Contents

User's Guide

Chapter 1 gives you a deep look into what word knowledge is all about. You'll find that words learned in context reveal more and more about themselves each time they appear in a different sentence. And you'll find that a word's meaning is elastic, changeable, subtle, nuanced and variable. There's more to knowing a word than the ability to parrot back a single, rigid definition when asked to do so on a test. You'll also realise that using a word in a sentence (meaningfully) requires a significant amount of knowledge. We don't just jump from being able to tell a definition to being able to use a word productively. There's a continuum of knowledge from Point A to Point B.

Chapter 2 may help you change your mind about the words – both the kinds of words and the amount – that you should be explicitly teaching. We make the case for relying heavily on a list that we're calling *Generic Academic Vocabulary* (GAV). You'll learn all about it in Chapter 2, plus various classroom activities that will allow students to process the words through meaningful use and analysis.

Chapter 3 explains the important difference between words we know because we've heard or read them and words we know because we've actually used them. The first category is called our *receptive* vocabulary; the second, our *productive* vocabulary. This chapter provides applications that will move the words along the continuum from total unfamiliarity, to receptive recognition, to productive use.

Chapter 4 we talk about the instructional implications of how the brain learns best. When we compare the ways in which brains learn best to the ways in which many classrooms and schools operate, we often find a gap. Practices such as worksheets that are done in silence, lists of unconnected words out of context and memorisation that is unconnected to meaning are a few of the outdated practices that don't comport with the way brains like to soak up information.

Chapter 5: Continuing within the landscape of the brain, we talk about word storage in chapter 5. We explain how the brain operates like a file system that has all kinds of interrelated access points through which words may be retrieved.

Chapter 6 explains how words are learned and remembered through deep processing. In practical terms, that means that we need various engagements with new words, engagements that allow those new words to really make themselves at home in the brain's schema. We take you through a detailed analysis of many traditional vocabulary activities/assessments in terms of their depth of processing and the likelihood that they would result in durable learning. We also match depth of processing activities to Bloom's taxonomy.

Chapter 7 delves into the whole idea of guessing from context. We make the point that not all contexts are alike. Some sentences and surrounding text are much more revealing than others. Certain kinds of key words and punctuation need to be read as context clues.

Chapter 8, The last chapter addresses assessment in a way that takes the subtleties of vocabulary learning into account. As we say throughout the book, we'd like to move you beyond traditional assessments that usually are capable only of a superficial reading of the extent to which a student knows a word.

2

What Do You Know When You "Know" a Word?

So let's face it: teaching vocabulary in the traditional manner has not proven to be very successful. Students are given a list of words on Monday, asked to look them up and memorise them during the week, and given a test on Friday, a test that often includes the instruction to use some or all of the words in sentences. By the following Friday, students have "forgotten" most of the words that they "knew" the previous Friday.

One of the primary reasons for the failure of traditional vocabulary instruction is that people seriously underestimate what knowledge is necessary in order to be in total control of a word, that is, to be able to use words in sentences of your own making. Thus, we would like to begin our trip into Vocabulary Land by helping you to appreciate what native speakers know when they truly know a word – to appreciate the extent to which vocabulary truly is at the centre of language. We do not present this information because you will have to teach it to your native-speaking students; we present the information to help you appreciate the complexities of vocabulary acquisition. Once you have gained an appreciation for this body of knowledge, you will better understand why past efforts at vocabulary instruction have been, for the most part, less than successful. This information will then serve as a backdrop against which we will present methods and activities that help students acquire vocabulary that, with proper exposure, lasts a lifetime. Let's get started!

What Do You Know?

If you were to ask the average person on the street what knowing a word entails, you would most likely get a list of three items:

1. Its meaning

2. Its pronunciation

3. Its spelling

(Some people might add a fourth item: How to use it in a sentence. However, knowing "how to use it in a sentence" glosses over a huge body of information, so let's hold off on that one.)

These three areas of knowledge are, obviously, critically important. But they only scratch the surface. Let's poke around a bit and see what else you know when you know a word.[1]

Derivations

When you know a word, you know how it can change. To illustrate, fill in the empty cells in Figure 2.1, thinking about the knowledge that you possess that allows you to do this task so easily. We'll do the first one for you:

Figure 2.1. Prefixes

Positive	Negative
legal	*illegal*
possible	
relevant	
appear	
divisible	
reliable	

Would it ever occur to you to say something like "You can't do that – that's dispossible"? Or "That's unlegal"? Of course not – to a native speaker of English, that sounds incredibly wrong. Yet, you probably can't explain why you know that the negative form of "reliable" is "unreliable" and not "disreliable" or "inreliable". You produce the word "unreliable" because that's the form that you've heard repeatedly. You've come to know it intuitively.

