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# Extreme Vocabulary Teaching :

## The Plan That Failed

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### The Supreme Importance of Vocabulary in Foreign Language Teaching

'Vocabulary is basic to communication. If acquirers do not recognise the meaning of the key words used by those who address them they will be unable to participate in the conversation. If they wish to express some idea or ask for information they must be able to produce lexical items to convey their meaning. Indeed, if our students know the morphology and the syntax of an utterance addressed to them but do not know the meaning of key lexical items, they will be unable to participate in the communication. For this reason, we are not impressed with approaches that deliberately restrict vocabulary acquisition and learning until the morphology and syntax are mastered.

Vocabulary is also very important in the acquisition process. The popular belief is that one uses form and grammar to understand meaning. The truth is probably closer to the opposite: we acquire morphology and syntax because we understand the meaning of utterances.'<sup>1)</sup>

Stephen Krashen somehow became famous by stating the obvious. Why is it that applied linguists in general persist in their efforts to invent the square wheel? Every real applied linguist, the kind who apply their linguistic knowledge to understanding a real life message, knows that not recognising a couple of words can lead to surrender in an argument or the miscomprehension of an order. Children have a functional grammar in their communicative arsenal by the age of five. Their command of the meanings of words has a long way to go. Many never make it very far and suffer in life accordingly. Sat tests, ads for magical vocabulary expansion, and those quizzes in the Reader's Digest, once the most popular magazine among the deprived but ambitious, reflect the popular acceptance of this concept.

Notional functional grammars were once the rage and led to the communicative craze, an approach that tried to harness the urge to let other people know what you think about everything but failed to supply the sufficient means to do it. What you want to say is just not covered by the paucity of phrases provided by the textbook. A communicative pair practice can be like one of those frustrating dreams where you know what you want to say but can only howl soundlessly. We need words and lots of them. When you are in a hurry, the only effective means to an end is to know the word 'toilet'. 'Would you mind telling me...' and even 'where is...' are superfluous.

Saying that vocabulary is essential would seem to be another statement of the obvious.

Unfortunately, it leaves much unstated: what is meant by vocabulary is not on examination all that obvious, while deciding which vocabulary items are more immediately useful is even less so. Fortunately much work has been done, most notably under the banner of I.S.P Nation, to tidy things up. That work has been aided by the collection of huge amounts of oral and written language data and their analysis by computer. Less fortunately, work on vocabulary at the sub-nuclear quark level, where the same item can have several meanings depending how you view it, and at the astronomical corpus level has yet to have much impact on classroom textbooks.<sup>2)</sup> This paper is a report on an independent effort to fill a perceived gap in current teaching materials, an effort to teach English as a foreign language more efficiently by incorporating vocabulary into classroom materials in a manner never attempted elsewhere.

### **An Original Approach to Teaching Vocabulary**

This paper will not be an assemblage of ideas gathered from various respected authorities and, with the exception of the above, supported by quotations from their number one hits. Nor, though this author is ashamed that it is not the case, is it a report of a research project carried out scientifically with control groups, its results backed up by statistical analysis. It is rather a report of a teaching project that failed.

The thinking behind the project was twofold. Firstly, there was the hypothesis that learning vocabulary in the context of a story or informative piece of writing would be self-motivating and would automatically deal with the ambiguity of many intermediate level vocabulary items. The immediate inspiration behind this first hypothesis was a 1980s textbook called *Kernel Intermediate* from the Longman Company. This contained a dramatic short story in serial form called 'The Man Who Escaped'. The focus was on grammatical structure not vocabulary but demonstrated how teaching points could be woven into an entertaining context using a limited space of some 25 pages. Rereading the story and linking its events and characters with a progression of grammatical points offered a mnemonic route to mastering those grammatical points. The story was very popular with students. See Appendix 1 for a sample unit.

### **Early Efforts at Contextualised Vocabulary Texts**

Taking up this idea, this author went on to produce a textbook consisting of a story melodramatically called 'Doctors in Love' together with cloze and expansion exercises.<sup>3)</sup> This was used successfully for three years in the English Department of a junior college. It was not, however, in the least bit scientific. Vocabulary and structure control depended only on the author's sense of what was useful and what was not. See Appendix 2 for a sample page.

To improve matters and to meet the challenge of the ever-increasing demand for success in the Eiken tests<sup>4)</sup> it was decided to attempt to produce a more ambitious story that would include the vocabulary needed for level 2 of the Eiken. A commercial handbook, *2100 Essential Words for Eiken 2*, one of a series claiming to include all the vocabulary needed for each level of the Eiken test, was employed to create a coherent story that would include all the diverse vocabulary items and phrases

in as short a space as possible. This space in the end came to almost 20,000 words and 23 chapters. For a sample paragraph, see Appendix 3.

Though the text, *Young Stewardesses*,<sup>5)</sup> was put into use for two years, again at the junior college, it failed on two counts. First, attempting to cram too many diverse vocabulary items into too compact a space resulted in content that, though essentially coherent, tended toward fantasy. It moved too far outside the students' schema. It also broke the rules of extended reading by, by definition, cramming too many unknown word into a page. And second, even as a crammer's bible, the text did not fulfil its purpose. Subsequent analysis of a series of Eiken tests showed that the commercial handbook used to produce 'Young Stewardesses' was overenthusiastic in its claims. It had been naïve to believe them. The range of vocabulary items and phrases used in the tests was much wider than that in the handbook. Using the *Essential Words for Eiken 2* as a base did, however, have one significant advantage over subsequent efforts based on high frequency vocabulary only. It was necessary to incorporate numerous idioms, useful conversational 'chunks' and phrasal verbs.

