The English language is considered to have the largest vocabulary in the world (Crystal, 2002). Educated native speakers of English are expected to know approximately 20,000 word families or 70,000 words (Nation, 2001); however, educated non-native speakers of English know less than one quarter of the native speakers’ vocabulary (Laufer & Yano, 2001). Non-native speakers of English must increase their vocabulary knowledge in order to become successful in their academic endeavors in English-medium educational environments. A solid foundation of vocabulary knowledge is essential at every stage of the learner’s second language (L2) development. Regardless of the degree of the learner’s competency in grammar and pronunciation; one cannot have effective communication without sufficient vocabulary knowledge. Developing the learner’s vocabulary skills ultimately facilitates richer listening and speaking abilities (Chang, 2007; Joe, 1998; Joe, Nation, & Newton, 1996; Newton, 1995), reading abilities (Cobb, 2008; Haynes, 1993; Laufer, 1992; Nation, 2001; Nation & Coady, 1988; Wesche & Paribakht, 2000), and writing abilities (Engber, 1995; Ferris, 1994; Hinkel, 2004; Laufer, 1998; Laufer & Nation, 1995). Research highlights that learning words in a systematic manner is very important for both word retention and the facilitation of the learner’s later production (Carter, 1998; McCarthy, 1996; Nation, 2009; Roberts, 1999). This paper presents effective vocabulary learning strategies that students who use English as their second language (ESL) can use to enhance their vocabulary acquisition and the learning of English.

**Process of Vocabulary Acquisition**

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**Dictionary Potential and Dictionary Training**

One of the most essential resources for language learners is a dictionary. Research points out that increasing recognition for the importance of explicit vocabulary training in L2 learning should be
accompanied by a greater awareness of the dictionary's potential (Folse, 2004; Scholfield, 1997). The three conditions for learners to be able to say they know a word are: which words it is usually associated with (lexical patterning); what grammatical characteristics it has (grammatical patterning); and how it is pronounced and spelled (McCarthy, 1996). The most important aspect of knowing a word is the collocational partnerships of the word (Folse, 2004; Sokmen, 1997). As the word parts “co” and “location” suggest, a collocation is a word or phrase that is frequently used near the target word. Learning chunks and groups of words that go together is a very effective way to expand the learner’s vocabulary power (Lewis, 1993; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Sokmen, 1997). Monolingual dictionaries can help learners develop a more solid awareness of the collocational partnerships of words since meaning and other information are provided in the same language as the target word.

Research also highlights positive effects of bilingual dictionaries on the learners’ L2 development especially on their reading comprehension abilities (Folse, 2004; Knight, 1994; Luppescu & Day, 1993). Bilingual dictionaries help learners quickly grasp the meanings of words, especially for words that are difficult to translate into English. The immediate semantic association between the L2 word and the L1 word can help learners reinforce the meanings of words and retain them in long-term memory. However, the constant use of a bilingual dictionary holds learners back from developing both a feel or intuition for words and the skill of paraphrasing to make up for words they do not know. Using bilingual dictionaries as the only reference source may hinder them from developing writing vocabulary because bilingual dictionaries focus on the translations of words rather than usages (Nation, 2008).

Based on my experience of learning English as a foreign language and teaching ESL writing courses for over 15 years, a very useful resource that can help learners understand the collocational partnerships of words is the encoding dictionary. It is a monolingual dictionary, but it is not a typical dictionary. As the name “encoding” suggests, in the encoding dictionary, words are systematically grouped together by meaning not by alphabetical order. It presents how semantically similar words have different syntactic and pragmatic usages. The most common encoding dictionary available on the market is the Longman Language Activator: the World’s First Production Dictionary. As an example, the entry “consist of/be made of” from the dictionary is presented in the Appendix. The encoding dictionary can promote a deeper level of processing words and can help learners increase their knowledge of collocational partnerships more effectively by comparing differences in word usages based on the specific examples. As the title of this dictionary suggests, it can help learners develop receptive (reading) vocabulary into productive (writing) vocabulary. It is crucial for the learner’s literacy development that vocabulary is learned not only receptively but also productively (Nation, 2008).

