**New General, Academic, and Specialized Word Lists for Vocabulary Teaching**

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0. **Introduction/Outline**  
1) Reflecting on/discussing word lists and language teaching  
2) Background: Some context from the literature  
3) What are some important lists?  
4) How have or might such lists be used?  
5) Discussion: Further issues/possibilities to consider  
6) Conclusion (question & answer time)  
7) References/Further reading

1. **Reflection/Discussion** (See separate sheet with questions; we’ll discuss them briefly)

2. **Background: Some context from the literature**
   - The role of vocabulary in ESL learning and teaching has been recognized for some time, and a significant amount of related research has appeared in the last two decades or so (Lessard-Clouston, 2013; Nation, 2013; Zimmerman, 2009). In particular, word lists exist for general English (West’s, 1953, general service list GSL) and academic vocabulary in English (Xue & Nation’s, 1985, university word list UWL & Coxhead’s, 2000, academic word list AWL). Tables 1 and 2 from Lessard-Clouston (2012/2013) offer a summary (see pp. 2-3), including 5 general and 8 subject-specific lists, respectively, for vocabulary teaching.
   - Yet the last three years has included the release of some additional and more up-to-date general, academic, and subject-specific lists that I would like to introduce here (pp. 4-5).
   - Within communicative language teaching, vocabulary learning has tended to be done incidentally, though more recently there’s been a call for more explicit teaching of words and vocabulary learning strategies (e.g., Zimmerman & Schmitt, 2005). One challenge with English is its huge vocabulary, which requires focus and some clear guidelines. One way to approach what vocabulary to teach is to consider the EWL, new GSLs, AVL, and other lists. One question is to consider if one is working in a more general, academic (EAP), or specific (ESP) program, and what the interests and needs are of the students, given their goals.
   - Research has indicated that ESL/EFL students lack essential vocabulary knowledge not just for reading, but also for listening, speaking, and writing in the target language (e.g., Liu & Nesi, 1999; Nurweni & Read, 1999; Schmitt, 2010; Ward, 1999, 2007, 2009a).
   - What has research shown? Elgort (2011) indicated that retention of vocabulary learned deliberately with lists is better than from incidental learning. Gholami and Khezrlou (2013/2014) reviewed the use of semantic and thematic lists for their students in Iran, concluding the use of such lists “can be very promising for the understanding of” texts or concepts (p. 158). Using the AWL to help 185 Japanese university students in Tokyo learn English, Yamamoto (2013) noted “the benefits of vocabulary-list learning are to gain not only receptive vocabulary knowledge, but also productive vocabulary knowledge as well to increase learners’ breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge” (p. 33). MacGregor (2014) had similar results with children in Japan, and Wadden, Ferreira, and Rush (2016) used lists successfully in both Australia and Japan. Burkett’s (2015) survey and interviews found programs in Canada, the U.S., and the U.A.E. were also all successfully using the AWL.
   - Note differences in lexemes, lemmas, flemmas, and word families when considering lists.

