

剑桥应用语言学丛书

CAMBRIDGE APPLIED LINGUISTICS

# Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition

第二语言词汇习得

Edited by

**James Coady**  
**Thomas Huckin**



外教社

上海外语教育出版社

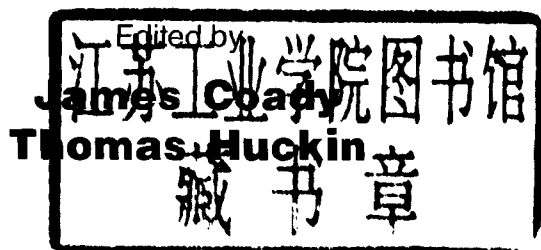
剑桥应用语言

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## 出版前言

1999年5月至2000年6月间,上海外语教育出版社先后出版了从牛津大学出版社引进的“牛津应用语言学丛书”19种、“牛津语言学入门丛书”6种和“牛津应用语言学丛书续编”10种,受到了外语界师生的一致好评和欢迎。为了向我国的外语教学与研究人员提供更多的有关专著,帮助读者了解近年来国外应用语言学和外语教学研究的理论,促进我国外语教学研究水平的提高,上海外语教育出版社又精心挑选了剑桥大学出版社的应用语言学丛书10种,形成与“牛津应用语言学丛书”相辅相成的“剑桥应用语言学丛书”。相信这套丛书也同样能开阔我国学者的视野。通过借鉴国外研究成果,进一步总结我国自己的外语教学经验,形成具有中国特色的外语教学理论。

《第二语言词汇习得》是一部研究在第二语言或外语的环境中学习词汇的论文集,由美国俄亥俄大学语言学副教授詹姆士·寇迪(James Coady)和犹他大学英语副教授托马斯·哈金(Thomas Huckin)担任主编,剑桥大学出版社1997年出版。

长期以来,词汇习得一直是第二语言或外语学习者最为关心的问题之一,因为词汇能力是语言交际能力的组成部分,词汇量大小是学习者所学语言水平高低的一个表现;但是在第二语言习得研究中,词汇的教与学的研究却没有得到应有的重视。探究语言习得过程中词汇习得研究的历史渊源,总结词汇教与学的规律性,为第二语言或外语的词汇习得提供理论阐释和指导,便成了编者编写《第二语言词汇习得》的根本出发点和目的。

本书尽管是一个论文集,但构思严密,结构严谨,组织科学,是一个完整的研究体系。全书共由14篇论文组成**立论**(Setting the Stage)、**案例分析**(Case Studies)、**实证研究**(Empirical Research)、**教学法**(Pedagogy)、**总结**(Summing Up)等5个部分。

第一部分含3篇论文,通过对第二语言词汇教学的方法进行的历史回顾和深入探讨,使读者对其过去有个充分的理解,对其将来的发展给予合适的定位;通过分析妨碍第二语言阅读理解词汇量不足(insufficient vocabulary)、迷惑性词义误解(misinterpretation of deceptively transparent words)和词义猜测能力不强(inability to guess unknown words)等问题,提出了一个顺利阅读的最低词汇量标准;通过对比母语和第二语言文字形态差别(orthographic knowledge)对词汇理解的影响,指出了精心安排课堂词汇教学的必要性。

第二部分的3篇论文描述了4名成年人分别将英语、希伯来语、葡萄牙语作为第二语言的词汇学习过程,其中2篇描写的是作者的亲身经历。通过这种定性并形成假说(qualitative & hypothesis-raising)的研究,作者提出一个共性的结论,即应当加强针对不同情况和不同目的词汇学习策略(vocabulary-learning strategies)的指导,进行大量阅读(extensive reading)是增强词汇知识和其他语言能力的有效手段。

