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978-0-521-70327-7 - Modelling and Assessing Vocabulary Knowledge

Edited by Helmut Daller, James Milton and Jeanine Treffers-Daller

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Contributors

Frank Boers, *Erasmuscollege, Brussels, Belgium*

Helmut Daller, *University of the West of England, Bristol, UK*

June Eyckmans, *Erasmuscollege, Brussels, Belgium*

Tess Fitzpatrick, *University of Wales, Swansea, UK*

Hilde Hacquebord, *University of Groningen, The Netherlands*

Nuria Lorenzo-Dus, *University of Wales, Swansea, UK*

David Malvern, *University of Reading, UK*

Paul Meara, *University of Wales, Swansea, UK*

James Milton, *University of Wales, Swansea, UK*

Paul Nation, *Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand*

David Phelan, *University of the West of England, Bristol, UK*

Brian Richards, *University of Reading, UK*

Ellen Schur, *The Open University, Israel*

Berend Stellingwerf, *University of Groningen, The Netherlands*

Françoise Tidball, *University of the West of England, Bristol, UK*

Jeanine Treffers-Daller, *University of the West of England, Bristol, UK*

Hans Van de Velde, *Utrecht Institute of Linguistics OTS, The Netherlands*

Roeland van Hout, *University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands*

Anne Vermeer, *University of Tilburg, The Netherlands*

Clarissa Wilks, *Kingston University, UK*

Huijuan Xue, *University of the West of England, Bristol, UK*

Abbreviations

AWL	Academic Word List
BNC	British National Corpus
CHAT	Codes for the Human Analysis of Transcripts
CHILDES	Child Language Data Exchange System
CLAN	Computerised Language Analysis Program
EVST	Eurocentre’s Vocabulary Size Tests
LFP	Lexical Frequency Profile
SALT	Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts
TTR	Type–Token Ratio
X-Lex	X-Lex the Swansea Placement Test

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Foreword

Modelling and assessing vocabulary knowledge are two sides of the same coin. Progress in modelling will help to develop more refined ways of assessing vocabulary knowledge, and empirical data from assessments will feed into the development of models for this aspect of language proficiency. The focus of this book is on both, modelling and assessing. The initiative for this book came after a BAAL/CUP workshop in January 2004 at the University of the West of England, Bristol. Researchers from various backgrounds were discussing their way of approaching vocabulary knowledge in the development and evaluation of measures, or in the discussion of models. After an intensive discussion over two days we decided to bring our views on this topic together by replying to the keynote chapter of Paul Nation, who outlined the threats to the validity of various measures of lexical knowledge. Chapter 1 of this book gives an overview of these threats; the remainder of the book is dedicated to the approaches to overcome these methodological problems. Overall, most researchers in the field stress that a single ‘one-size-fits-all’ measure or a ‘Holy Grail’ does not exist for the measurement of vocabulary knowledge. Instead many researchers stress the importance of multiple measures to give a valid picture of the lexical richness of a person. A broad variety of these measures are discussed in this book.

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Series Editors' Preface

This book explores approaches to the measurement of vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary development in second and foreign language learners. Vocabulary plays an important role in the lives of all language users, since it is one of the major predictors of school performance, and successful learning and use of new vocabulary is also key to membership of many social and professional roles. The measurement of vocabulary knowledge in second language learners is of interest not only to language teachers, who are often required to make assessments of development of their learners' language proficiency, but also to researchers and test developers who seek to develop valid and reliable measures of second language knowledge and use. While there is a considerable literature of many aspects of language testing, the assessment of lexical knowledge has received relatively little attention until recently, despite the fact that vocabulary can be viewed as the core component of all the language skills. The papers in this book show how scholars in a number of different countries are addressing fundamental questions related to vocabulary modelling and measurement.

Modelling and Assessing Vocabulary provides an overview of issues involved in vocabulary measurement in second and foreign language learning. The central question which the contributors to the book explore is, how can one assess the extent and richness of a person's vocabulary knowledge and use? Lexical competence is difficult to assess with a single measure since vocabulary knowledge is multi-faceted. Multiple measures are needed across a variety of tasks and settings in order to provide an adequate picture of the extent of a learner's vocabulary. In this book a number of approaches to the measurement of the L2 lexicon are illustrated. Many standard vocabulary tests are shown to reflect a partial view of the nature of lexical competence, and the papers demonstrate how researchers are attempting to develop more sophisticated and representative measures of lexical competence. The contributors show that among the factors affecting the validity of vocabulary measures are the definition of a word itself, individual variables learners bring to the testing process, test-taking strategies employed by learners, learners' motivation to complete a test, the characteristics of the test itself, the

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source of the items included in tests, and the choice of first language versus second language test formats.

As a whole the papers in this book throw valuable light on the issues involved in measuring vocabulary learning in a second or foreign language and illustrate ways in which vocabulary tests can seek to capture the complex and multi-dimensional nature of lexical knowledge.

Michel H. Long
Jack C. Richards