The encoding dictionary can also enhance learners’ awareness of the fundamental interdependence between lexis and grammar. Learners do not need to depend solely on grammar books; they can also enhance their grammatical knowledge through the dictionary. The encoding dictionary illustrates that a dichotomy between grammar and vocabulary is not always appropriate. Research highlights that it is not appropriate to divide a language into grammar and vocabulary (Folse, 2004; Nation, 2008, 2009; Sokmen, 1997). Some aspects of language that have been dealt with under grammar in the area of L2 acquisition are actually lexical in nature (Sonaiya, 1991). Language is a grammaticalized lexis not lexicalized grammar (Lewis, 1993). If the goal of L2 education is to develop the learner’s communicative ability, then it is crucial to enhance the learner’s awareness of the connection between lexis and grammar. It is important to remember that communicative competence goes hand in hand with vocabulary competence, and vocabulary competence goes hand in hand with collocational competence.

**Word Unit Analysis**

Words can be stored in terms of their graphological forms as well as by their meanings. Graphological forms can greatly enhance word storage and recall. There are more words in English that are related by common roots or bases than many other languages (McCarthy, 1996). A knowledge of roots and affixes (prefixes and suffixes) will help learners unlock the meanings of many English words. Knowledge of word formation is very important, especially for those whose native language is not of the Greco-Latin family group. It is crucial for ESL students to study Greco-Latin affixes and roots because such knowledge helps them learn many new words “by relating these words to known words or known prefixes and suffixes, and it can be used as a way of checking whether an
unfamiliar word has been successfully guessed from context” (Nation, 1990, p. 168). Learners can also develop inferencing skills by analyzing the left flank (prefixes), the right flank (suffixes), and the center (roots), which can ultimately lead to better word retention.

Let’s take a look at the following words: convivial, revive, survive, vitality, vitamin, vivacious, vivid, and vivisection. They all have something in common: each of them is built on the building block of “vit” or “viv”. The Latin roots “viv” and “vit” mean “life” or “to live”. By learning the common Greek and Latin roots and affixes, learners can recognize, analyze, build, and use many related words more easily and quickly. Although root prediction does not work all the time, this method will help learners make fewer trips to the dictionary both for a new word and for words they have looked up before and will help them expand their vocabulary knowledge. Another effective way to use word roots in acquiring L2 vocabulary is to match a word of Latin origin with one of Greek origin, whenever the meaning of the word and the root corresponds. Let me explain this further in the following section.

**Word Parallels**

The English lexicon comprises two main strands: Greco-Latin and Anglo-Saxon (Crystal, 2002). The Anglo-Saxon words in English comprise only about 35% of the lexicon as a whole with words of French, Latin, and Greek origins comprising the rest of the lexicon; and Anglo-Saxon words account for 50% of the high frequency words that are used in our everyday lives (Nation, 1994, 2001). Learning the word parallels of Greek and Latin roots that share the same meaning is a very effective strategy for solid vocabulary development. Here is an example that illustrates the word parallel method (Nurnberg & Rosenblum, 1966, 2005):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anglo Saxon</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Greek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teamwork</td>
<td>cooperation</td>
<td>synergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birth</td>
<td>origin</td>
<td>genesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>song</td>
<td>chant</td>
<td>anthem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belief</td>
<td>tenet</td>
<td>dogma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghost</td>
<td>specter</td>
<td>phantom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most students learn the Anglo-Saxon words in the left column first since they are more commonly used in our everyday lives than their Greco-Latin partners. Many students do not know “dogma” is the Greek word for “belief”, and “tenet” is the Latin correspondent; “beverage” is the Latin word for “drink”, and “paternity” is the Latin equivalent for “fatherhood.” As learners get to know the relationships between the Anglo-Saxon and Greco-Latin words, they can develop more awareness of formal and informal registers. Their increased understanding of connotation will ultimately help them develop their writing vocabulary as well as reading vocabulary.

**Pronunciation and Spelling for Word Power**

To learn a new word, one must learn three things: meaning, pronunciation, and spelling. Learning the exact pronunciation of the new word is very important for L2 vocabulary acquisition (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Laufer, 1998). Lower-level learners may especially benefit from perceiving acoustic and orthographic similarities in words (Hennings, 2000; McCarthy, 1994). Many simple words are mis-spelled because they are mispronounced. English is not an easy language to spell. The differing spellings are the result of the complex linguistic history since English was not created at one time or from one source (Crystal, 2002). When learners get in the habit of pronouncing words with care and acquire the habit of looking closely at the word, as they read the word or write it down, their spelling is bound to improve. Taking into consideration that the relationship of spelling to sound of the English language is quite irregular, the importance of learning exact pronunciation with vocabulary needs to be highlighted.
Vocabulary Journal

