

Book Reviews

Focus on Vocabulary Learning

Marlise Horst

Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2019, 173 pages, ISBN 978-0-19-400313-1 (paperback; publisher's list price \$41.95)

The critical role that vocabulary knowledge plays in learners' overall language proficiency and educational outcomes is widely recognized in second language research and pedagogy. However, insights gained from lexical research are not always available to language instructors in a practical format. As a result, teachers might not benefit from these important findings. Marlise Horst addresses the need to bridge gaps between research and practice in her book, *Focus on Vocabulary Learning*. This recent release is part of the Oxford Key Concepts for the Language Classroom series edited by Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada. The book is aimed at English as a second or foreign language teachers in K-12 education, but it also speaks to content area teachers at a time when growing numbers of English language learners (ELLs) are being integrated into mainstream classrooms across North America.

Horst covers an impressive range of topics related to vocabulary learning and teaching in five well-organized chapters. The first four chapters include *Spotlight Studies* in which the author summarizes relevant lexical research within diverse K-12 contexts. Each of these chapters also includes *Classroom Snapshots*, which are for the most part transcribed interactions between teachers and students. These vignettes provide the reader with glimpses into the language-learning classroom and opportunities to gain valuable insights into effective vocabulary teaching techniques. In addition, practical activities that teachers can integrate into their instructional plans are featured throughout the book.

In Chapter 1, Horst invites readers to reflect on their beliefs about vocabulary learning and teaching in a brief survey. For instance, she asks if knowing nine out of 10 words in a text is sufficient to guess the meaning of the unknown word. Another survey item enquires about the use of learners' first language (L1) in second language (L2) teaching. A central theme of the book is the importance of word frequency in both L1 and L2 acquisition. Horst highlights the learning benefits of language corpora, frequency-based word lists, and online tools, such as vocabulary profilers and concordancers. The author outlines a principled, frequency-informed approach for prioritizing words to teach based on learners' needs. Later in this chapter, she elaborates on the components of word knowledge related to form, meaning, and use and describes the incremental nature of vocabulary learning.

The theoretical underpinnings of vocabulary acquisition are provided from a variety of perspectives in Chapter 2. Horst explains how understanding theory can inform language teaching practices. This chapter includes a discussion of bilingualism and the linguistic diversity found across Canada and the United States today. Next, factors affecting vocabulary learning from early childhood to the formative years of schooling are examined. The author clarifies why both incidental and intentional learning are necessary. She cites studies that reveal vocabulary learning gains possible through extensive reading, viewing, and gaming. Above all, Horst stresses the need to create multiple opportunities for noticing and retrieving words and emphasizes the role of rich instruction in fostering depth of vocabulary knowledge.

Chapter 3 focuses on ELLs in primary/elementary grades and the linguistic challenges that they face. Horst examines variables that contribute to a trajectory of vocabulary growth for these young learners inside and outside the classroom. These factors include the amount of language exposure and the types of input that children receive, as well as their age and cognitive development. The author explains that measuring learners' vocabulary knowledge is needed to monitor progress, and she describes several vocabulary tests available to assess children's receptive and productive word knowledge. She recommends several elaborative techniques to raise learners' metalinguistic awareness. The author advises teachers to make connections between children's L1 and the target language, for example, by drawing learners' attention to cognates and *false friends*. Later in the chapter, Horst discusses instructional practices that support children's academic vocabulary development.

The author delves into L2 vocabulary learning among adolescent ELLs in Chapter 4. She covers vocabulary growth in terms of rate and volume for middle and high school students. Various aspects of word knowledge are detailed, including productive use. This chapter also includes a section on selecting words to teach using a principled, frequency-informed approach. Again, Horst underscores the importance of academic vocabulary development, recommending the use of corpus-based lists freely available online. She describes how new and traditional technologies can enhance word learning. In this section, the author illustrates the benefits of concordancing software and flashcards—both paper-based and digital. These technologies can facilitate autonomous learning, as instructional hours are limited.

The final chapter provides a summary of the book's take-away messages. Horst revisits the 14 topics covered in the survey found in Chapter 1. She asks readers if their beliefs about vocabulary learning and teaching have either been changed or confirmed by the research presented in the book. Clearly, learning sufficient vocabulary to be successful in a second language context remains a daunting task. In light of this challenge, Horst offers words of encouragement, affirming that teachers can empower their learners through rich instruction and effective practices informed by research. Suggestions for

further reading are included, followed by a list of online vocabulary learning and teaching resources in the appendix.

Marlise Horst's background as a language teacher educator is apparent in her narrative. The content is delivered in clear, accessible language. One of the greatest strengths of this work, and what sets it apart from other books on vocabulary learning, is the abundance of practical activities integrated into each chapter that make direct connections between lexical research and L2 pedagogy. These include hands-on practice with online tools and exercises that can be used in the classroom. Not to be overlooked is a wealth of additional resources found on the book's companion website: www.oup.com/elt/teacher/fovi. Here, Horst extends the discussion of topics covered in all five chapters with supplemental activities and questions for further reflection on best practices. *Focus on Vocabulary Learning* will serve as a valuable professional development resource for current primary and secondary educators. This book will also benefit undergraduate students preparing to become K-12 teachers as well as graduate students in educational research.

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The Reviewer

Brock Wojtalewicz is an educational researcher and teacher trainer based in Calgary. His research interests include corpus linguistics, vocabulary development, and second language writing. He is currently a materials developer for the *Learning English with CBC* project.

World English 1 (2nd ed.)

Martin Milner

CENGAGE ELT, 2015, 167 pages, ISBN 978-1-285-84869-3 (paperback; publisher's list price \$52.00)

World English series is one of the latest teaching materials that skillfully weaves appealing authentic content into a well-organized structure. Presenting content from *National Geographic* and TED, the series offers an excellent selection of topics and mesmerizing pictures taken by professional *National Geographic* photographers. The most striking feature of this series is the emphasis put on different cultures and a variety of accents, which provide learners with a unique way of looking at the English language. The whole series consists of four different proficiency levels (i.e., intro, one, two, and three), and they are geared toward adult learners. The creators of the series utilized a "backward design" approach to map out the units and, thus, desired outcomes and goals, guiding the structure of all activities/tasks included in each unit. Besides, the student book comes with an online workbook and resources such as flashcards. Teachers can also access online teaching materials and