### Building a Vocabulary Database in the Pre-corpus Era

So, if useful but limited manuals like *Essential Words for Eiken 2* were inadequate, what was the database behind the construction of the Eiken? What could the question setters have on paper or in their heads as a guide for including or excluding vocabulary items at the various levels of the test? Since those folks were not about to divulge commercially valuable information, this author in a spirit of 'per ardua ad astra' set about building a database that might approximate to this possibly non-existent question setters' vocabulary list. In the process this author's aims changed from hoping to provide help in scoring well in a socially useful examination to hoping to use such a database to create better, more tightly contextualised vocabulary 'stories' that would advance English language learning overall.

A two-pronged attack was decided on. One prong was the deployment of an update of Michael West's famous General Service frequency list,<sup>6)</sup> the Cambridge English Lexicon by Roland Hindmarsh.<sup>7)</sup> The second prong was a database of the vocabulary items created by hand-scanning the vocabulary indices of some sixty senior high school textbooks. The two prongs were finally melted down and recast into one spearhead with the help of an early Macintosh computer and the facility it offered to create simple HyperCard programs tailored to manipulate and combine large word lists. The results were published in a short paper<sup>8)</sup>, but also went on to form the basis of a further attempt to create teaching material that would present as much vocabulary as temptingly as possible and in as short a space as could be managed.

An amazing total of 9,560 lexical items were found the high school texts of which some 2,300 were phrasal verbs, prepositional phrases and other conversational and idiomatic expressions. The Hindmarsh basic list gives 4,470 items divided into five levels of frequency. The two lists were combined with the aim of producing a list of high frequency words that would run to between 2,000 and 2,500 items. This was found to lie at the combined list's Hindmarsh 3 level of 2,200 items. It was decided to create teaching texts based on this level on the premise that most high school textbooks would have covered most of these items, although, since there was no standardisation, each student

entering university would have had a different experience. The intention here was a positive one: to create teaching material that would turn passive into actively communicative competence, material that could be exploited in listening and speaking classes. The second reason for setting the bar at 2,200 items was less sanguine and concerns the state of English education in Japan.

### **The Second Reason for Focussing on Vocabulary Learning at the 2000 Item Level**

Despite the best efforts of linguistic science, English continues to flounder in Japan. Public notices such as 'closed' have suffered nativisation to 'close'. Large signs announcing 'Vegetable' adorn the fresh vegetable section of many supermarkets. Signs in the English section of a major bookshop are wrong. The optician's shop frequented by this author flaunts above its show window, in large and presumably expensive letters, the legend 'Glass'. Respectable broadsheet newspapers persistently carry full-page advertisements promising fluency in English through the scientifically well-founded technique of 'kikinagasu' (just listen without thinking), a clear indication that there exists a market of failed learners desperate enough to go the voodoo way. Put the player under your pillow like they do in Philip K. Dick stories and whoopee! Huckster books on how to double or treble your TOEIC score in six minutes, sorry six months, have begun to appear, another indication of the desperate desire for magic solutions.

TOEIC scores themselves continue to be unimpressive, reflecting the basic incompetence of the majority of English learners in Japan. There are even signs of retreat. Notoriously, the number of students attending universities abroad has peaked. At this author's university, taking Chinese and Korean is increasingly popular as a ruse to fulfil foreign language requirements for graduation. Where it was once possible to run spoken English classes on the premise that basic grammar patterns and a core vocabulary acquired during six years of high school were passively waiting to be exploited this is no longer the case in a world where self-recommendation has become the norm for entrance into many universities. Bums on seats is the order of the day. The level of English on entry into this author's faculty, where the mastery of English is touted as a necessary tool for international communication, is at the second year junior high school level. Or lower. This is reflected in freshman and sophomore TOEIC scores, which at this author's university in a faculty supposedly specialising in English average around 300 out of a possible 900. The TOEIC 470 point level has been defined as a state where knowledge of vocabulary and grammar is inadequate but it is possible to understand simple conversation when the other party speaks slowly. Since, at an average of 300 points, many of the students attending this author's faculty students are nearer to the 220 level, (defined as when even simple conversation is only partially understood but the protagonist is able to communicate with isolated phrases), it will be seen that remedying this at the university level in the limited time available is going to be a major struggle. However, hope springeth eternal, and this author decided to try a new approach.

## A New Approach to University English Teaching

### Grammatical Structure is Unmasterable . . .

Given then the lack of time and the plain fact that for many students English grammar, the concept of plurals, for example, was likely to continue to be a closed book, joke intended, this author decided to take a different approach, one focussed on meaning. But not, as in all available textbooks, on meaning conveyed by syntax. The focus would instead be lexical, the reasoning being that almost anyone could memorize a list of words and their equivalents. Following Krashen, sort of, syntax could come later. Even if it didn't, a kind of pidgin built around a core vocabulary would be established, one that would serve the purpose of communication both in comprehension and production. Getting a first glimpse of what is going on, through comprehension of bits of vocabulary, is rewarding and may lead to more concentrated study. This author has a recent memory of standing at a traffic light behind a couple of Chinese women in South Osaka and having his wife casually ask what they were talking about. It was delightful to be able to reply that they were talking about going shopping. Not an intense revelation for her but an intense revelation for the person who had understood something which he had been unable to do before. And, let's not forget, knowing a bunch of vocabulary is pretty certain to help with those pesky TOEIC scores, even if it only helps the process of elimination.