第三部分3篇论文侧重对一些更为可控的研究中的变量(variables for more controlled investigation)进行探讨,如认知技能、所学的词汇单位和教学指导的方法等。对受控的实验条件下的第二语言词汇习得的研究表明,有意识的单词翻译(conscious word translation)、单词识别(word recognition)和词义预备(semantic priming)3种认知技能中,有意识的单词翻译能力形成发展的速度比后两者都要快;对复合词汇单位(complex lexical units)的研究表明,第二语言学习者习得罕用词比母语使用者不逊色而习得复合词汇单位的程度则差距很大,而改变这一差别的途径是增加接触口语的机会;教学指导方法方面的研究表明,阅读活动加上精心指导(extensive reading + explicit instruction)比单纯的大量阅读对习得的效率高得多。

第四部分集中讨论词汇教学的方法论问题。该部分第1篇论文探讨关键词记忆法(keyword mnemonics)等记忆术在第二语言或外语词汇习得中所起的重要作用,提出应当充分重视、恰当运用但切忌单纯地过分强调这一传统方法;第2篇论文借鉴“偶然词汇学习假设”(incidental vocabulary learning hypothesis)的内涵,从多个角度论证需要进行大量阅读、增加语言输入、扩大词汇量,以弥补正规课堂教学的不足;第3篇论文指出课堂教学应该对学习目标、资源和方法作出精心计划,强调了教师的责任心和指导作用;第4篇论文分析了词项(lexical items)的4种基本类型及其意义,罗列13种练习活动论述了教学法中词汇法(Lexical Approach)的原理,指出教师在重视产出型教学活动(productive practice)的同时同样要重视摄入型教学活动(receptive practice)。

第五部分为主编之一詹姆士·寇迪的1篇论文,对前面四大部分研究进行总结。作者首先回顾了以往忽视词汇教学的原因以及补救的方法,接着概括地论述了语境习得(contextual acquisition)、个体学习策略(individual learning strategies)、直接指导(direct instruction)、词汇规模(lexicon size)、词典使用(dictionary use)以及常规的学习理论(general learning theory)等实证性研究领域的问题,最后得出了第二语言词汇教学论的基本原理。

可以说,本书全面展示了第二语言词汇习得理论和方法的过去、现在和将来,纠正了一些历史偏见和误解,为这一领域的研究澄清了思路 and 方向。无论是外语教师、对外汉语教师,还是对此感兴趣的研究生及其他研究人员,都可从本书得到极为有价值的启示和帮助。

## *Series editors' preface*

The relative neglect of studies of vocabulary acquisition and related areas of lexical research in second language acquisition has often been commented on within the fields of language teaching and applied linguistics. Compared to work in grammar, phonology, and discourse studies, much less is known about the nature of the second language learners' lexicon. Yet adequate theories of L2 vocabulary acquisition and use are central to a wide range of issues in applied linguistics, including performance assessment, proficiency testing, curriculum development, and applied lexicography. Fortunately, since the mid-1980s there has been a renewed interest in the role of vocabulary in second language learning, and this has seen a growing body of empirically based studies of such issues as the nature of the bilingual lexicon, vocabulary acquisition, lexical storage, lexical retrieval, and use of vocabulary by second language learners.

*Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition* will be of great interest to those interested in current views on the nature of L2 vocabulary acquisition and approaches to L2 vocabulary teaching. It provides a useful introduction to the current state of theory and research, examines the topic of vocabulary learning and teaching from a number of perspectives, and presents a comprehensive range of papers that explore such issues as the nature of lexical competence, the measurement of vocabulary knowledge and growth, the role of vocabulary in L2 reading and listening, speaking and writing, the relations between L1 and L2 vocabulary, as well as pedagogical approaches to the teaching of vocabulary. Strategies employed by learners in processing vocabulary encountered in spoken and written discourse are illustrated, as are the cognitive skills involved in lexical comprehension.

