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For my mother, Joyce Read

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Series editors' preface

This book in the Cambridge Language Assessment Series is both timely and authoritative. It is timely because, after many years of neglect, the study of vocabulary in applied linguistics is now flourishing. Research on vocabulary has made a significant contribution to this development and will assume greater importance as researchers and practitioners recognise the need for a stronger theoretical foundation for their work and for more sophisticated ways of measuring vocabulary knowledge and use.

It is also authoritative because it is written by a scholar who has devoted many years to the study of vocabulary in the context of second and foreign language learning, teaching and assessment. John Read is at the forefront of recent work in the area, and in this book provides us with an in-depth consideration of how the results of empirical research and thoughtful scholarship can be applied to assessment. The book is unique in bringing together the most important empirical research in this area for reference by test developers and classroom teachers. This reflects the fact that Read is not only a researcher on vocabulary assessment but also a language teacher familiar with the challenges faced by students acquiring vocabulary in a second language as well as by their teachers in assessing what the learners have acquired.

Having established what is known about vocabulary knowledge and use, and how this might be measured, Read then deals at length with the implications for vocabulary assessment.

He presents a framework that expands the traditional concept of a vocabulary test to cover a range of procedures for assessing the vocabulary knowledge of second language learners. These procedures can be useful for addressing practical assessment needs as well as pro-

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viding tools for conducting research into the lexical dimension of language.

Finally, Read looks forward, taking us beyond current research and concerns, and speculates on new directions in vocabulary assessment, in particular the contribution of computerised corpus analysis. Just as Read's research has already influenced the field of vocabulary studies, it is likely that this final chapter on future directions will itself, in the years to come, influence the work of language testers, practitioners and researchers alike.

Like other volumes in the series, it is practical in focus, addressing those issues which concern teachers, researchers and test developers. At the same time, it also takes account of what is known about relevant aspects of language, from the point of view of both language teaching, and research in language education and applied linguistics.

It skilfully incorporates practical advice to teachers and item writers, clear and constructive criticism of existing tests and words of caution to those who believe that it is a simple matter to devise tasks that require learners to 'write a sentence that shows you know the meaning of the word'. Read's book epitomises what we as series editors are trying to achieve: integrate theory and research in applied linguistics into language assessment, for the benefit of the test developer and the classroom teacher.

*J. Charles Alderson
Lyle F. Bachman*

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge first of all the contribution of the series editors, Charles Alderson and Lyle Bachman. Charles originally asked me to write this volume at a time when I doubt that he had much reliable evidence of my capacity to deliver. I have appreciated his good-humoured encouragement along the way and done my best to ensure that his initial confidence in me was not misplaced. Lyle has been a demanding reader of my work and has spurred me on at various points to achieve more than I thought I was capable of.

It was Paul Nation who first interested me in vocabulary tests and in his gentle way acted as a mentor in the early years. Like any successful pupil I think I can teach him a thing or two about vocabulary assessment these days but I am very grateful for all the help he has generously given me up to the present time.

Paul Meara gave a much-needed sense of direction to my research on vocabulary testing in 1990 when I spent three months working with him at Birkbeck College, London. Since then he has continued to stimulate me, like so many others, with his original ideas and his deep distrust of conventional truths. He too has always been ready to provide assistance and support when I needed it.

I am particularly indebted to Carol Chapelle. We were delighted to discover our mutual interest in vocabulary testing in 1995 and she has subsequently had a great influence on my thinking about the subject. She helped me to see the connections between language testing and second language vocabulary research which I had been struggling to make for some years before that. She has also challenged me to break new ground with this book and deserves much of the credit if I have succeeded in doing so.

Norbert Schmitt has emerged as a productive scholar in second language vocabulary research in recent years while still retaining his

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youthful enthusiasm for the subject. I have used him as a sounding board in the latter stages of the writing and benefited greatly from his wide knowledge of the field.

All of these people have read the book in manuscript form. While I was naturally flattered by their very positive evaluations of my work, their close reading of the text has obliged me to clarify a number of the main ideas, take a more sceptical view of certain matters and correct errors in the detail. Any remaining problems with the book are not for want of effort on their part and I thank them all for their dedication to the task.

Part of the book was written during a period of leave I spent at the Centre for Advanced Research in English at the University of Birmingham in 1996. I am grateful to Malcolm Coulthard, Dave Willis and all the staff of English Language Research who provided me with such good facilities and congenial company during that time.

My family – Siew Hean, Melanie and Martin – have been tolerant of my silent preoccupation with the project and my long hours on the home computer at times. I suppose I might have completed the work sooner without having them around, but my life would have been much the poorer for it.

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