### . . . So Try Vocabulary Building

To reprise, the students entering this author's faculty ten years ago were unable or unwilling to learn grammar. The putting of even the simplest utterances into English was beyond them; it relied on Japanese constructions fitted out with English words. What was left as a way into learning? Phrase book style communicative routines perhaps. And perhaps vocabulary. Perhaps low-level unmotivated students could learn vocabulary at least. There seemed to be a degree of motivation for that. This author had often overheard students asking each other 'what does that word mean?' when asked to practice a simple pattern.

Vocabulary has been something largely neglected in typical English conversation course books. Often they do not even contain vocabulary indexes. The Michael McCarthy sponsored *Touchstone* series from Cambridge University Press has no vocabulary index even though it is promoted as based on the Cobuild corpus. *Interchange* is the same. Not only that, coursebooks often contain communicative situations and dialogues that require low frequency vocabulary well outside the 2000 item mark. Even worse, if there is any overall plan in the selection of lexical items over the course of a three or four book course, it would seem to be confidential information, something which can unfortunately also be said of graded readers. Words in graded readers are said to be controlled but are often clearly adapted from old texts where the only control was the adaptor's sense of the appropriate. Publishing company representatives are unwilling or unable to explain what vocabulary controls the readers are based on. Perhaps there are none.

All this disregard for the importance of vocabulary is shocking, when it should be obvious, especially when time is limited, as it always is in TEFL, that, while paying sufficient attention to the requirements of each individual communicative situation, vocabulary acquisition should proceed from

the often encountered to the difficult, from the more to the less useful.

## Vocabulary in Context

Equally obviously, the best way to learn vocabulary would seem to be in context not by isolated example sentences. There are excellent collection of lexical material available in Japan, including the JACET 8000,<sup>9)</sup> which contain good, often bilingual sample sentences of word usage. But how many people are capable of memorising 8,000 self-contained sentences?

As Michael Lewis emphasises 'Simply putting the word into a sentence may not contextualise—it may need to be realised in an utterance, in a sentence, that is part of a coherent text so that its discursal features are apparent.'<sup>10)</sup> A coherent text should be more memorable than a series of disconnected sentences.

To summarise: time is limited and many university students are starting from a low base of both knowledge and interest; vocabulary items are most efficiently presented according to the frequency with which they are found; vocabulary is ideally presented in the context of a story, dialogue, presentation or informative article. These are the reasons for this author's creating three texts based around the Hindmarsh 3 level of 2,200 items referred to above.

There are counter arguments to this plan. One, from the era of Michael West, protests that a word frequency based progression can lead to absurdities, such as learning the word 'Monday' in year one of a course only to have to wait until year three or four to around to unpopular 'Thursday'. The second, from the era of computer derived corpuses, has inspired the sourly accurate comment that 'The attempt by Cobuild to build a lexical syllabus around the most frequent words of the language has not, despite its fascinating theoretical base, met with widespread acceptance.'<sup>11)</sup> These counter arguments have to be ignored. We have to start somewhere. There is so little coordination at university level of the vocabulary being taught in the various textbooks used that any efforts made by students within each individual course are not echoed, not reinforced elsewhere. Using a single course book has the disadvantage that it would provided only a thin and disorganised diet of words. It was felt that something different was required.

The remainder of this paper will describe the texts produced together with the tests designed to measure their success.

## The Vocabulary Centred Text Programme

### Construction

As a first step, a grammatical framework that follows the same progression as most conversation course books was decided upon. See Appendix 4.

The 2,200 items of Hindmarsh vocabulary combined with the Japanese high school text lists fell into three levels. For the first of these a mere 630 words were available. For a sample of the vocabulary items see Appendix 5. Since a major problem of adult language courses is the apparently inevitable triteness of their content, it was decided to attempt something more dramatic and, since the whole purpose was to fix vocabulary in the mind, potentially more memorable. On the reasoning

that crime reports have always been among the most read sections of newspapers, the content was made to take the form of short stories and dialogues based upon criminal incidents. For a sample page of the text see Appendix 6.

Once such chapter titles such as 'Arson' and 'Burglary' had been settled on, what remained was to construct a very short story and a related dialogue of 200 to 250 words each, using only the items found in the vocabulary list. For the purposes of the stories, certain low frequency vocabulary items did have to be added, 'arson' and 'burglary' obviously, but the vocabulary content was essentially true to the basic list. The method of writing was simple: the full printed vocabulary list was laid out on the desk beside computer or notebook and the story was begun. Items in the list suggested ideas for sentences which could be developed into a story. As each item was used, a checkmark was made beside it. A sufficient number (at the time it was twelve of each) of stories and dialogues was created to provide enough material for a once a week 26 week university course. The story came first followed by the dialogue, which served to review the previous week's story. The final aim was to use the items in the vocabulary list as many times as possible and certainly at least once. mentioned This aim was achieved.

No exercises were added. In this author's opinion, most of the exercises in most commercial textbooks are perfunctory and arbitrary and seem designed to fill in lesson time and to sell expensive blank paper. The intention with these texts was to produce something akin to the open use software of the computer world and indeed the material was immediately made available on the internet, ready for electronic conversion at will into question and answer, cloze and gap exercises. Although a full vocabulary list was also made available on the internet, and to students, no lesson by lesson vocabulary lists were produced until much later. The intention was that students should deepen their acquaintance with the vocabulary items by regularly making their own word lists (using vocabulary notebooks) for systematic self-study. This expectation was exceedingly over optimistic and in retrospect a mistake. Babies are cute but need spoonfeeding.