3. **What are some important lists?** (Please see the following Tables on pp. 2-5.)
## Table 1
Important and Recent Word Lists for Vocabulary Teaching “At a Glance”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word List</th>
<th>Source/Reference</th>
<th>Focus, Purpose(s), Example Words, and Online Information</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Service List (GSL)</td>
<td>West (1953)</td>
<td>A list of vocabulary families reflecting the 2,000 most frequent words in English and representing an average of “around 82 per cent coverage” of various types of texts (Nation &amp; Waring, 1997, p. 15). Further divided into the 1K (e.g., act, behind, choose) and 2K (delight, entertain, firm, greet). Used as the basis for many graded readers and other ESL/EFL materials. See <a href="http://jauman.com/aboutgsl.html">http://jauman.com/aboutgsl.html</a> for a frequency-ranked version.</td>
<td>An old but often cited list: Still the best we have for high frequency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Word List (UWL)</td>
<td>Xue and Nation (1984)</td>
<td>An 836-item academic vocabulary list (e.g., accompany, ignore, indicate, occur) that compiles academic English common to a variety of disciplines but excluded from the GSL. Especially useful for academic reading and provides on average some 8.5% coverage of academic texts (Nation &amp; Waring, 1997). Divided into sublists based on frequency. The 11 sublists are available online at <a href="http://www.auburn.edu/~numath/engl6240/wilstuni.html">http://www.auburn.edu/~numath/engl6240/wilstuni.html</a>.</td>
<td>Suited to humanities? Now largely replaced by the AWL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Word List (AWL)</td>
<td>Coxhead (2000)</td>
<td>A general-purpose academic word list, particularly for reading, with 570 word families that are not included in the GSL but that have wide range in academic texts, across disciplines (based on corpus research in arts, commerce, law, and science). Further divided into 10 sublists that reflect frequency and range. Examples: require, income, structure, policy, economy, process. <a href="http://www.victoria.ac.nz/als/resources/academicwordlist/default.aspx">http://www.victoria.ac.nz/als/resources/academicwordlist/default.aspx</a>.</td>
<td>Generally replaces the UWL. Compare Hyland and Tse (2007).²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First 100 Spoken Collocations (First 100)</td>
<td>Shin and Nation (2008)</td>
<td>A frequency-ranked list of the 100 most frequent spoken collocations in 10 million spoken words in the British National Corpus (BNC). Examples: you know (1), I think (that) (2), a lot of (6), thank you (8). Chosen using six criteria, including frequency, word type, and so on. An Appendix (pp. 346-348) in the article online at <a href="http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/content/62/4/339.abstract">http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/content/62/4/339.abstract</a>.</td>
<td>Focuses on spoken collocations; conversation emphasis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrasal Expressions List (PHRASE List)</td>
<td>Martínez and Schmitt (2012)</td>
<td>A frequency-ranked list of “the 505 most frequent non-transparent multiword expressions in English, especially for receptive use” (p. 299), chosen using three core and three auxiliary criteria, such as a lack of semantic transparency. Examples: have to (1), there is/are (2), such as (3), I mean (9), a lot (10). Ranked according to 1K levels of the BNC, and noting the prevalence of each phrase in the BNC’s spoken and written data. Available as a supplementary Word file to the article online at <a href="http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/content/33/3/299/suppl/D1">http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/content/33/3/299/suppl/D1</a>.</td>
<td>Draws on both oral and written examples. Good for discourse markers and so on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lessard-Clouston (2012/2013), page 292.