Ideally, one word form would only have one meaning, and each meaning would be associated with only one form. A language such as English, however, has a great number of homonyms (same in spelling and sound but different in meaning), polysemes (word of multiple meanings), synoforms (similar spelling), and synophones (similar sounds). Thus, organizing words in a systematic manner and reviewing them at regular intervals are very important for both word retention and facilitation of the learner’s later production. Numerous studies indicate that reviewing vocabulary at regular intervals is a very effective technique for learners to develop a feel for their learned vocabulary and to enhance their learning of English (Carter, 1998; Folse, 2004; McCarthy, 1996; Nation, 2008, 2009; Roberts, 1999). Learners acquire new lexical items by meeting them at least seven times (Huizenga & Huizenga, 2000), and a minimum of 12 exposures is needed for them to develop solid vocabulary knowledge (Meara, 1987).

In a vocabulary journal, learners can include various pieces of information about the target word such as pronunciation, part of speech (noun, verb etc), lexical and grammatical patterns, register, etc. One feature that learners should include in their vocabulary journal is a synonym or antonym of the word, which can greatly increase their ability to use and retain the word (Bromberg & Gale, 1998; Folse, 2004; Nurnberg & Rosenblum, 2005). Learners can also include any personal examples (anecdotes, memories, or feelings) that can help them develop a feel for the target word and retrieve the word later. Learners can organize their vocabulary journal in various styles. They can draw images or create grids and sets to visualize semantic networks of words, which will lead to better retention.

Basically, keeping a vocabulary journal provides learners with opportunities to experiment with words. The journal is a space where they can practice words and expand meaning while they are acquiring new vocabulary, which will ultimately help them develop both their writing and reading vocabulary. Keeping a vocabulary journal will also help them become more aware of the interdependence between lexis and grammar, and it can prevent learners from being preoccupied with grammatical rules.

Conclusions

Effective vocabulary acquisition training is integral for effective reading and writing processes. The ability to read and write fluently requires learners to reach a “lexical threshold” (Laufer, 1997). Reading and writing cannot be separated from each other: the more in-depth reading they do, the more in-depth writing they can do. The more English reading learners do, the more English vocabulary they will be exposed to. However, as noted earlier, relying solely on reading to develop English vocabulary is not an effective way to expand vocabulary. It is essential for learners to combine an explicit approach to vocabulary learning with extensive reading to maximize their vocabulary power and the learning of English.

Lack of vocabulary knowledge is a problem across all areas. As Wilkins (1972) powerfully argues, “Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (p. 111). Learners should know that vocabulary plays a prominent role in their L2 acquisition and development. Learners should utilize efficient vocabulary learning strategies and resources to increase effectiveness in their vocabulary acquisition more actively. In essence, the more active they are in their vocabulary acquisition process, the more active readers and writers they will become. It is important to remember that effective storage of words will ultimately lead to effective retrieval of words: effective input always precedes effective output.

Appendix

CONSIST OF / BE MADE OF
Ways of saying that something is made of or contains a number of parts, substances etc

Consist of: Bolognese sauce consists of minced beef, onion, tomatoes, mushrooms, garlic and seasoning. / Lorna’s whole wardrobe consisted of jeans, tee shirts and sweaters. / The senior management team consists of John, Betty, and Ken. / He mixed a special drink, consisting of gin, vodka, and cherry brandy.

Be made of: The candlesticks are made of brass. / She mixed a batter made of flour, eggs and water. / What’s this carpet made of?

Be made up of: The US government is made up of two legislative assemblies – Congress and the Senate. / The United Nations is made up of more than 200 individual nations. / The jury was mostly made up of women.
Be composed of: The earth’s atmosphere is composed mainly of nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon dioxide. / The human body is composed of billions of tiny cells.

Comprise: The house comprises 2 bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room. / The city’s population comprises mainly Asians and Europeans.