The same procedure was followed with Levels 2 and 3 except that, while the bulk of the vocabulary used derived from each level's list, it was permitted to use items from the levels below. Thus for level 2, with 640 new items added, a total of 1,270 words were available, while at level 3 with 890 new words added, the grand total came to 2,160. For Level 2, the content was given an international informational aspect. The subject was the lifestyle and opinions of young people in a number of countries around the rich and poor world. The framework was a series of authentic newspaper articles into which the target vocabulary and grammar were woven. Some of the content was expository, most of it followed an interview format. Level 3 content followed a popular pattern in English current affairs texts. Controversial topics were presented in the form of arguments and viewpoints and rebuttals. Most of the content took the form of short speeches. This type of content was chosen because at this level more and more vocabulary items expressing abstract notions are beginning to appear. For vocabulary item and text page samples for Levels 2 and 3 see Appendices 7 to 10.

A major difference between Level 1 and Levels 2 and 3 lay in the necessary length of each textual item. Particularly for Level 2 preserving a natural, meaningful flow to the texts made it difficult to keep them compact. Textual items ran from between 400 to 700 words. For Level 3 between 400 and

500 words was the norm. In practice this led to dividing each textual item into two or sometimes three parts, teaching it over two or three weeks. This was because the intention was not to give students a reading text containing a small amount of new vocabulary. The intention was to present and thoroughly practice a relatively large number of vocabulary items, theoretically as many as thirty items in one session.

### Implementation

The three levels of vocabulary were assigned as target content over four levels of native speaker led English classes, with level three of the vocabulary being assigned to levels three and four of the classes. Around ten native speakers were involved. This author's prepared contextualised texts were offered for use not prescribed, the philosophy being that teachers who control their own material are more likely to be enthusiastic and successful. It was hoped that teachers would either use the prepared texts or find original ways of incorporating the prescribed vocabulary tasks into their own or commercially available teaching materials. This proved over optimistic. Expecting part-time teachers, who in order to make a living need to meet the needs of as many as four or five different masters, to invest a lot of time and effort was in retrospect asking too much. It can be argued that it would have been better to prescribe the prepared texts together with a set of exercises and teaching instructions, as in fact became necessary when an outsourcing company came on the scene.

Be that as it may, the prescription for each level was constrained to a simple grammar syllabus and a vocabulary list that was to be tested on twice a year and was to comprise an uncompromisable 40% of final grades. The intention was to provide students with a clear aim, an easily visible target, while at the same time leaving enough leeway to fudge grading and allow most students to pass the class and eventually graduate. (Japanese universities largely leave grading and graduation credit assessment to individual instructors. There are few joint tests for students nominally taking the same subject. There are no 'finals'.) Texts and vocabulary lists were posted on the internet and available for download.

This author, while mostly unsuccessfully attempting to persuade his colleagues to do the same, was able personally to implement the hypothesised 'ideal' contextualised text plus vocabulary formula to the tune of two or three classes a year, though in less than ideal circumstances. There is a tradition in Japanese universities of tenured staff taking on repeater classes, a less than ideal learning situation. Another difficulty met was variability in class sizes, which could be as large as forty students or more.

### Testing

As indicated above, tests were given twice yearly, the results being used as a significant part of a student's grade. The identical tests were administered over nine years with one revision after the first set of administrations to weed out egregiously unsuccessful distractors.

Tests took the form of gap-fill individual sentences with a choice of five items to fill in the gap. The annual vocabulary learning load was divided into first and second semester lists and the tests were constructed accordingly. Only items present in the lists were used in the construction of the target sentence and the distractors. Grammatical patterns were kept to the simplest possible. The



aim was to measure whether or not students' familiarity with vocabulary items had become sufficiently deep for them to usefully apply it in an unfamiliar context. Each test consisted of forty items. Test forms were retrieved after testing sessions and destroyed. For samples of the test questions see Appendix 11.

Although class instructors, who, incidentally varied from year to year, were conscientious in explaining and preparing for the tests, the hoped for 'consciousness raising' among students did not appear to take place. It had been hoped that the setting of clear, accessible targets would encourage systematic study that would eventually be self-motivating. It had been hoped that a settled objective and an environment where grades did not depend on the discretion and philosophy of individual instructors would lead to a culture with some of the aspects of an external examination. In short, it had been hoped that students would be persuaded to study. There is no evidence that this happened.

### Test Results

The subtitle of this paper is 'The Plan That Failed,' and it here that the clearest evidence of failure may be discerned. Over the nine years of testing no change in the overall pattern of results was discernible. At level 1 average scores ran from 75% to 85%, at level 2 from 55% to 65%, and for level 3 from 38% to 43%. (Owing to low intake the Level 4 classes were changed to a different syllabus after two years.) Despite the different approaches and teaching materials being used, the basic pattern remained unchanged. Worse, when this author himself was in charge of a class, emphasised weekly bilingual vocabulary testing, and always used the texts where the target vocabulary was contextualised, results were heartbreakingly the same. For this level of student, at any rate, there would seem to exist a barrier at around the six hundred word level, beyond which input becomes fatally incomprehensible.