*New Word Lists for Vocabulary Teaching* - Michael Lessard-Clouston, CATESOL 2016 Conference
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<tr>
<td>Science Word List (SWL)</td>
<td>Coxhead and Hird (2007)</td>
<td>For undergraduates, especially for reading this 318-word general science list represents 3.79% of the words in a corpus of 1.5 million words of texts from 14 different science subject areas. Further divided into six sublists. Examples: anatomy, diffuse, incubate, molecule, serum. Click “EAP Science List” at <a href="http://www.victoria.ac.nz/labs/">http://www.victoria.ac.nz/labs/</a> staff/averil/coxhead.aspx.</td>
<td>See also Cheng (2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Academic Word List (MAWLL)</td>
<td>Wang, Liang, and Ge (2008)</td>
<td>A 623-item list of high-frequency and wide-coverage words in a 1.5 million-plus corpus of academic medical research articles representing 32 medical subject areas. Excludes items from the GSL but not those from the AWL (e.g., analyze, concentrate). Medical examples: cell, protein, gene, cancer, incubate. MAWLL appeals most to graduate students pursuing medical or research degrees. For reading and writing, doi:10.1016/j.esp.2008.05.003.</td>
<td>See also Chen &amp; Ge (2007). Replace AWL for medical students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AgroCorpus List</td>
<td>Martinek, Bedek, and Panza (2009)</td>
<td>A 92-word family list of items from the AWL that were most frequent in the 826,416-word AgroCorpus of agriculture research articles. Examples include: environmental, accumulation, region, variation, chemical. Purpose is for reading and writing. (Authors highlight how individual words may be general or technical depending on context and argue that GSL words were used in a technical sense in their corpus, while others used in an academic sense, and whether or not study, research results are used academically, even more so than synonyms from the AWL.</td>
<td>Argues the role of the GSL for academic study especially reading and writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Engineering List (BEL)</td>
<td>Ward (2009a)</td>
<td>A 299-item basic lexical list drawn from an engineering corpus of 271,000 words formed from extracts of key textbooks for undergraduates in five engineering subfields. It does not exclude GSL, AWL, or its synonyms, and thus is argued to be a non-technical list of special interest to those who have not yet studied special subject engineering at the undergraduate level, particularly for reading. Examples include: system, calculate, value, flow, process, column, factors. An Appendix (p. 181): doi:10.1016/j.esp.2009.04.003.</td>
<td>See also Mudraya (2006), Ward (2009b). Use with GSL/AWL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Word List (NWLL)</td>
<td>Chang (2009)</td>
<td>A specialist word list of 588 word families drawn from a newspaper corpus of 579,869 words. Excludes proper names and GSL items that did not have wide range in the corpus. Items are grouped into 10 sublists according to range: Examples: campaign, financial, individual, job, project, team. See the Appendix (pp. 176-182): <a href="http://jalt-publications.org/jaltarticles/263/newspaper-word-list-specialised-vocabulary-reading-papers.pdf">http://jalt-publications.org/jaltarticles/263/newspaper-word-list-specialised-vocabulary-reading-papers.pdf</a>.</td>
<td>Useful focused list for current news and journalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theological Word List (TWL)</td>
<td>Lessard-Cloiston (2010)</td>
<td>Used in research of 23 90-minute academic theology lectures, the TWL has 100 items and is further divided into TWL1 (58 items) and TWL2 (42) according to frequency. For Christian theology, examples include: crucifix, omnipotence, polytheism, theology. Shows words used in handouts, on the board. Also used in research on students’ technical vocabulary learning and disciplinary writing (Lessard-Cloiston, 2006, 2008, 2012). Appendix (pp. 318-339): doi:10.1016/j.esp.2010.09.001.</td>
<td>See Ryan (2012) for another list (which does not exclude GSL/AWL).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Word List (BWLL)</td>
<td>Hsu (2011a)</td>
<td>A 426-word list of the most frequent items appearing in a very large Business Research Article Corpus at least 270 times, ranked according to range, frequency, and coverage. Excludes words from the British National Corpus below the 3,000 level. Includes 12 mathematics/statistics-related (alpha, coefficient, median) and 4 computer-related (download, online, software, web) items, as well as 6 compound words (e.g., database, keyword, workspace), and 4 abbreviations (Euro, GDP, IELT). Available as an Appendix (pp. 92-99) online at <a href="http://tasan-exp-journal.com/">http://tasan-exp-journal.com/</a> Dec 2011 wh.php.</td>
<td>See also Hsu (2011b).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### ‘At A Glance’: Twelve Important and Recent Word Lists for Vocabulary Teaching

