

"Evaluating EFL Vocabulary Materials for Curriculum Renewal Using
"Range"

Software: A Two Stage Work in Progress"

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The University of Aizu is undergoing an examination and renewal of the curriculum on the approach to its tenth anniversary. This two-stage project contributes to that process by enlisting "Range" corpus analysis software (Nation and Coxhead, 1998-2000) to examine in detail the English vocabulary instruction currently provided to our freshmen. Computer science majors need direct instruction in three levels of English vocabulary: the 2000 most frequent words on West's (1953) General Service List (GSL), which account for 70.7% of science and technology texts (Coxhead, 2000), the 570 word families on the Academic Word List (AWL), (Coxhead, 2000), which account for 9.1% of science and technology texts (Coxhead, 2000), and technical vocabulary related to computer science, which accounts for an estimated 10%-13% of science and technology text. (Nation, personal communication.) Learners should be given strategies for dealing with the remaining low frequency words found in technical texts, including instruction in higher frequency word parts.

Two weekly, 90-minute classes, a general introductory course (GI) and an academic reading course (AR 1), teach vocabulary directly to first term freshmen. Second term freshmen take academic reading two (AR 2). GI students are assigned about 8 pages of reading homework a week and tested on a list of 100 to 120 word pairs taken from the reading texts. A total of 1,500 words should be mastered during the one term course. AR 1 and AR 2 students study essential vocabulary prior to reading the texts. They are tested on 30 of these words a week and are expected to master 300 words each term. Freshmen are tested on a total of 2,100 words.

Range corpus analysis should allow us to answer the following questions:

Stage One: Are we teaching the essential vocabulary? First term sophomores recently performed poorly on Nation's levels test of the GSL (33.6% passed) and the AWL (12% passed). In stage one, vocabulary taught and tested in GI and AR will be compared with the GSL and the AWL word lists. The words tested will be identified according to level of frequency and for their coverage of science and technology texts. This will allow us to re-evaluate the vocabulary that is directly taught in the three classes.

Stage Two: Are the two courses synergistic? Do the reading texts and vocabulary taught in one class establish and enhance the vocabulary

instruction provided by the other class? A combined list of all words tested in GI and AR One and Two will be compared with the complete corpus of the vocabulary of the texts read in AR 1 and 2 and the reading homework assigned in GI. This will yield a list of word families that are shared and unique between the two classes.

The procedures and results of these analyses will be described in detail. Copies of the vocabulary lists and tests will be offered. The url for downloading Range software is <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals>)