Introduction

This book is about the teaching and learning of vocabulary, but the teaching and learning of vocabulary is only a part of a language development program. It is thus important that vocabulary teaching and learning is placed in its proper perspective.

Where does vocabulary fit in the learning goals of a course?

Vocabulary learning is only one sub-goal of a range of goals that are important in the language classroom. The mnemonic LIST is a useful way of remembering these goals which are outlined in Table 0.1. L = Language (which includes vocabulary), I = Ideas which cover content and subject matter knowledge as well as cultural knowledge, S = Skills (which include the process skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and T = Text or discourse which covers the way sentences fit together to form larger functional units of language.

Although this book focuses on the vocabulary sub-goal of language, the other goals are not ignored. However, they are approached from the viewpoint of vocabulary. There are chapters on vocabulary and the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Discourse is looked at in Chapter 6 on specialised uses, and pronunciation, spelling, and grammar are looked at in relation to vocabulary knowledge in Chapter 3.

Where does vocabulary fit in the four strands?

The approach taken in this book rests on the idea that a well-balanced language course should consist of four major strands (Nation, 2007; Nation & Yamamoto, 2011). These strands can appear in many different forms, but they should all be there in a well-designed course.

First, there is the strand of learning from comprehensible meaning-focused input. That means, learners should have the opportunity to

Table 0.1 Goals for language learning

General goals	Specific goals
Language items	pronunciation vocabulary grammatical constructions
Ideas (content)	subject matter knowledge cultural knowledge
Skills	accuracy fluency strategies process skills or subskills
Text (discourse)	conversational discourse rules text schemata or topic type scales

learn new language items through listening and reading activities where the main focus of attention is on the information in what they are listening to or reading. As we shall see in the following chapter, learning from meaning-focused input can best occur if learners are familiar with at least 98 per cent of the running words in the input they are focusing on. Put negatively, learning from meaning-focused input cannot occur if there are lots of unknown words.

The second strand of a course is the strand of meaning-focused output. Learners should have the chance to develop their knowledge of the language through speaking and writing activities where their main attention is focused on the information they are trying to convey. Speaking and writing are useful means of vocabulary development because they make the learners focus on words in ways that they did not have to while listening and reading. Having to speak and write encourages learners to listen like a speaker and read like a writer. This different kind of attention is not the only contribution that speaking and writing activities can make to language development. From a vocabulary perspective, these productive activities can strengthen knowledge of previously met vocabulary.

The third strand of a course is one that has been subject to a lot of debate. This is the strand of language-focused learning, sometimes called form-focused instruction. There is plenty of evidence (Ellis, 2005; Williams, 2005) that language learning benefits if there is an appropriate amount of usefully focused deliberate teaching and learning of language items. From a vocabulary perspective, this means that a course should involve the direct teaching of vocabulary and the direct learning and study of vocabulary. As we shall

see, there is a very large amount of research stretching back to the late nineteenth century which shows that the gradual cumulative process of learning a word can be given a strong boost by the direct study of certain features of the word. The language-focused learning strand also includes training in learning strategies and learning how to learn.

The fourth strand of a course is the fluency development strand. In the activities which put this strand into action, learners do not work with new language items. Instead, they become more and more fluent in using items that they already know. A striking example of this can be found in the use of numbers. Learners can usually quickly learn numbers in a foreign language. But if they go into a post office and the clerk tells them how much the stamps they need cost, they might not understand because the numbers were said too quickly for them. By doing a small amount of regular fluency practice with numbers (the teacher says the numbers; the learners write the figures), the learners will find that they can understand one-digit numbers said quickly (1, 7, 6, 9) although they have trouble with two-digit numbers said quickly (26, 89, 63, 42) or three-digit numbers (126, 749, 537, 628). A little further practice will make these longer numbers fluently available for comprehension. If a course does not have a strong fluency strand, then the learning done in the other three strands will not be readily available for normal use.

In a language course, these four strands should get roughly the same amount of time. That means that no more than 25 per cent of the learning time in and out of class should be given to the direct study of language items. No less than 25 per cent of the class time should be given to fluency development. If the four strands of a course are not equally represented in a particular course, then the design of the course needs to be looked at again. The strands work best when there is integration of ideas content across the strands.

