
Book Reviews

Vocabulary Studies in First and Second Language Acquisition: The Interface Between Theory and Application

Brian Richards, Michael H. Daller, David D. Malvern, Paul Meara, James Milton, Jeanine Treffers-Daller

Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 248 pages

Reviewed by: *Nikta Razavi*

With teachers, education policymakers, researchers, and other language professionals in mind, *Vocabulary Studies in First and Second Language Acquisition* is an in-depth look at the multifaceted process of vocabulary acquisition in both the L1 and the L2. This edited volume presents 12 recent empirical studies that investigate vocabulary use in a wide array of contexts from K-12 to university settings. It offers a systematic and comprehensive overview of how vocabulary acquisition influences, and is influenced by, the language of home and school.

The goal of this book is to present both research and practical perspectives such that each chapter offers implications for educational practice and policy: a goal that is partly accomplished. The initial chapters discuss how each study is situated in the larger theoretical framework of the role of vocabulary in applied linguistics; what the findings imply; and what practical applications are suggested for parents, teachers, and policymakers. The later chapters are more distant from this goal as they attend to more technical issues about instruments to measure a number of lexical features, also highlighting the drawbacks of earlier measurement tools.

The first section—chapters one to four—presents an investigative as well as a pedagogical perspective on vocabulary learning and teaching. This section offers a thematic selection of research in areas that deserve attention on account of the heavy effect they may have on children's later academic success. Chapter one investigates the importance of parent-child interactions in terms of the lexical diversity and density of parents' conversational style of speech. It examines the role of parents as literacy tutors and the kind of input they provide in terms of the lexical features of the academic language register. Perhaps most useful to teachers, chapter two discusses the effects of classroom activities on vocabulary-learning in primary-grade classrooms, points to deficiencies in vocabulary instruction for L2 learners, and suggests the need for curricula designed with vocabulary development in mind. Based on the notion that vocabulary size is a reflection of educational level, chapter three introduces the use of corpora for its revelation of lexico-gram-

mar and its provision of opportunities to build on children's already existing metalinguistic knowledge. Valuable to teachers seeking equality and diversity in education, chapter four discusses the linguistic differences in the spoken and academic registers of economically disadvantaged and L2 children: the longstanding debate between the deficit and the difference positions triggers a critical exploration of teaching strategies such as raising children's language awareness, increasing children's motivation for extensive reading, and other new pedagogies designed to close the present gap.

The next four chapters, perhaps most attractive to those well versed in the field of applied linguistics and psycholinguistics, home in on the features of lexicon and their applications. Chapter five describes using lexical diversity to measure differences between bilinguals' and L2 speakers' language use; chapter six explores using lexical organization to measure nativeness in comparing speech samples of study-abroad and at-home learners; chapter seven, a meta-analysis of six studies on task performance, explores the inter-relationship between lexical diversity and lexical sophistication; and chapter eight investigates whether non-native-speaker teachers' code-switching enhances or detracts from students' vocabulary learning.

The dense body of research in the later chapters on assessing measurement tools such as mean length of utterance (MLU), rare word diversity (RWD), C-tests, and Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) makes this section an extremely technical, research-based resource for graduate students and researchers. Hence although the authors seem to suggest that *Vocabulary Studies in First and Second Language Acquisition* has pedagogical applications in every chapter, the technical nature of some of the studies means that they offer implications for educators involved with research, policymaking, and curriculum design, but not really for teachers in the classroom. In this respect, the book might have achieved its underlying goal more completely by including an analysis and extrapolation of each of the 12 studies, where complex issues are presented in comparison with each other, in a more generally understandable and accessible manner so that teachers with little or no prior knowledge of linguistics could more readily apply them in their classrooms. In addition, it is possible that including research on the role of vocabulary in content courses for subject-matter teachers and those who teach content courses to English language-learners might also have been a valuable addition.

Overall, *Vocabulary Studies in First and Second Language Acquisition* is an excellent collection of qualitative and quantitative research for researchers in the field of vocabulary acquisition. It could certainly be used as a textbook for courses examining theory, research design, and practical applications in vocabulary acquisition.

The Reviewer

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The Hunchback of Notre-Dame

Victor Hugo (W. Cobb, Trans.) Retold by N. Taylor, 2004

Harlow, UK: Penguin Readers. 72 pp. ISBN 978-1-4058-5550-1

Reviewed by: *Chirawibha Sivell*

This Penguin simplified extensive reader is based on the well-known novel by Victor Hugo. As an example text from the Penguin Readers series, it has a number of desirable features: it begins with a useful introduction; its difficulty level is reasonably easy to assimilate into the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) system; it offers a practical package of exercises and supporting materials; and it comes with two audio CDs of the entire text.

