical characteristics, register, frequency, and associations. In order to use a word with confidence, a learner must have some mastery of all of these types of word knowledge. Some can be taught explicitly (for example, meaning and spelling), while others can only be truly acquired through numerous exposures to a word (for example, frequency and register information). Our extensive recycling can help learners gain intuitions about types of word knowledge that are best learned in context. We have provided exposures to the target vocabulary in both reading passages and in a number of exercise sentences, which model as many different contexts as possible. At the same time, our exercises focus on elements that can be explicitly taught. Every chapter focuses on meaning, the derivative forms of a word (word families), and collocation.
- Students learn best when their attention is focused on the material to be learned (Schmidt, 1990). To make the target words more noticeable, we have placed them in **bold** type in the chapters in which they are the target words. However, to avoid excess clutter, recycled target vocabulary is not boldfaced in subsequent chapters.
- Learners typically do not know all of the members of a word family, even if they know some of these word forms (Schmitt and Zimmerman, 2002). However, a learner must know the correct form of a word (noun, verb, adjective, adverb) for a particular context. Thus, every chapter has a section (Word Families) that deals with the derivative forms of the target words.
- Equally important for the natural use of words is collocation. These word partnerships are actually difficult to teach, but we feel that collocation is so important to the appropriate use of vocabulary that we have included a collocation section in each chapter (Collocation). The exercises explicitly teach a number of collocations for the target words. However, as it is impossible to teach all of the collocations for a word, the tasks are best seen as exercises that help make learners more aware of collocations in general and may help students build their collocation intuitions for individual words more rapidly.
- In order to ensure that the information in this book reflects the actual usage of the target words, we have researched a number of corpora, including the 263 million-word New Longman Corpus. This has allowed us to empirically determine how the target words behave in real contexts. This was particularly useful in identifying the collocations of the words, because intuitions are often unreliable in this area. In addition, the examples and sentence exercises in this