References

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Guest Editorial, *Journal of International Students*

**Enriching American Riches with International Students**

*Susan C. Pearce, PhD*

East Carolina University, North Carolina (USA)

I first wish to applaud those who gave birth to this journal, which is a timely addition to the scholarly landscape. The increasing presence of international students in the United States is generally under the radar of those who study, advocate, or write about migration or diversity in the United States. And yet, as I have learned through my own research, advocacy, and interactions with international students, this is a group that is central to American diversity, and not an afterthought. I say this for several reasons. First, international students often graduate and remain in our countries because they are valued new entrants to our labor market. Only recently has the U.S. Congress recognized this fact by introducing legislation to loosen the visa barriers that many of our high-achieving science and technology graduates face when they attempt to adjust their status.

Second, international students contribute to higher education by exposing us to information and perspectives that we may otherwise have missed. My own international graduate students offer language skills that I do not possess and insights into data sources and academic literature from their home countries. Some of my most memorable teaching moments in class have been stimulated by the contributions of international students who can give their classmates first-hand accounts of the meaning of wearing the hijab in their culture, life under an authoritarian government, or alternative perspectives on textbook histories. I like to quote, with a laugh, a friend’s experience in her social work class one day, as they were discussing family life. An international student in the class raised his hand and stated, “In American society, divorce is a problem.” An American student raised his hand and disagreed: “No, in American society, divorce is a solution.” This diversity of perspective makes for important educational exchanges. Our students who have the opportunity to study abroad through programs such as Fulbright, as Akli underscores in this issue, become vital players in this exchange as they reintegrate back into their home institutions.

Our own boundaries get stretched by the presence of international students. This year, students at my university got the opportunity to splash colored powder all over each other to celebrate the Indian festival of Diwali. Further, international students open our eyes to an appreciation of our own embarrassment of riches, such as teaching methods that emphasize analysis, original thought, writing, and critical thinking. As one immigrant woman that we interviewed for the book *Immigration and Women: Understanding the American Experience* asked, why are American universities establishing branches in other countries to teach technical subjects such as math and science in which those countries already excel? She recommends the opposite: that these universities should export our more unique model to the world: “Liberal arts teach you to be educated, to think.”

In my recent research and writing on immigration, I insist that we pay more attention to a growing demographic: the cross-border migration of women, who are now the majority of immigrants globally. One chapter in the story is that of higher education. As a result of the global women’s movement and other international initiatives, a record number of women are pursuing higher education across the world. UNESCO reports that between 1970 and 2009, the increase in the number of females in higher (tertiary) education was almost twice as high as the increase in the numbers of males (UNESCO, 2012). Women are now in the majority among students in higher education in 93 out of 139 countries (UNESCO, 2012). This tide is not expected to stem. Since nearly one in five students (female and male) who chooses to migrate to another country for her/his university education heads for the United States, it is my country that is among the main benefactors of this growing female student population (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012).

There are a number of reasons behind this growth that are related to continued gender inequalities. We interviewed women for our book, for example, who came to the United States because of the educational opportunities that it offered for females, in contrast to their own countries. One was a graduate student from India who moved here to study engineering. Many of these women are graduate students who go on to become professors here in our institutions, contributing to both the gender and international diversity of our educational leaders. We also interviewed several of these women. Such perspectives offer powerful teaching moments in our classes as well. As one of my co-authors reported, several years ago, she asked her new first-year students to introduce themselves in class, and mention what
they plan to do when they graduate. After a series of the expected responses about starting an ideal job or family, one female student, who had been detained for her advocacy for women’s rights in her country, announced, “I am going back to Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban.”

Even in a resource-rich country like the United States, a very small percentage of students can afford to travel abroad to attend a university, even for a short time. Recognizing this problem and the value of such exchanges in an increasingly globalizing world, my university, East Carolina University, created the Global Classroom, which uses the latest communication technology to establish video- and computer-linked classroom experiences. The multi-disciplinary Global Understanding courses connect students in more than 40 institutions across more than 24 countries. Such initiatives can work hand-in-hand with the integration of international students, since the courses broaden and deepen American students’ understanding of other cultures and of students like themselves in those countries. Among the interesting lessons of these courses is that our students are rarely seeing a monocultural classroom on the other side of the screen. For instance, they talk with Lithuanian, Chinese, and Spanish students who are studying with the British class members in the U.K., and with a Nigerian student in our Chinese partner’s class. Thus, this growing phenomenon of studying internationally is presenting itself in unique ways in these types of “virtual” exchanges, which will likely become more common in the future as well (Global Understanding Course, 2012).

