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

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Opening Reflection Task

• Please think about a particular situation for using lists, & use the small handout to reflect:

1) Have you ever used word lists to teach vocabulary? If so, which ones? In what ways?

2) If you’ve used word lists, what are some advantages or disadvantages in doing so? If not, can you imagine any?

3) What questions do you have about word lists? Suggestions or ideas for doing so?

• You’ll share with someone and we’ll debrief.
Why Word Lists??

- Many MA TESOL programs focus on grammar, but neglect vocabulary teaching. Please value vocabulary!

- As I argue in Lessard-Clouston (2013), grammar and vocabulary are not at odds with one another, but actually work together in a lexicogrammar (pp. 8-9).

- It’s important to know a word’s part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb), and if at all possible to present vocabulary items/examples in context.

- There’s a bias against lists! Yet principled word lists are a great way to focus on appropriate vocabulary.

- Lessard-Clouston (2012/2013) introduced the basics of words lists, but so much has changed since then! This presentation thus offers an update on new lists.
Background: Context from the Literature

• Please refer to page 1 of the handout.
• Lexemes, lemmas, flemmas, and word families:
  - With the 1953 GSL and 2000 AWL the focus was on **word families**: base word forms plus their inflections and derivatives. For example, ‘observe’ includes observation, observable, observant, observance (plus all their inflections, for plural, etc., and affixes, so non-observant, unobservant, etc., could be considered part of the same word family). **Problems**: many parts of speech (POS) can cause learners challenges, plus some may be the same POS, yet a different meaning.
  - See Nation (2016) for more examples and details.
Another approach to counting words is the **lexeme**, which is very similar to the word family (with inflections and derivations), but normally homographs (words spelled the same but with different meanings, such as ‘pupil’) are distinguished. Used with the NGSL.

The next approach is the **lemma**, where the head word and derivational options are more limited, by word class/part of speech. This approach is used with both the new-GSL and the AVL. The AVL is quite strict and distinguishes POS and inflections.

A final approach uses the **flemma**, a word family with headword plus inflected forms of different POS (& thus has more members than lemmas). Used with the EWL.
Word Lists to Consider Using

• See previous lists: Table 1 (handout p. 2) for general five ESL lists and Table 2 (handout p. 3) for six discipline-based lists (business twice) plus one genre-based list (newspapers). That summary is taken from Lessard-Clouston (2012/2013).

• The handout chart on page 4 offers info. on five more general ESL lists (namely the EWL, NGSL, new-GSL, AVL, & PHaVE list), while page 5 outlines seven recent specialty or discipline-based word lists, for business, computer science, engineering, environmental science, nursing, and medicine.
The Essential Word List (EWL)
Top 10 Function & Lexical Words

1. the
2. and
3. of
4. to
5. a
6. I
7. in
8. you
9. that
10. it

know
like
well
just
think
right
then
now
get
time

PHaVE List Frequency Top 10

1. Go on
2. Pick up
3. Come back
4. Come up
5. Go back
6. Find out
7. Come out
8. Go out
9. Point out
10. Grow up

Source: Garnier & Schmitt (2015)
Minshall’s (2013) CS Multi-Word List

• Alphabetical list of 23 technical phrases, such as:
  - control flow graph
  - data mining
  - data structure
  - lower bound
  - execution time
  - machine learning
  - polynomial time
  - social network
  - software engineer
Graham’s (2014) Engineering Phrases List

• 40 common phrases in engineering, such as:
  - can be viewed as
  - for a given
  - acting on the
  - is known as
  - which/one/each of the following
  - under the action of
  - let us consider (a)
  - can be written
  - about an axis
Final Thoughts on Word Lists

• These new (since 2013!) lists are not well integrated yet into ESL/EFL teaching materials, but this tends to change quickly. Look for more texts using the EWL, NGSL, new-GSL, AVL, etc.

• The fact that the word list resources are growing so fast, largely based on advances in corpus linguistics, is encouraging, and suggests that vocabulary is now valued more in TESOL.

• This is a work in progress! Please let me know if you find other useful word lists for students. michael.lessard-clouston@biola.edu Thanks!