It is possible that the tests were measuring more than just vocabulary. That they were measuring general reading ability and with it general intelligence, a subject this author has addressed elsewhere<sup>12)</sup>. It is possible that bilingual testing of individual items or some kind of recognition/matching approach as used in academic measurement of vocabulary knowledge would have produced more cheerful results. That would, however, have been beside the point, since the aim was to test to what degree students could transfer their knowledge to another context and apply it usefully. That is what is required in real life communication. An ability to match words or to fill in gaps from a textbook that has been studied throughout the year is another version of the mastery of pattern drills or grammar points that dies in the fresh air of the real world.

### The Cobuild experiment

As the applied linguistics world began increasingly to catch up with this author's thoughts and turned its eyes increasingly to lexis, a further experiment was carried out that attempted to take advantage of all the computer driven advances in vocabulary analysis that began to appear at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This experiment involved using corpus data directly, to wit the word list named Frequency Band

5 that is to be found in the Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners.<sup>13)</sup> This list is said to contain the 680 most frequent words in today's English language. They are taken from the 400 million word corpus known wittily as the Bank of English.

Once again texts were constructed with the aim of showing in context how vocabulary items are used. The texts were used in General Education English classes, by this author only, over a period of four years.

It proved very difficult to create material along the lines of the Hindmarsh/ High School textbook derived stories and articles described above. This was because of the diverse nature of the vocabulary items, which ranged from 'Prime Minister, development, and security' to 'Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday'. Many words that one would not intuitively consider to be immediately useful are present in this purportedly high frequency list, seeming to confirm Michael Lewis's doubts about their applicability to teaching.

Nevertheless, the experiment was made. Texts produced were necessarily short and of diverse content, more a series of short newspaper articles than anything else. The shortness proved salutary, making a virtue out of necessity. In each class there was sufficient time to explicate and practice the materials. Scores in weekly vocabulary and final tests were good. For a sample text and its accompanying vocabulary see Appendix 12.

### **Summary, Conclusions, Refusal to Repent**

In the face of the continual failure of other English teaching methods to produce any results worth noticing among academically challenged students at a tier 3 Japanese university, it was decided to try a vocabulary centred approach.

Vocabulary frequency lists based Roland Hindmarsh's updating of Michael West's General Service List were assigned for teaching and testing as the principle aims of a large English teaching programme over a period of nine years.

Texts were created that contextualised the vocabulary lists for each level. The aim was to have students acquire a basic 2,200 word vocabulary of high frequency items.

Feedback and personal observation indicate that although the texts were made as compact as possible, given the constraints of smooth reading, they were too daunting in length for students brought up on a diet of phrases and translation equipped single sentence examples. (Graded readers suffer the same resistance even at the lowest levels).

Lesson time at levels 2 and 3 was always too short for practice and explication, and in the majority of cases students could not be relied on to prepare and review by themselves. This is a generation of students who have been known to express shock at finding that reading a couple of 400 word passages in English was required to pass a university entrance examination.

The idea of fitting frequency controlled vocabulary to a themed, unified context seems to have backfired through the very, albeit only five hundred word, textual items that it required. Though the Cobuild based experiment spat out a peculiar mix of textual items, their very shortness seems to have made them acceptable and effective.

As the subtitle of this paper indicates, nothing that can be called success was achieved. Over the

years of the ‘programme’ test scores neither got worse nor improved, though there was marginal improvement at level 1 when an outsourcing company took over the teaching and concentrated solely on the supplied texts and vocabulary.

Much of this failure, of course, can be attributed to the general ambience of ignorance and apathy present at this author’s university. There was, for instance, no sense among students of there being a progression from levels 1 to 3 of the programme. Students happily took level 3 without passing levels 1 and 2, if there was a hole in their timetables. Nor was there any failure stimulated washback from senior to junior students as to the need to learn vocabulary systematically, and no sense of urgency in the classroom despite constant publicity regarding testing and grading. For students now entering tier 3 universities, largely through a system of self or high school recommendation, the prospect of an A or even a B grade is an insufficient motivator. A pass is sufficient. And in this author’s experience weekly vocabulary tests too have no electrifying effect on a defensive numbness: students who score 4 out of 10 on tests continue to do so throughout the year; likewise with 7 out of 10 achievers.<sup>14)</sup>

Failure of the system then. But also failure of the methods described above to achieve the longed for turn around either through growing motivation or the pressure of testing. The point of this paper has been to record a relatively large-scale effort to change unsuccessful parameters to untried ones. In particular, this author has wanted to show to anyone who might be tempted in that direction that the strategy of producing contextualised teaching materials based thoroughly and zealously on frequency lists is not after all an instant recipe for success. Anyone reading this is urged not to reinvent the square wheel.

Michael Lewis, while insisting upon the supreme importance of lexis in language teaching, thinks that relying on frequency lists is naive. And yet, and yet, in spite of all, this author still feels that frequency lists are an accessible database ideally useful for implanting a strong immediately useful foundation on which to build a language teaching course. And wonders, in the depths of the night, where he went wrong. Perhaps in a different environment.