The following chart presents a synopsis of important points concerning 5 new general and 7 new specialized word lists for ESL & EFL instructors in teaching English vocabulary. First is the name (and acronym) of the list, followed by the source reference for further details, plus the focus, purpose, and web information (if available), along with some potentially helpful comments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List</th>
<th>Source/Reference</th>
<th>Focus/Purpose(s)/Online Information</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essential Word List (EWL)</td>
<td>Dang, T. N. Y., &amp; Webb, S. (2016). Making an essential word list for beginners. In P. Nation, <em>Making and using word lists for language learning and testing</em> (pp. 153-167). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.</td>
<td>An 800 word list for ESL beginners: 176 function words (<em>the, and, of</em>) &amp; 624 lexical words (<em>know, like, well, just, think</em>), further divided into 13 sub-lists, according to frequency and coverage in 9 spoken and 9 written corpora of that represent 10 varieties of English. Includes words from the GSL, new-GSL, BNC2000, etc., to address practicality, change in the lexical coverage curve, and actual lexical coverage (p. 159). Uses lemmas. See Appendix 3 (pp. 188-195) in Nation (2016).</td>
<td>A great, short list for lower levels. Note overlap with new-GSL, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New General Service List (NGSL)</td>
<td>Browne, C. (2014a). A New General Service List: The better mousetrap we've been looking for? <em>Vocabulary Learning and Instruction, 3</em>(2),1-10. doi:10.7820/vli.v03.2.browne</td>
<td>A list of 2,801 general English lexemes reflecting the most frequent words in English within a 274 million-word subset of the Cambridge English Corpus. The focus is on second language learners’ needs. This list provides 84.24% coverage of the corpus, and was developed following updated criteria from West (1953), incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. The complete list is available for download at <a href="http://www.newgeneralservicelist.org/">http://www.newgeneralservicelist.org/</a>. [The list is to be used with the 983-word New Academic Word List being released by the same team.]</td>
<td>Based on spoken &amp; written American &amp; British Eng. See Browne (2014b).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering English Word List (EEWL)</td>
<td>Hsu, W. (2014). Measuring the vocabulary load of engineering textbooks for EFL undergraduates. <em>English for Specific Purposes, 33</em>, 54-65. doi:10.1016/j.esp.2013.07.001</td>
<td>For beyond the first 2,000 most frequent English words, the EEWL includes 729 frequently occurring word families that cover 14.3% of the total words in a 4.57 million word corpus of 100 textbooks from 20 engineering subject areas. The EEWL includes generic, specialized, and technical words that may be useful to science and technology instructors preparing engineers. The study found a wide range of vocabulary demands in engineering fields.</td>
<td>See also Graham (2014) and Ng, et al. (2013)’s ETWL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Academic Word List (EAWL)</td>
<td>Liu, J., &amp; Han, L. (2015), A corpus-based environmental academic word list building and its validity test. <em>English for Specific Purposes, 39</em>, 1-11. doi:10.1016/j.esp.2015.03.001</td>
<td>A list of 458 word families beyond the most frequent 2,000 words in English, within an environmental science corpus of 200 texts from 10 subject areas, totaling 862,242 words. The EAWL provides 15.43% coverage in the environmental science corpus. Although it excludes the GSL, it shares 318 words with the AWL, though with different frequencies and ranges, and it offers better coverage of the environmental science corpus than items on the AWL.</td>
<td>Replace the AWL for environmental science students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Academic Word List (NAWL)</td>
<td>Yang, M.-N. (2015). A nursing academic word list. <em>English for Specific Purposes, 37</em>, 27-38. doi:10.1016/j.esp.2014.05.003</td>
<td>A 1 million+ word Nursing Research Articles Corpus (NRAC) of 252 English research articles was used to create a 676 word family Nursing Academic Word List which offers 13.64% coverage, which is more than the AWL and Wang, Liang, and Ge’s (2008) MAWL. The most frequently appearing words of each family are listed alphabetically in an Appendix (pp. 36-37).</td>
<td>Compared with Wang, Liang, and Ge (2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Academic Vocabulary List (MAVL)</td>
<td>Lei, L. &amp; Liu, D. (2016). A new medical academic word list: A corpus-based study with enhanced methodology. <em>Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 22</em>, 42-53. doi:10.1016/j.jeap.2016.01.008</td>
<td>Following procedures for the AVL, using lemmas, an 819 word Medical Academic Vocabulary List was created representing about 20% of the words in both a 2.7 million word Medical Academic English Corpus and a 3.5 million word Medical English Textbook Corpus. The MAVL “contains only the most frequent and most widely dispersed words in medicine, including some general high-frequency words with special medical English” (p. 49). The list is in an Appendix (pp. 51-52) and notes part of speech and which words are also included in the new-GSL.</td>
<td>Perhaps replaces the MAWL, and the AWL for medical students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Word List (MWL)</td>
<td>Hsu, W. (2013). Bridging the vocabulary gap for EFL medical undergraduates: The establishment of a medical word list. <em>Language Teaching Research, 17</em>, 454-484. doi:10.1177/1362168813494121</td>
<td>A Medical Word List of 595 frequent word families beyond the BNC’s 3,000 most frequent words, in a Medical Textbook Corpus of 15+ million words. The MWL offers 10.72% coverage of the corpus, and is included as an Appendix (pp. 473-484) in the article, which notes the range, frequency, BNC list, and percentage coverage for each word. Aimed at medical novices, the MWL includes both sub-technical and lay-technical vocabulary, to bridge the gap before technical terms.</td>
<td>Hsu (2013) shows MWL items that reflect the various degrees of technicality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. **How have or might such lists be used?**