As the papers in the book demonstrate, lexical competence is at the heart of communicative competence, and ways of measuring the size and nature of the L2 lexicon offer a challenge to researchers. A number of different research directions are illustrated throughout the book, including case studies, diary studies, introspection, and experimental studies. At the same time, the contributors explore applications of research and

theory to a wide variety of issues in language education, including vocabulary teaching, language assessment, test construction, syllabus design, and materials preparation. The book will therefore be a valuable resource for researchers, teachers, and other language professionals interested in the nature of vocabulary in second language teaching and learning.

Michael H. Long  
Jack C. Richards

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We offer thanks to the people who have helped us in so many ways. Primarily, we wish to thank the many contributors to this volume. Their patience and understanding during the production of the book were essential. We also wish to thank our editors at Cambridge – Mary Vaughn, Mary Carson, and Olive Collen – for their tireless work in helping in the preparation of the manuscript and in seeing it through to publication. Also, we appreciate the fact that Jack Richards encouraged us to attempt to publish this collection and supported us throughout. Finally, we are grateful to our wives, Miriam and Christiane, for their unflagging support and inspiration.

James Coady  
Thomas Huckin



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## PART I: SETTING THE STAGE

In recent years, second language vocabulary acquisition has become an increasingly interesting topic of discussion for researchers, teachers, curriculum designers, theorists, and others involved in second language learning. Part I provides a framework for the rest of the book by introducing the main dimensions of the topic: teaching techniques, testing principles, and learning processes. In so doing, it emphasizes those subtopics that have been given the most attention in the literature: (1) debates about different teaching methods, (2) the problem of how to test vocabulary knowledge in a valid yet practical way, (3) issues about the interrelationship of reading and word learning, in particular the effectiveness of contextual guessing, and (4) the role of detailed perceptual variables in the identification and misidentification of words. The range of topics runs from broad (e.g. general teaching approaches, global measures of lexical competence) to fine-grained (e.g., morphology, orthography).

Cheryl Zimmerman leads off with a historical survey of vocabulary teaching methods. Vocabulary is central to language, she notes, and words are of critical importance to the typical language learner. Nevertheless, researchers and teachers in the field of language acquisition have typically undervalued the role of vocabulary, usually prioritizing syntax or phonology as central to linguistic theory and more critical to language pedagogy. Zimmerman's chapter examines the position assigned to vocabulary within each of the major trends in language pedagogy, including the Grammar Translation Method, the Reform Movement, the Direct Method, the Reading Method and Situational Language Teaching, the Audiolingual Method, Communicative Language Approaches, the Natural Approach, and current proposals such as the Lexical Approach that stress the lexical nature of language and propose lexico-grammatical approaches to language instruction. The primary goals of each pedagogical approach are described and the implications for vocabulary instruction are examined; this includes the rationale for word selection, the perception of written versus spoken language, attitudes toward translation of target words or dictionary use, and examples of recommended word-learning strategies or exercises. The purpose of this survey is to build a better understanding of the past and to position future lexical pedagogy.

Vocabulary learning has long had a synergistic association with reading; each activity nourishes the other. But, as James Coady notes later in the book, it is not a simple, problem-free relationship. In Chapter 2, Batia Laufer discusses three lexical problems that may seriously impede reading comprehension in L2: (1) the problem of insufficient vocabulary, (2) misinterpretations of deceptively transparent words, and (3) inability to guess unknown words correctly. Drawing on a variety of studies, including her own, Laufer claims that by far the greatest lexical factor in good reading is the number of words in the learner's lexicon. A vocabulary of 3,000 word families or 5,000 lexical items is needed for general reading comprehension, as this would cover 90–95% of any text. Below this threshold, reading strategies become ineffective.

A large vocabulary is also claimed to solve the other two problems: deceptive transparency and guessing ability. Deceptively transparent words are words that look familiar to the learner even though they are unfamiliar. These are words with deceptive morphological structure (e.g. nevertheless = "never less"), idioms, false friends, words with multiple meanings, and "synforms" (e.g., cute/acute). Laufer argues that misinterpretations of such words are widespread among second language learners.