### Notes

- 1) *Krashen S. and Terrell T. The Natural Approach*, Alemany Press and Pergamon Press 1983, p.155.
- 2) Michael McCarthy’s *Touchstone*, Jack Richard’s *Interchange*, and Rod Ellis’ *Impact* are on the shelves and prominently displayed but, though produced under the authorship or with the cooperation of major scholars in TESOL and Applied Linguistics, do not seem notably more effective than their predecessors (or competitors).
- 3) *Martin B. Bonar, Doctors in Love*, S.U. Press 1982.
- 4) Tests of English sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Education and Science. Popular among junior and senior high school students. Also known as Step tests.
- 5) *Martin B. Bonar, Young Stewardesses*, Shukugawa Gakuin Junior College, 1991.
- 6) *Michael West, A General Service List of English Words*, Longman, 1953.
- 7) *Roland Hindmarsh, Cambridge English Lexicon*, Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- 8) Vocabulary in Japanese High School English Textbooks, 夙川学院短期大学『研究紀要第20号』, 1996年2月.
- 9) JACET8000英単語「大学英語教育学会基本語リスト」に基づく出版社：桐原書店（2005/10/29）.
- 10) *Michael Lewis, The Lexical Approach*, Language Teaching Publications, 1993, p.103.
- 11) *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- 12) Martin B. Bonar, *Second Language Acquisition and General Intelligence*, 『阪南論集人文・自然科学編』 第41巻

第 1 号, 2005年11月.

- 13) Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, Second Edition, 1995.
- 14) One thing this author now partly regrets is not having provided bilingual target lists for weekly and final tests. It was felt that, as conventional pedagogy teaches, that looking up and making note of unknown items is a useful part of the acquisition process. Other teachers, however, did go in for a check list style approach, so perhaps providing bilingual lists, one more spoonfeeding step, would not have made any difference anyway.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 (The Man Who Escaped)

It is six o'clock on a very cold winter evening. All over England people are sitting down in their living-rooms and are watching the news on television or are listening to it on the radio. There is one very important piece of news this evening. It is this.

'In the west of England this evening, hundreds of policemen are looking for a man who escaped from Princeville Prison early this morning. The man's name is Edward Coke. He is 30 years old, six feet tall, and has black hair and blue eyes. He is wearing a dark blue prison uniform. The police do not think he can stay free very long. It is only a few degrees above zero and it is snowing.'

The radio is on in an expensive pub in Soho, in the centre of London. Most of the people there are not interested in the news programme, but one man is. His name is Eric Masters. He is about 45 and is wearing very expensive clothes. He is looking very afraid of something. There is another man standing next to him at the bar. Masters is asking him a question.

'Did they say the man's name was Coke?'

### Appendix 2 (Doctors in Love)

When Dr. Masaki Kubota arrived at their Ashiya office, his brother Takafumi was already there.

"Don't you know what time it is?" Takafumi frowned irritably. "It's ten o'clock now and we're supposed to start at ten. Half a dozen patients are waiting already."

"Sorry," the younger brother smiled. He had beautiful white teeth and liked to show them. "The traffic was heavy this morning. And I still don't know the road very well."

"You should leave earlier. Hurry up and get ready!" Takafumi said sharply. His leg was hurting again and that always made him irritable on winter mornings. His brother's smile irritated him too. 'I've been looking after him for ten years now,' he thought, as Masaki left the consulting room. 'How much longer will I have to go on doing it?'

He looked at the calendar. It was the tenth of December.

"Five days," he said aloud. "In five days it'll be ten years since Mum and Dad died. Why did they have to take that plane?"

There was a knock at the door and Nurse Kondo came in. She was a short rather unattractive girl with wide shoulders about twenty six years old but she did her job well. In fact, she did it better than the other nurses. 'I'll have to hire another couple of nurses, when Masaki starts working properly,' the older Dr. Kubota thought. There were only four nurses working at the little hospital.

"May I send the first patient in, Doctor?" asked Nurse Kondo.

"Who is it?"

"Mrs Kobayashi, Doctor."

“Oh dear . . . what a terrible way to start the day. Alright. Send her in.”

### Appendix 3 (Young Stewardesses)

“Are you all right? You look ill.”

“I’m all right, thanks,” said Diana. “It’s that man. When I look at him, I lose my balance. When he walks in, I can feel the vibrations. It’s like an earthquake.”

“Him? Well, I would advise you to calm down. He is only a man. What’s so special about him, anyway?” Is due asked.

“He looks dangerous. And fierce. Like an eagle.”

“He’s also bald like an eagle,” Zuju declared.

“How unkind!” Diana laughed. “You mustn’t make fun of him. I think bald men are sexy. All my idols are bald! And his head is beautiful and brown just like a farm egg.”

“Well, he hasn’t been lying under a sun lamp. He’s been abroad a lot recently. He is doing the Pacific route, Heidi says. But you know, Di, speaking off hand, I really don’t think you have a chance right now. Heidi says he is dating one of the Air France girls... she called him up fourteen times last month and asked him to take her to the Kabuki. He declined. Absolutely impossible, he said. It wouldn’t be fair to Anne-Marie, he said.”

“Poor Heidi.”