Lest our cheerleading for this diversity gloss over the more complex, and sometimes even tormenting, realities of students on the ground, our contributors to this volume offer some eye-opening critical analysis. If we owe a debt to the rich diversity that international students bring to our campuses and classrooms, one of those debts is to pay more attention to their particular needs as newcomers. This includes both more intensified feelings of homesickness and isolation than those of our American-born students, as Onabule and Boes explain in their article in this issue; Jackson and Ray also elaborate on this issue. Roy’s article enlightens us about learning difficulties that international students have in the classroom, which professors could address through some simple techniques. When universities and colleges create services and write policies, is the international student perspective at the table? While the answer may have been “yes” for years, if not decades, in the traditional immigrant gateways such as New York and Los Angeles, there are new immigrant gateways across the country that are still getting their feet wet in this regard. In my college years, I do not recall more than one or two “exchange students” per year—and they were considered exotic, even if they were Europeans. This scenario has changed dramatically, and today diversity is the name of the game across the States.

The important new ground that the research in this issue of Journal of International Students breaks can potentially help the institutions of higher education overcome any leftover monoculturalism of the past—and that includes any “gender monoculturalism.” Further, it can help those individual newcomers avert crises or manage them when they arise, both to ensure their success for their own lives, and to create enthusiastic ambassadors for our educational institutions worldwide.

References


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An increasingly diverse population of students leave their home to pursue their education overseas. Data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) indicate that in 2007, three million students worldwide studied outside their home countries (OECD 2009). This global mobility is predicted to increase to 7.2 million in 2025 (cited in Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2009). Leading exporters of international education include such countries as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Bashir, 2007; Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Some universities worldwide enrol a significant proportion of international students’ bodies. The enrolment of this student cohort is a response to increasing global competition (Choudaha & Chang, 2012) and is also triggered by the need for universities to source additional income (Stone, 2006; McGowan, 2007). For international students (particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds), an overseas degree has multiple benefits, ranging from the prestige of a degree obtained from an English-speaking country, to improved opportunities for immigration and better prospects of securing a better job and to the generic value of improved skill in the English language itself in business and in life.

What are the implications of student mobility? The presence of international students has transformed the monolithic culture of higher education institutions worldwide into a multicultural one. How institutions are coping with the changed nature of the classroom and with the different needs and expectations of international students become a key issue in international education. It is not an easy undertaking for both international students and host institutions. Entering a new learning sphere, international students may find transition and adjustment difficult. Culture conditions and shapes learning in general and language learning in particular (Gonzalez, Chen, & Sanchez, 2001) hence cultural differences and also prior educational system are believed to have contributed to the social and academic adjustment of international students. Universities are striving to address some of the challenges teaching international students for example, their language difficulties, adjustment to learning styles in western education and reforming teaching materials to suit the varying needs of the students so as to provide all students with maximum learning opportunities.

The presence of international students also has implications for the development of internationalisation of higher education, a “process that prepares the community for successful participation in an increasingly interdependent world” (Francis, 1993, p. 5). In the context of internationalisation, the development of intercultural perspectives becomes an integral part of learning in all disciplines (Crichton & Scarino, 2007). To prepare such graduates, institutions have progressed by internationalising the curriculum, for example, by incorporating international elements into the curriculum and teaching and learning activities and by expanding the study of Asian language to facilitate understanding of other cultures (Harman, 2005). Internationalisation of the curriculum incorporates a range of values such as openness and tolerance of other cultures (Webb, 2005). The cultural diversity introduced by international students provides a teaching resource for developing teacher and students’ cultural awareness and learning. If diversity is embraced rather than problematized, it can enhance the intercultural leaning of all students and staff. However, there is a serious concern that cultural diversity represented by international students was undervalued and underutilised by local community (Kondakci, et al., 2008; Sawir, 2013). Knight (2003, pp. 2-3) notes that internationalisation is about “relating to diversity of cultures that exits within countries, communities, and institutions”. Hence, how cultural diversity can be well exploited has become a compelling undertaking in order to achieve successful internationalisation of the curriculum.

Student mobility is expected to continue and to grow. Institutions enrolling international students have multiple roles not only to maximise the transitional experience of international students but also to ensure
that their presence benefits host institutions and local community particularly local students. More research on international students continues to be fruitful to unpack the complexity of students’ transitional and educational experience. At the same time, institutions should work on strategy to ensure that the diversity as part of the global environment of work and learning is recognised and utilised by the local community so as to achieve a genuine internationalisation of institutions.

References


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