AAUSC 2018 Volume—Issues in Language Program Direction

Understanding Vocabulary Learning and Teaching: Implications for Language Program Development

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AAUSC 2018 Volume: Understanding Vocabulary Learning and Teaching: Implications for Language Program Development
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Peter Ecke and *Susanne Rott*
Editors

Abstracts

PART 1—Vocabulary Learning and Use: Variables and Relationships

Nan Jiang

Semantic Development and L2 Vocabulary Teaching

Semantic development is an integral part of vocabulary learning and teaching in a second language (L2), as an adequate understanding of a word's meaning is vital to the accurate use of new words. However, semantic development in adult L2 learning can be a challenge for both learners and teachers for at least two reasons. The first is the presence of a semantic system that is specific to a learner's first language (L1). This system often overlaps with the semantic system of the target language in a complicated and subtle way and interferes with the development of the new semantic system. The second is a lack of optimal input, in terms of both quality and quantity, that is necessary for semantic development or restructuring to take place. This chapter begins with the discussion of how two semantic systems may differ, outlining five patterns of semantic overlap across languages. It goes on to review research evidence for the difficulty L2 learners encounter in semantic development, suggesting that they often continue to rely on the semantic system associated with their L1, even at an advanced level of proficiency. The chapter ends with a discussion of pedagogical strategies instructors may use to help facilitate semantic development among L2 learners.

Ulf Schuetze

Supporting Your Brain Learning Words

Encountering, processing, retrieving, and articulating words is a dynamic and fluid process. Several brain regions are involved that are associated with attention, language, memory, and the senses (Baddeley, 2007; Pulvermüller, 1996; Schuetze, 2017). This chapter provides insight into the processes at work in the brain focusing on the formation of the language network; its interaction with the limbic system; and the capacity to direct, switch, and divide attention. Bringing together cognitive psychology and applied linguistics, teaching tips as well as strategies for effective second and foreign language vocabulary acquisition are provided.

Maria Rogahn, Denisa Bordag, Amit Kirschenbaum, and Erwin Tschirner

Minor Manipulations Matter: Syntactic Position Influences the Effectiveness of Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition During L2 Reading

This chapter reports on a study that addresses the role of syntactic prominence, that is, the perceived importance of sentence constituents, in L1 and L2 incidental vocabulary acquisition. In a self-paced reading study with 80 native German speakers and 64 advanced learners of German, we explored the initial stages of vocabulary acquisition. The results revealed an acquisition advantage for the meanings of new words that appeared as subjects in main clauses compared to those that appeared as objects in subordinate clauses in L2, but not in L1. We argue that the acquisition advantage for words with high syntactic prominence in L2 can be attributed to a higher allocation of the readers' attention to prominent sentence constituents. L1 participants did not display this benefit because their high linguistic competence allowed sufficient processing of both subject and object, main and subordinate clauses. The findings demonstrate that syntactic prominence has, so far, been an overlooked factor in incidental vocabulary acquisition, which, however, has important implications for teaching material design and vocabulary presentation.

Erwin Tschirner, Jane Hacking, and Fernando Rubio

The Relationship Between Reading Proficiency and Vocabulary Size: An Empirical Investigation

Studies of the vocabulary size needed to be a proficient second-language reader commonly arrive at numbers that are staggering. The figures most often cited are between 8,000 and 9,000 words, as required for reading novels and newspaper articles with sufficient ease and understanding (Nation, 2006). To date, almost all of the empirical research on reading proficiency and vocabulary size has focused on English, but two recent studies (Hacking & Tschirner, 2017; Hacking, Tschirner, & Rubio, in press) reported lexical minimums associated with particular American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) reading proficiency levels. This chapter builds on these data and examines the relationship between the reading proficiency and vocabulary knowledge of L2 learners of German, Russian, and Spanish. It addresses the following research questions: (1) How well does reading proficiency as defined by ACTFL predict vocabulary size measured as the receptive knowledge of various bands of the most frequent 5,000 words in German, Russian, and Spanish? (2) What vocabulary sizes are predicted by ACTFL reading proficiency levels? (3) Do German, Russian, and Spanish differ with respect to the relationship between reading proficiency and vocabulary size? This chapter will also focus on some implications for curriculum development.

PART 2—Vocabulary Teaching, Materials, and Curricula

Claudia Sánchez-Gutiérrez, Nausica Marcos Miguel, and Michael K. Olsen

Vocabulary Coverage and Lexical Characteristics in L2 Spanish Textbooks

This chapter reports on a study that examined the vocabulary coverage of elementary and intermediate Spanish textbooks used in U.S. universities, as well as the lexical characteristics of the words they contain. Concretely, glossaries from 16 textbooks were analyzed to determine the coverage of words found among the 3,000 most frequent words in Spanish, the length and concreteness of the words, and the development of these characteristics between elementary and intermediate textbooks. Results indicate that textbook vocabulary generally does not represent the most frequent words in Spanish and that words in intermediate textbooks are significantly longer and less concrete than words in elementary textbooks. According to these findings, language program directors and teachers should complement textbook glossaries with words drawn from the 3,000 most frequent words of the target language as well as incorporate techniques that ease the learning burden of long and abstract words. This analysis can also guide textbook authors on how to improve vocabulary selection for their textbooks.