### Appendix 4 (Grammar Syllabus for Vocabulary Based Texts)

#### Level 1

Basic Grammar Introduction (Word Order, Articles, Number; Nouns, Adjectives, Adverbs, Prepositions—what are they?); “To Be; ‘To Have’; Simple Present; ‘there is, are’; Present Progressive; Modals — present tense; Interrogative pronouns; Imperatives; Verb + ‘ing’; ‘would like’; Polite Requests; Regrets; Time and Date; numbers to 100; Simple Past — strong and weak

#### Level 2

Offers; ‘prefer, would rather’; ‘How + adjective’; Future with ‘going to’; Simple Future; ‘Want’ + Object + Verb; Superlatives; ‘because’; ‘in order to’; ‘too/enough’; ‘looks, tastes etc.’; Present Perfect; ‘yet, not yet, already’; Modals — past and future; ‘ask/tell’ + Object + Verb; Conditional Type 1; ‘else’; numbers to 1 million

#### Level 3

Suggestions; Past and Present Perfect Progressives; ‘might’; Tags; ‘so’ + ‘such a’; ‘should, supposed to, must, had better’; ‘used to’; Comparisons; ‘interested’ v. ‘interesting’; Wishes; Future + Conjunction + Present Tense; Conditional Type 2; ‘so as to’

### Appendix 5 (Level 1 Vocabulary Sample)

1st ~58th	am	an avenue	before	blue
a	America	away	to begin	both

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Extreme Vocabulary Teaching

about	an	a baby	a belt	a bottle
an afternoon	and	back	beside	bourbon
again	angry	bacon	the best	a box
at the age of	any	bad	better than	a boy
ago	anyone	a bag	between	breakfast
aikido	anything	a banana	big	a briefcase
an airline	an apartment	a bank	a bird	to bring
an airplane	April	a bar	a bit	a brother
an airport	are	a basket	to bite	brown
all	an arm	basketball	black	to build
almost	arson	a battery	blackmail	a businessman
alone	to ask	to be	a blackmailer	but
alright	an assault	to become	black	butter
also	at	a bed	blond	to buy
always	to attack	a beer	to blow	

### Appendix 6 (Level 1 Text Sample)

Friday, January 26<sup>th</sup>

Murder: the Incident

Joe Kowalski is fifty years old. He lives on the north side of Gotham City, America. He isn't rich, but he isn't poor either. He works in a garage. No, that's wrong. He *worked* in a garage, fixing trucks. He doesn't work there now. It's midnight. Joe is drunk. He started drinking at five in the afternoon in a bar near the garage. Bourbon and beer chasers. He came home a minute ago.

His wife May is sitting on a kitchen chair, waiting. She is very angry. She is not wearing any make-up. She looks tired and ill. She shouts at Joe. Her wedding ring is beside her on the table.

Joe tells her to shut up. He gets a can of beer from the refrigerator. May calls him a dirty, lazy drunken pig. Joe hits her on the face with the back of his hand. She bites him on the finger. He hits her again and again.

May takes a dinner knife from the kitchen drawer. She stabs Joe in the arm. Joe pushes her back. He is a big, strong man. May falls down. She hits her head on the refrigerator.

Murder: the Trial

Judge Fairbrother: 'Why did you murder your wife, Joe?'

Joe Kowalski: 'I didn't murder her, judge. Please listen to me. I pushed her. Really, that's all.'

Judge Fairbrother: 'All right. So why did you push her?'

Joe Kowalski: 'The cow was trying to stab me with a dinner knife.'

Judge Fairbrother: 'And why was Mrs. Kowalski trying to stab you with a dinner knife?'

Joe Kowalski: 'I guess she was angry. I was home late. And I was a little drunk.'

Judge Fairbrother: 'What time did you get to the bar, Joe?'

Joe Kowalski: 'At five.'

Judge Fairbrother: 'And what time did you leave?'

Joe Kowalski: 'I forget. At eleven maybe.'

Judge Fairbrother: 'And what did you drink?'

Joe Kowalski: 'Bourbon and beer chasers. I was thirsty.'

Judge Fairbrother: 'OK. So you were very drunk, Joe, weren't you? You were in the bar for six hours, is that right?'

Joe Kowalski: 'I guess so.'

Judge Fairbrother: 'Why did you stay in the bar for so long, Joe? Why were you so drunk?'

Joe Kowalski: 'I lost my job, judge. They told me that I had to finish in a week.'

Judge Fairbrother: 'That doesn't matter, Joe. You killed your wife. I'm jailing you for five years.'

### Appendix 7 (Level 2 Vocabulary Sample)

China	already	bath	bridge	cause
Japan	also	bathroom	brush	cent
Russian	among	beach	bucket	certain
Spanish	amount	bedroom	build	certainly
able	anyone	began	building	chance
above	anything	begin	bush	change
accept	appear	beginner	business	chocolate
afraid	arrive	beginning	busy	choose
age	awake	beyond	by	chose
ago	away	billion	canned	circle
agree	bank	birthday	captain	city
almost	bar	born	case	clear
alone	basket	brave	catch	cloudy
coast	cotton	dangerous	dish	electric
common	could	decide	dream	else
company	country	deliver	dreamer	engine
completely	cousin	different	drown	enough
continue	cover	difficult	during	even
conversation	crew	dig	each	
correct	cross	dirt	earth	
correctly	cruel	dirty	edge	
cost	danger	discover	either	



## Appendix 8 (Level 2 Text Sample)

### Maria Scolari Figo, Brazil

Her father is a driver and her mother a maid. She spends part of her time living with her family in the Rocinha favela in Rio and she spends part of her time with her mother's company in Ipanema. She is at school, studying for examinations.

Q. What are you going to do after leaving school?

A. When I think about the future, I think, God, I'm going to have to try really hard. It's going to be difficult. Most people about my age think that they are going nowhere. But you have to do your best and work harder and harder. That's the key.

Q. How happy are you living in Rio?

A. Living in Rio used to be good, but I would rather live somewhere else now. You can't walk freely on the street because of the violence. I think it has got a lot worse during the last year.