Figure 2.1 deals with prefixes – things added to the left side of words. Now let's look at suffixes – the right side.

Figure 2.2. Suffixes

Country	People
China	*Chinese*
Cuba	
Brazil	
Iraq	
Spain	
Germany	
France	
Holland	

---

[1] We are referring here to the knowledge that a native speaker has about English. Non-native speakers, even advanced ones, may very well have gaps, especially with some of the finer points.

Would it ever occur to you to say "He speaks Chinan" or "He speaks Cubese"? Again, the answer is obvious: of course not. Think about how your knowledge grows out of having heard the word forms that you've heard repeatedly, developing your intuition about adding suffixes.

Figure 2.1 shows six different ways to change a word from positive to negative and Figure 2.2 shows eight different ways to change from the country to the people of that country. So you can see that you already know what derivations are in English – and so do your students. They just don't use the word *derivation* to speak of the many changes that can be made to a word that they know.

Do you remember memorising lists of this kind of stuff as a child? ("Let's see: the opposite of *appear* is *disappear*, but the opposite of *possible* is *impossible*. How can I remember that?") Again, of course not – you learned this information naturally as you were acquiring English. And these examples only represent the tip of the iceberg: The body of knowledge that you have about word derivations is immense!

Classroom Application

Help students give themselves credit for their intuition about word derivations. By giving themselves due credit for their ability to change the forms of words that they know, students will broaden their understanding of what it is to know a word.

Activity 1: Group Fill-In

Do Figures 2.1 and 2.2 as a class activity. Tell the students that you want to help them appreciate how much they already know about English vocabulary. The steps are as follows:

♦ Present Figure 2.1 to your class orally, much in the same manner as we presented it to you in writing: Tell the class that you will give them the positive and that you want them to give you the negative. Model the activity with the first row of the table. Then read each word in the left-hand column and ask students, as a group, to give you the negative form.

♦ Introduce the term *derivation*. Tell the class that just knowing a word isn't enough: you have to know how to change words to make them fit the situation.

♦ Give them a couple of wrong derivations to let them see how silly they sound (*dispossible*, for example). Then ask them *why* the opposite of *appear* is *disappear*, but the opposite of *possible* is *impossible*. (There is no answer; derivations are often not logical.)

♦ If *prefix* is a new concept for your students, introduce it now. Tell them that this exercise has worked with prefixes, things you add to the beginning of words.

♦ If *suffix* is a new concept, introduce it now. Tell your students that you are now going to show them a bit about what they know about suffixes – things you add to the end of words. Then do Figure 2.2 in the same manner as you did Figure 2.1.

This activity takes much longer to write up than to do in class. Plan on spending between 5 and 10 minutes on the whole exercise, depending on how much discussion your questions generate.

<div style="background:#d9d9d9;padding:8px;text-align:center">

Activity 2: Noun-Making Suffixes: Transforming Adjectives and Verbs into Nouns

</div>

The purpose of this activity is to have students understand that their ability to turn an adjective or verb into a noun creates an abstract idea. The process is simple: You list several common noun-making suffixes on the board. Meanwhile, students create a list of verbs and adjectives about a particular topic. You may use the topics such as food, music, sports, animals or something that is related to your current readings: "Write ten verbs that tell what a character in a novel is doing; write ten adjectives that describe the character's personality." What we're then going to do is match up these words with the noun-making suffixes, to the extent that we can. Of course, not all of the words will be able to play the role of noun by dressing in any of the "noun costumes".

Have dictionaries on hand so that students can verify whether a "nounified" word is legitimate.

The most common noun-making suffixes are *-ment, -ness, -hood, -tion (-sion), -ity, -ism, -itude, -ence, -ance, -ist, -er, -or*.

To extend this activity, you can create adjectives out of nouns and verbs with these suffixes: *-y; -ish, -al,-ive, -ful, -able, -ible, -en*. You can create verbs out of nouns and adjectives with these suffixes: *-ise, -ify*.