Introductory section. The introduction comprises a description of the three major characters, a short biography of Victor Hugo, an overview of the social atmosphere in France around the time of the story, and a brief depiction of the literary tradition in which Hugo wrote. At just three pages in length, the introduction is not dauntingly long or complicated; it provides just enough background information on each character not only to prepare students to understand the story, but also to trigger their curiosity and keep them reading, which effectively sets the stage for carrying through with a relatively lengthy extensive-reading task (53 pages). Carefully selected information about French society in Hugo's time also prepares student readers for the emotional and historical significance of the events in the story.

Difficulty level. Rated as pre-intermediate by Penguin Readers, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* contains five chapters, a length that is, of course, beyond anything defined by the CLB. However, other CLB descriptors, together with grammar items noted by the LINC curriculum guidelines, suggest a difficulty level of about CLB 5 or early 6. The number of headwords (1,200) is not particularly relevant to the CLB, but on reading the text it is clear that most of the vocabulary is kept generally simple, emphasizing concrete and factual words that students will come across in daily life with the rare exception of some more abstract or unfamiliar words, for example, *evil*, *flog*, *sanctuary*, or *sorcerer*. Moreover, the engaging narrative context will help students deal with unfamiliar vocabulary, as will the brief but useful word list at the end of the novel. In addition, there are frequent illustrations every three to five pages. Sentence length varies: for example, on a sample page, the average was a fairly modest 10 words, ranging from three to 24.

And considering the two sentences of 20 words or more on that page, one was in fact constructed from a series of easily comprehended complex noun groups; the other was a similarly manageable conditional sentence, although it is true that its direct object was structured by paired *not only ... but also* conjunctions. Overall, the vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and illustrations correspond to CLB 5-6, and I have found that students at about this level can read this text easily and with enjoyment.

Exercises and supporting materials. The exercises at the end of the book focus on both reading and writing. The reading questions are presented in the three categories that most teachers would wish: before you read, while you read, and after you read. They vary from literal to inferential, including critical application of the text such as judging the characters or making choices by comparing facts. Equally important, all questions are designed to guide the reader to approach the story from both bottom-up and top-down perspectives: not only questions dealing with vocabulary, specific behaviors of characters, or particular events in the story, but also others addressing the cover illustration, the general background of the main characters and places, and the social context in which particular events take place. Such activities do much more than check comprehension: they activate the reader's imagination, promoting lively and meaningful interaction with the book.

The writing exercises encourage students to think about the story from many points of view, for example, if the reader were a reporter, a particular character in the story, or a movie producer wanting to make a film of this novel. The writing questions require engagement in not only basic skills like literal or inferential interpretation, but also higher-level skills like evaluating, comparing, judging, or transferring information.

Overall, exercises in the *before you read* and *after you read* categories exhibit a more or less argumentative quality that makes them potentially useful either for extended work on speaking/listening practice, or for brief discussion before writing. The *while you read* questions generally serve the purpose of eliciting literal-type answers about the story, keeping readers on the right track and helping them to accumulate enough detailed information to contribute effectively in class discussions.

Finally, the package of supporting materials includes teachers' notes, activity worksheets, progress tests, and answer keys, available from the Penguin Readers Web site: www.penguinreaders.com.

Audio CDs. The two audio CDs accompanying the book, read in clear speech at normal speed, not only have the evident benefit of permitting students to follow the story either while they are reading it or afterward, but also of demonstrating the correct pronunciation of new vocabulary or of unfamiliar place or character names. Students can experience the satisfaction of being able to understand when a narrator tells a story, and much exposure to English will be obtained whichever way students go about using the CDs.

Possible limitations for this book or the Penguin Readers series as a whole may include the observations that not all Canadian ESL programs will have a place for fictional readings and that extended texts of this nature could be unwieldy in the context of a continuous-intake program. Even so, I have found such exciting and well-supported extensive reading materials valuable for work with individual LINC-type students who are open to this kind of interesting assignment.

The Reviewer

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Book Reviews

- 136 *Vocabulary Studies in First and Second Language Acquisition: The Interface Between Theory and Application* by Brian Richards, Michael H. Daller, David D. Malvern, Paul Meara, James Milton, & Jeanine Treffers-Daller
Nikta Razavi
- 138 *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* by Victor Hugo (W. Cobb, Trans.)
Retold by N. Taylor
Chirawibha Sivell

Books Available for Review, Winter 2010

Desperately Seeking Solutions: Helping Students Build Problem-Solving Skills to Meet Life's Many Challenges, Kathy Paterson, 2009 (Pembroke).

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms: New Dilemmas for Teachers, Ed. Jennifer Miller, Alex Kostogriz, and Margaret Gearson, 2009 (Multilingual Matters).

Take-Off: Technical English for Engineering (Course Book, Workbook, and Teacher's Book, includes three CDs), D. Morgan and F. McGarry, with N. Regan, 2008 (Garnet Education).

Teaching Second Language Listening, Tony Lynch, 2009 (Oxford University Press).

Word Knowledge: A Vocabulary Teacher's Handbook, Cheryl Boyd Zimmerman (Oxford University Press).

A History of Ireland for Learners of English, Tony Penston, 2010 (TP Publications).