Q. Do you like going to school?

A. In my school there are about 2,000 people. About 200 girls are pregnant. Lots of people in my school are already working. They don't want to study any more. They think their chances of a good future are zero. This country needs a better education system. I want to make enough money to have a good future. I want to be able to eat anything. I want to wear anything I want to. To have enough money in my purse to go and see a film every day. I want to make about two thousand reals (550 pounds) a month.

Q. What do Brazilian young people want?

A. We live in an American culture. Everyone of my age just wants to eat in McDonald's. People are not interested in politics because there is no education. Everyone just wants a roof over their head and a job.

Q. What plans do you have for the future?

A. I don't want to be a maid like my mother. I don't want to be some rich person's servant. I don't want to sweep the floor and clean the toilet. I want to have my own life. Maybe I'm just a dreamer but I want to be a Portuguese language teacher.

## Appendix 9 (Level 3 Vocabulary Sample)

about	argument	control	disturb	feeling
accident	arrangement	course	duty	feelings
actual	art	crime	eager	fine
actually	ashamed	customer	earn	forbade
admire	astonish	damage	education	forbid
advantage	attend	damp	effort	forbidden
advertisement	attitude	deaf	employment	frequent
advice	average	decision	entirely	frighten
advise	battle	deeply	equal	frightened

affair	bill	depend	equally	future
afford	blame	disadvantage	exam	gas
allow	block	disagree	examination	grateful
although	brain	disappear	excellent	habit
annoy	calm	disappoint	excite	health
anyhow	care	discuss	excited	healthy
anyway	comfort	disease	expect	highly
apply	complain	dislike	expensive	
area	connection	district	explode	

## Appendix 10 (Level 3 Text Sample)

### Liberation and Terror

‘The governments of some countries are not willing to allow their people to vote freely. In Belgravia a small élite arrange everything to their own advantage. When people try to organize political parties, the police prevent them from meeting, or even put them in prison. Recently there was a homemade nail bomb explosion outside the entrance to the Leader’s palace. Two guards were slightly hurt.’

A citizen of Belgravia

‘My country has many problems but it is dangerous to mention them aloud. When the people in command tell us to do something, all we can do is nod our heads, and obey. When the Leader makes a speech, all we dare to do is clap. There is no discussion. When he declares that the country must go in a certain direction, we dare not refuse to follow.’

A political assistant to the Leader

‘Our country is at peace. We have good international relations with our neighbors. There has been no war for thirty years, thanks to our good and wise Leader. Under his protection the people of Belgravia can enjoy a pleasant, comfortable life. I am proud of my nationality. I am proud of our national flag. This kind of attack will only multiply our problems.’

A college student

‘We have been under the thumb of the Leader for too long. We are slaves. We are more like tame rabbits than human beings. Taxes are high, rents are high. The Government froze wages five years ago. The Leader and his companions are thieves. It is time to rescue the nation from their hands. Now is the time for a revolution. We will bury the Leader.’

An army officer of high rank

‘Anyone who throws a bomb is a terrorist. We cannot permit such acts of violence. The terrorists will gain nothing by their actions. They are cowards with no sense of honor. We will deal severely with any person who joins a plot against the Leader. The army and navy will give the Leader and his ministers full protection.

Meanwhile, we will closely control all movement in and around the Palace Square. On this occasion no-one was killed, but two young men are lying bleeding in hospital.’

**Appendix 11 (Test Question Samples)**

## Level 1

1. Monday is blue. What \_\_\_\_\_ is Thursday?  
 1. day                      2. color                      3. age                      4. o'clock                      5. night
2. Mrs. Brown makes \_\_\_\_\_ with butter and eggs.  
 1. glass                      2. cakes                      3. coffee                      4. children                      5. pictures
3. Hannan University is \_\_\_\_\_ Osaka.  
 1. near                      2. of                      3. through                      4. up                      5. into

## Level 2

1. Yesterday I \_\_\_\_\_ a postcard from my friend in Sydney.  
 1. reached                      2. passed                      3. included                      4. received                      5. chose
2. I don't think that dress is going to \_\_\_\_\_ you.  
 1. fit                      2. change                      3. happen                      4. win                      5. sweep
3. I made this chair myself so it has special \_\_\_\_\_ for me.  
 1. taste                      2. value                      3. nature                      4. pleasure                      5. purse

## Level 3

1. I am \_\_\_\_\_ to say that I don't speak much English.  
 1. forbidden                      2. ashamed                      3. equal                      4. ugly                      5. unlucky
2. I don't think pink is a \_\_\_\_\_ color for you.  
 1. recent                      2. pleasing                      3. successful                      4. suitable                      5. proud
3. My \_\_\_\_\_ is tired from too many tests and examinations.  
 1. university                      2. professor                      3. attitude                      4. health                      5. brain

**Appendix 12 (Cobuild Vocabulary and Text Sample. Cobuild Frequency Level 5)**

August; September; a; always; and; any; before; building; campaign; car; chance; change; condition; decide; drive; even; final; have; information; later; local; member; my; number; order; problem; short; the; themselves; that; to; too; value; very; world; you

My problem is that I am very short. Because I am a very short person, I don't have the same chances in the world that tall people do. Even driving a car is difficult for me. Taking the elevator to the 20th floor of a tall building is difficult too. I am a member of my local Short People's Club. We campaign for better conditions for short people. Tall people are always ordering short people to do things. We want to change that. Short people want to decide things for themselves.

August comes before September. September is later in the year than August. The final month of the year is December. The number of months in a year is twelve. Does this information have any value for you?

(2012年11月22日掲載決定)