These four strands need to be kept in mind while reading this book. Where recommendations are made for direct vocabulary learning, these should be seen as fitting into that 25 per cent of the course which is devoted to language-focused learning. Seventy-five per cent of the vocabulary development program should involve the three meaning-focused strands of learning from input, learning from output, and fluency development, that is, using the language.

These four strands apply generally to a language course. In this book we will look at how vocabulary fits into each of these strands. It is worth stressing that the strands of meaning-focused input and output are only effective if the learners have sufficient vocabulary to make these strands truly meaning focused. If activities which are supposed

to be meaning focused involve large amounts of unknown vocabulary, then they become language-focused learning because much of the learners' attention is taken from the message to the unknown vocabulary. Similarly, fluency development activities need to involve little or no unknown vocabulary or other language items, otherwise they become part of the meaning-focused input and output strands, or language-focused learning.

What are the main themes of this book?

There is a small number of major themes that run through this book, but which are first dealt with in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. The most important idea is that there is a small number of well-researched principles that can guide how we deal with vocabulary. Both teachers and learners should understand these principles.

First, there is the cost/benefit principle, based on the results of word frequency studies. Its most important application is in the distinction between high-frequency and mid- and low-frequency vocabulary and the different ways in which teachers should deal with these types of vocabulary. The cost/benefit idea also applies to individual words in that the amount of attention given to an item should be roughly proportional to the chances of it being met or used again, that is, its frequency.

Second, there is the principle that spaced repetition is essential for vocabulary learning. The more often a word is met or produced, the more likely it is to be learned. This is largely a quantity-based principle.

Third, there is the principle that the quality of each meeting with a word affects the likelihood of it being learned. The quality of attention to words involves noticing, retrieval, varied meetings and varied use, and elaboration through analysis and enrichment. The deeper the quality of processing, the more enduring the learning.

Fourth, there is the principle of the four strands which takes account of the idea that learning a word is a cumulative process involving a range of aspects of knowledge. Learners thus need many different kinds of meetings with words in order to learn them fully. There needs to be opportunity for learning across the four strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. The main contrast in these strands is between incidental learning and deliberate learning.

Fifth, there is the principle that we learn what we focus on. If we focus on word form, we will learn word form. If we focus on meaning, we will learn meaning. It is thus worth looking carefully at activities

to see where the focus is, and what quality of processing (principle three) is likely to occur.

Finally, there is the principle of autonomy. Learners should understand how to learn by applying these principles.

When reading this book and the research on which it is based, it is very helpful examine the results of the research and the recommendations given to see how closely they relate to these principles. Although this is a long and complex book, I think that it in essence it supports the application of this small group of powerful principles.

Who is the audience for this book?

This book is intended to be used by second and foreign language teachers. Although it is largely written from the viewpoint of a teacher of English, it could also be used by teachers of other languages.

This book is called *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* partly in order to indicate that most of the suggestions apply to both second and foreign language learning. Generally, the term **second language** will be used to apply to both second and foreign language learning. In the few places where a contrast is intended, this will be clear from the context.

Since I wrote my first book *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary* (Nation, 1990), another two generations of vocabulary researchers have appeared. There is now a substantial group of very productive researchers who have identified a range of useful research focuses and who persist in exploring and refining research in those chosen areas (see the introduction to the Author Index). Research on vocabulary is clearly alive and well. It is also pleasing to note that the older generation is still actively involved in vocabulary-related research and writing.

What is new in the third edition?

When I began writing this third edition of *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*, I was reminded of what Spike Milligan wrote in the Introduction to one of his books. He said, 'After [I finished writing] *Puckoon*, I swore I'd never write another book. This is it!' When I finished writing the second edition, I felt that the field of vocabulary learning was now so large that a single person could not get their head around it, and I would not be able to write a third edition. This is it!