When students engage in this word-synthesising activity, they become more comfortable in the realm of Latinate words, words that are commonly used for academic and business communication.

Of course, spelling must be considered when we add a suffix. (Actually, there are spelling implications involved when we add a prefix as well, but adding a prefix is a simple matter: no letters get dropped or doubled when we add a prefix.) Instead of giving the students the spelling rules, which they no doubt have heard before, have them verify spellings in a dictionary. Then, if you intend to delve into spelling patterns, have them group the words in accordance with whether they stay the same, drop a silent *e*, double the final consonant, or change a letter in the stem of the word when adding a prefix. By observing the groupings, have the students use inductive reasoning to generate a rule that describes the spelling patterns. (When students generate a rule based on their own observations about patterns, that rule is learned much more durably than when they are simply *given* the rule and asked to apply it.)

Collocations

Collocation refers to our knowledge about what words fit with each other. Why, for example, do we say a **piece of paper**? Why not a **unit**, **portion**, **section**, **chunk** or **slice**? There is no logical reason – in English, we say a **piece of paper**. That's all.

When you know a word, you know what that word goes together with – a truly *enormous* body of knowledge. Here are just a few of the thousands and thousands of examples:

1. I _____ afford to buy a new car. (Only *can* or *cannot* fits here.)

2. solar _____, nervous _____, stereo _____, digestive _____, get it out of your _____ (Only *system* fits in all the blanks.)

3. Why can a toilet run, but a sink cannot? Why can the air conditioner be running but a toaster cannot?

4. bread and butter (never butter and bread), knife and fork, bride and groom, etc. These pairings are called *freezes*: collocations that are normally spoken in a specific order.

5. Why am I mad *at* you (not *with*, *by*, *of*, etc.)?

6. Notice what happens to the meaning when we change the combination of words with look: look up, look down on, look forward to, look in on, look like, look into, look over, look up to.

There is another "hidden" piece of knowledge that you have about verb phrases such as the ones listed in #6: you know when you can rearrange things by separating these phrases. Look at Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3. Separateable?

Unseparated	Separated
look up the word	**look** the word **up**
look over the book	**look** the book **over**
look down on John	*****look** John **down on** *****look down** John **on**
look into the decision	*****look** the decision **into**

We use an asterisk (*) to flag sentences or phrases that are not properly formed.

Classroom Applications

Phrasal verbs offer two important instructional implications:

1. They are vexing to English-language learners.

2. They are conversational in tone.

We can address the first implication, the trouble that English-language learners have with phrasal verbs, by developing the habit of self-translating as we use these phrasal verbs with students. We can also encourage them to take special notice of phrasal verbs that they hear in conversation. An enjoyable and productive way to do this is to ask students to watch sitcoms, listening carefully for phrasal verbs. (Because the language register of sitcoms is casual and conversational, they will hear a lot of phrasal verbs.) Have them keep a journal of two or three phrasal verbs that they hear for each sitcom, along with the context: What is the speaker trying to convey in the sentence that has the phrasal verb?

We can use this activity to elevate the language of our native speakers as well, because phrasal verbs, being conversational, usually have a Latinate correspondent; that is, for every casual phrasal verb, there's a more formal word that matches it, or that comes close, as shown in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4. Phrasal Verbs and Latinate Correspondents

Phrasal Verb	Latinate Correspondent
make up	consist
set up	establish, institute
point out	indicate
help out	assist
end up	conclude
keep up	maintain
figure out	perceive, deduce
lock up, lock out, lock in	secure
move out, move over, switch around	transfer
give in	consent
sign up	register
leave out	exclude
line up	correspond
think up	scheme

Connotations

When you know a word, you not only know what a word actually means, you also know its connotations. You can explain connotations to students as "the emotional freight of a word", or "the feelings that you get when you hear a particular word".

1. What is the difference between "We will *eat* at 6.00" and "We will *dine* at 6.00"?

2. What is the difference between *house*, *home*, *domicile*, *residence*, *living quarters*, *pad*, *crib*? With what audience or context might you use each?

Classroom Application

Have students enact a conflict, such as an argument over a parking spot or choice seat. Have them do the enactment in two ways: First, using language that is as polite and diplomatic as possible; then, using incendiary language to express the same ideas. When they plan out their words, they should concentrate on "translations" from words that have neutral or positive connotations to those that have negative connotations, rather than just adding words to spark a confrontation.