Guessing word meanings by use of contextual clues is far more difficult, according to Laufer, than is generally realized. Guessing can be impaired by any of the following factors: (a) nonexistence of clues, (b) lack of familiarity with the words in which the clues are located, (c) presence of misleading or partial clues, and (d) incompatibility between the reader's schemata and the text content. To consistently make good guesses, one should know about 98% of the words in a text. For this kind of coverage, one would generally need a sight vocabulary of about 5,000 word families (8,000 lexical items). Laufer concludes that a large sight vocabulary is indispensable to good L2 reading and vocabulary guessing.

Building a large sight vocabulary, however, requires accurate "sight," i.e., word perception. As Laufer notes in her discussion of synforms and words with deceptive morphological structure, many second language learners have trouble at this microscopic level of cognition. In Chapter 3, "The role of orthographic knowledge in L2 lexical processing," Keiko Koda addresses this problem. The major purpose of this chapter is to examine the ways in which L1 orthographic competence shapes L2 lexical processing. In an effort to clarify the nature of L2 vocabulary learning, the critical relationship between orthographic properties and processing mechanisms is first analyzed from a cross-linguistic perspective. Second, the cognitive consequences of L1 orthographies are examined through empirical L2 data. Finally, pedagogical implications are drawn from the current knowledge base on orthographic transfer.

Koda shows that there are strong connections between the L1

orthographic system and L2 processing. She argues that improved L2 vocabulary instruction therefore depends in part on a better understanding of this relationship and on its long-term impact on L2 processing. Second language reading and vocabulary instruction, she claims, should be individualized and it should be based more on L1 strategies than on L2 ones. Also, it should include explicit instruction, in particular orthographic properties of the target language.



# 1 *Historical trends in second language vocabulary instruction*

Cheryl Boyd Zimmerman

## Introduction

Vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learner. Nevertheless, the teaching and learning of vocabulary have been undervalued in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) throughout its varying stages and up to the present day. SLA researchers and teachers have typically prioritized syntax and phonology as “more serious candidates for theorizing” (Richards, 1976, p. 77), more central to linguistic theory, and more critical to language pedagogy. This chapter will seek to show how vocabulary has been viewed, researched, and presented throughout the history of SLA. The purpose of this survey is to build a better understanding of the past and to indicate likely developments in lexical pedagogy in the future.

## The Grammar Translation Method

The Grammar Translation Method was first introduced to teach modern languages in public schools in Prussia at the end of the eighteenth century. The primary goals of this method were to prepare students to read and write classical materials and to pass standardized exams (Howatt, 1984; Rivers, 1981). Like courses in classical Latin and Greek, this method used classical literature chosen for its intellectual content as materials; it was typically assumed that most students would never actually use the target language but would profit from the mental exercise. Students were provided detailed explanations of grammar in their native languages, paradigms to memorize, and bilingual vocabulary lists to learn; these prepared them for the regular task of translating long passages of the classics. Although the names of the Grammar Translation materials typically included the adjective “practical” (e.g., *The Practical Guide of the German Language* by T. H. Weisse), the word was not used to mean *useful* as we would use it today. Rather, it referred to the importance of *practice* (Howatt, 1984): Lessons typically consisted of a reading selection, two or three long columns of new vocabulary items with native-language equiv-

alents, and a test (Rivers, 1981). Language skill was judged according to one's ability to analyze the syntactic structure, primarily to conjugate verbs.