Jamie Rankin

der|die|das: Integrating Vocabulary Acquisition Research into an L2 German Curriculum

While there has been broad consensus in L2 research regarding the importance of learning L2 vocabulary, and that high-frequency vocabulary should be the primary focus of that learning at the outset of L2 development, both priorities are strikingly absent from current L2 textbooks on the market. This is true both in terms of the vocabulary items presented (which bear astonishingly little resemblance to the ranked frequency lists now available), and the ways that the textbooks provide (or fail to provide) focused study and systematic review of vocabulary in general. This chapter describes a collaborative project that was designed to address this problem. It narrates the development of a lexically focused curriculum for Beginning German at the college and university level that bases its core (i.e., active) vocabulary on a recently published frequency list of German (Jones & Tschirner, 2006) and describes how the presentation and review mechanisms were designed to reflect recent research on vocabulary acquisition and retention. The intention is not to argue that this particular curriculum should serve as a model, but rather to provide a window into the process of integrating research and instructional *praxis* in a relatively neglected domain of foreign language curriculum development.

Nina Vyatkina

Language Corpora for L2 Vocabulary Learning: Data-Driven Learning Across the Curriculum

Empirical Instructed Second Language Acquisition research on L2 vocabulary has shown that Data-Driven Learning (DDL), or teaching and learning languages with the help of corpora (large, structured electronic collections of texts), is beneficial for L2 vocabulary acquisition. Nevertheless, it is still far from becoming a common pedagogical practice, not least because few pedagogical manuals and user-friendly corpus tutorials have been published to date. This chapter describes how DDL with an open-access German language corpus has been used across the curriculum in a German Studies program at a North American university. I report empirical results and present specific pedagogical suggestions and activities for using a corpus to enhance L2 vocabulary knowledge at all proficiency levels and show how DDL can help learners improve not only the breadth of their L2 vocabulary knowledge (the number of words the basic meaning of which the learner knows) but also the depth of this knowledge, including collocations, frequency, and grammatical patterns. Although this chapter uses a German program as a case study, its pedagogical suggestions can be applied to teaching any language for which open-access electronic corpora are available.

Alla Zareva

Setting the Lexical EAP Bar for ESL Students: Lexical Complexity of L2 Academic Presentations

This study was conducted with three primary goals in mind: (1) to determine how the academic presentations of native speaking (L1) college students and English-as-a–second- or subsequent-language (L2) users compared in their lexical complexity profiles; (2) to establish guiding baselines of several measures associated with lexical complexity, which includes lexical density, lexical sophistication, and lexical diversity as subcomponents of its three-dimensional framework; and (3) to determine the relationship among the subcomponents. The study was based on two corpora of L1 and L2 academic presentations ($N = 70$) delivered by individuals during regular classes. The analyses allowed us to establish not only the common lexical complexity ground shared by the L1 and L2 presentations but also some typical lexical baselines that both L2 learners and instructors should monitor in courses focused on the use of language for academic purposes. The findings are discussed in light of their pedagogical implications for language programs that include in their curricula and assessments the development of presentational competence in a foreign language.

Joe Barcroft

The Input-Based Incremental Approach to Vocabulary in Meaning-Oriented Instruction for Language Program Directors and Teachers

The tenets of input-based incremental (IBI) vocabulary instruction (Barcroft, 2012) include (a) planning for vocabulary-learning opportunities; (b) presenting target words as input in particular ways while considering research findings and theoretical advances on lexical input processing; (c) specifying how different types of tasks promote different types of processing and, in turn, different aspects of vocabulary knowledge; (d) respecting the incremental nature of developing vocabulary knowledge; and (e) promoting learning of all aspects of vocabulary knowledge, including language-specific meanings and usage, over time. This chapter explains how language program directors (LPDs) and instructors can integrate the IBI approach within programs of meaning-oriented instruction in order to increase vocabulary learning in a theoretically grounded and evidence-based manner. The first section of the chapter reviews how meaning-oriented approaches provide necessary ingredients for successful L2 acquisition. The second section reviews some background issues related to what it means to "know" vocabulary. The third section summarizes the specific proposals of the IBI approach to vocabulary instruction, followed in the fourth section by examples of research findings that support them. The fifth section explains how IBI proposals can be seamlessly integrated into language programs focused on meaning, such as communicative language teaching and task-based instruction. The sixth section presents concrete lesson plans that demonstrate the integration of the IBI approach in meaning-oriented lessons at different levels of L2 proficiency. The seventh and final section provides six recommendations for LPDs and teachers on how to incorporate IBI vocabulary instruction within the multiple levels of a language program.

Editors

Peter Ecke (Ph.D., University of Arizona) is a Professor of Second Language Acquisition in the Department of German Studies and the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching at the University of Arizona. His research areas are lexical development in multilingual speakers, language and intercultural competence development during study abroad, and the learning and teaching of German in the United States.

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Contributors

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Jamie Rankin (Ph.D., Harvard University) is a Senior Lecturer in the German Department of Princeton University, where he directs the Beginning German language sequence and mentors teaching assistants in L2 pedagogy. He is the coauthor with Larry Wells (late) of the *Handbuch zur deutschen Grammatik* (Cengage). In 2015, he was appointed Director of the Princeton Center for Language Study, which brings together students, instructors, and resources to enhance L2 teaching and learning. Research interests include L2 vocabulary, corrective feedback in the classroom, and developing new rubrics for assessing L2 written output.

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Alla Zareva (Ph.D., University of Georgia) is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at Old Dominion University and, currently, the Graduate Program Director of the M.A. Program in Applied Linguistics. Her research interests range from the organization of the mental lexicon of high proficiency ESL users to studying various language features of student academic presentations, based on small specialized corpora.