- The EWL, NGSL, and new-GSL are relevant to all English language learners, as they represent the most frequent and useful vocabulary in speech and writing. The AVL is helpful for EAP students, and should be useful for students preparing for academic study.
- Some teachers have given their students the actual word lists (or subsections of them) and have students decide which words to focus on. This could be guided/supplemented.
- Teachers have used word lists to guide their choice of readings and to focus students’ attention on target vocabulary. Emphasize both comprehension and production!
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5. **Discussion: Further issues/possibilities to consider**

- Okamoto (2015), Stein (in press), and others raise good questions about frequency lists.
- Choose text books that are specifically focused on particular lists. More will appear...
- Corpus linguistics and data-driven learning in language teaching require some knowledge of basic principles and tools available. Lessard-Clouston & Chang (2014) offer an overview.
- Teachers can and should use available online resources along with word lists, such as:
  - Compleat Lexical Tutor: [http://www.lextutor.ca/](http://www.lextutor.ca/)
- Always remember that contextualized learning is most effective! Adapt lists for your use in teaching and for your students’ learning! These lists are geared for particular audiences.
- Some additional lists not introduced much (except in passing) above include:
  - the 963-item New Academic Word List (based on a corpus of 288 million words, and to be used with the NGSL) [http://www.newacademicwordlist.org/](http://www.newacademicwordlist.org/)
  - Graham’s (2014) 40-item Engineering Phrases List (see pp. 70-90 in the file below) [http://thailandtesol.org/Picture/file/ThaiTESOL%20Proceedings%202014.pdf](http://thailandtesol.org/Picture/file/ThaiTESOL%20Proceedings%202014.pdf)
  - the Global Academic Vocabulary (GAV) lexicon – see Wadden, Ferreira, & Rush (2016), which combines the UWL, AWL, NGSL, plus an older EAP core word list

6. **Conclusion**

- Word lists can be a useful tool to help focus our vocabulary teaching.
- Question and answer time
- Comments, feedback, and suggestions of other resources!

7. **References/Further reading**


New Word Lists for Vocabulary Teaching - Michael Lessard-Clouston, CATESOL 2016 Conference
Chen, Q., & Ge, G.-C. (2007). A corpus-based lexical study on frequency and distributions of Coxhead’s AWL word families in medical research articles (RAs). English for Specific Purposes, 26, 502-514. doi:10.1016/j.esp.2007.04.003


Liu, J., & Nesi, H. (1999). Are we teaching the right words? A study of students’ receptive knowledge of two types of vocabulary: “Subtechnical” and “technical”. In H. Bool & P. Luford (Eds.), Academic standards
and expectations: The role of EAP (pp. 141-147). Nottingham, UK: Nottingham University Press.

This is a work in progress. Please email me if you have any suggestions of lists, resources, etc. Thank you!