It follows, then, that students using the Grammar Translation Method studied literary language samples that used primarily archaic structures and obsolete vocabulary. Students were exposed to a wide literary vocabulary (Rivers, 1981) that was selected according to its ability to illustrate grammatical rules, and direct vocabulary instruction was included only when a word illustrated a grammatical rule (Kelly, 1969). When vocabulary difficulties were addressed at all, their explanations depended largely on etymology. Latin and Greek roots or "primitives" were considered "the most accurate court of appeal on word meanings"; the ability to use etymology was respected as "one way of discovering truth" (Kelly, 1969, p. 30). The teaching of vocabulary was based on definition and etymology throughout the nineteenth century, at least in part because of the prevalent belief that the connection between etymon and derivative should be protectively preserved to avoid degeneration of the language. Bilingual word lists (*vocabularies*), used as instructional aids rather than as reference, were organized according to semantic fields and had been a normal part of grammars and readers since the mid-seventeenth century. During the period of Grammar Translation methodology, bilingual dictionaries became common as reference tools (Kelly, 1969). As more was understood about language families and the natural process of language change in the twentieth century, scholars began to emphasize the dangers of cognates, but this change in perspective was gradual.

The Grammar Translation Method was used well into the twentieth century as the primary method for foreign language instruction in Europe and the United States, but it had received challenges and criticism for many years. In the mid-1800s, the primary objection to the method was the neglect of realistic, oral language. This objection had implications for the role of vocabulary in language instruction. For example, the Frenchman François Gouin emphasized the acquisition of specific terms, especially of action words

... that could be physically performed as they were used. . . . Within these situations, students would act out very detailed sequences of appropriate actions in relation to objects, stating aloud exactly what they were doing with what. (Rivers, 1983, p. 116)

He introduced words in semantic fields in the interest of teaching a verb's collocations along with the verb, always emphasizing that "general terms are . . . terms of luxury, which the language can upon necessity do without" (Gouin, 1892, in Rivers, 1983, p. 116).

Another challenge came from Thomas Prendergast, who objected to archaic vocabulary lists; in his 1864 manual, *The Mastery of Languages*,



or, the *Art of Speaking Foreign Tongues Idiomatically*, he listed the most common English words, based entirely on his intuitive judgment. This effort to rank vocabulary according to frequency was seen as one of many fleeting and rebellious methods that failed to perform what it promised and consequently “didn’t significantly influence language teaching” (Sweet, 1899/1964, p. 2). Nevertheless, Prendergast’s judgments were deemed surprisingly accurate when compared to the lists compiled systematically by Thorndike and Lorge in 1944: of a total of 214 words, 82% of Prendergast’s words were among the first 500 most frequent words on the list of Thorndike-Lorge (Howatt, 1984). Prendergast’s list was an important innovation because it came at a time when simplicity and everyday language were scorned and before it was normal to think in terms of common words.

## The Reform Movement

As already seen, although Grammar Translation dominated language teaching as late as the 1920s, it had been challenged on many fronts. In the 1880s its challengers had enough consensus and the intellectual leadership they needed from linguists such as Henry Sweet in England to establish the Reform Movement. Sweet insisted that previous reactions against Grammar Translation had failed because they were “based on an insufficient knowledge of the science of language and because they [were] one-sided” (Sweet, 1899/1964, p. 3). The Reformers emphasized the primacy of spoken language and phonetic training. *Fluency* took on a new meaning: the ability to accurately pronounce a connected passage and to maintain associations between a stream of speech and the referents in the outside world. The curriculum developed by Sweet is considered representative of the time (Howatt, 1984). His system began with the *Mechanical Stage*, where students studied phonetics and transcription, continued to the *Grammatical Stage*, where they studied grammar and very basic vocabulary, and then to the *Idiomatic Stage*, where they pursued vocabulary in greater depth. Stages four and five (*Literary* and *Archaic*) consisted of the study of philology and were reserved for university-level work. Sweet’s lessons were based on carefully controlled spoken language in which lists of separated words and isolated sentences were avoided; only after thorough study of the complete text should grammar points or vocabulary items be isolated for instructional purposes.

Although language is made up of words, we do not speak in words, but in sentences. From a practical, as well as a scientific, point of view, the sentence is the unit of language, not the word. From a purely phonetic point of view words do not exist. (Sweet, 1899/1964, p. 97)