I noted in the second edition that around 30 per cent of the research on learning vocabulary by non-native speakers over the last 100 years had appeared in the 10 or so years between 2001 (the date of the

first edition) and 2013 (the date of the second edition). Since the second edition, the research published on learning vocabulary has not decreased in pace of output. My database of around 4,000 entries contains over 900 articles, chapters, and books that have appeared since 2012. The major purpose of the third edition is to take account of this.

Around 10 per cent of the second edition was changed for the third edition. I think this is largely because there is now more partial replication in the recent research, and there have been some issues such as test formats, word families, and learning vocabulary through listening and viewing which have involved a lot of publications focusing on the same area. These focuses have involved the need to update parts of the second edition largely through the refinement of sections already in the book. These focuses are also the result of the very welcome growth of a community of skilled and committed vocabulary researchers who have their own areas of research that they continue to explore. The chapter on using dictionaries in the first and second editions has been greatly reduced and incorporated into the chapter on reading, largely because hard-copy dictionaries have been replaced by electronic dictionaries and electronic glossaries. A new chapter on learning out of class has been added to take account of the rapidly increasing amount of research on the effect of the Internet and electronic resources on learning. It also takes account of the increasing influence of English on the vocabulary of other languages.

Because a book on native-speaker vocabulary size has now appeared (Nation & Coxhead, 2021), the discussion of measuring native-speaker vocabulary size has been deleted from Chapter 13 on testing. I recommend that those interested in native-speaker vocabulary growth consider the model in Chapter 7 of that book which brings together the research on children's vocabulary growth and the research on adult native-speaker vocabulary size.

At the risk of offending or at least irritating my colleagues in the field of vocabulary studies through omissions, I want to point out what I think are the most important developments in the teaching and learning of vocabulary since the second edition. In the second edition, I noted the very important finding by Elgort (2011) that deliberate learning results in both explicit and implicit knowledge. This remains for me a very significant finding, emphasising that the deliberate study of vocabulary can contribute in a very positive way to non-native speakers' vocabulary growth.

In the area of reading, I consider the development of the Xreading program to be a major advance in increasing the opportunity to learn from extensive reading. There is strong advocacy for extensive

reading through the Extensive Reading Foundation and through the publication of the book by Nation and Waring (2020) reviewing the research. However, the ready availability of a program that effectively deals with many of the barriers to implementing extensive reading has to be seen as a major advance.

In the area of listening, extensive listening and extensive viewing have now begun to get similar attention to that given to extensive reading. I think advances in technology are likely to allow substantial innovation in this area, so that we may start to see the adaptation of spoken text in a similar way to which graded readers are made.

Also in reading, the research by Norbert Schmitt's student, Ana Pellicer-Sánchez (2016), using eye-tracking, took observation of vocabulary learning while reading a step closer to what actually happens.

The continuing research by the team of Boers, Deconinck, Demecheleer, Eyckmans, Lindstromberg, and Stengers has greatly enriched the range of ways in which we can elaborate and thus strengthen the learning of multiword units and single words through what could be called word consciousness activities.

In the area of multiword units, I highly rate the findings by Boers and colleagues (Boers, Dang, & Strong, 2017; Boers, Demecheleer, Coxhead, & Webb, 2014; Strong & Boers, 2019) showing that test-like trial and error exercises are not as helpful to learning as seeing the whole intact multiword unit. Study and retrieval are better than trial and error and feedback. This finding clearly applies beyond multiword units. The area of multiword units has also seen the development of well-researched and substantial lists as well as studies of how they are learned.

Research by Yen Dang has added more rigour and breadth to the creation and application of word lists, including parallel word lists using different word family sizes.

Meta-analyses like all research have their dangers but a well-conducted meta-analysis can help make sense out of a confusing area. Stuart Webb and his students along with others have started doing meta-analyses of a wide range of vocabulary-related areas involving both incidental and deliberate vocabulary learning, and other researchers have also used this methodology.

The book has a large list of references, and this has the goal of acting as a starting point for new researchers who want to get into vocabulary research. Some pieces of research are analysed in detail in the book, and guidelines for future research, particularly things to be careful about, are drawn from this analysis.

I swear I will not write a fourth edition.