CHAPTER 1

Getting Started
With Five Key Questions

As both instructors and students know well, vocabulary is at the center of language acquisition and successful communication. Words and lexical phrases (recurring combinations of multiple words) are the fabric of language, the building blocks of what we use to communicate with one another. Limited vocabulary knowledge always restricts the ability to communicate in an effective manner. On the other hand, improving vocabulary knowledge can increase communicative competence by leaps and bounds. Not surprisingly, students of second languages (L2s) are particularly interested in receiving instruction on vocabulary (see James, 1996), identify vocabulary knowledge as the most important factor underlying successful communication with native speakers (Gorman, 1979), and point to lack of vocabulary knowledge as one of their principal sources of difficulty in the L2 (Meara, 1980). Advanced L2 learners also suffer from limited vocabulary knowledge, such as when it comes to their command of idiomatic expressions (see Arnaud & Savignon, 1997) and field-specific vocabulary (such as for business, medicine, law, botany). This type of limited vocabulary knowledge can be a burden year after year, persistently restricting the advanced L2 learner’s ability to communicate in a more precise and effective manner.

VOCABULARY AND OTHER AREAS OF LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT

When it comes to the importance of vocabulary compared to other areas of linguistic development, as Wilkins (1972) pointed out, lack of grammatical knowledge may impede the ability to convey meaning, but absence of vocabulary can impede the ability to transmit meaning altogether. Consider, for example, the two types of errors in the sentences presented in Table 1.1. Notice how none of the sentences with grammatical errors impede comprehension of the speaker’s intended meaning to the extent that the sentences with lexical errors do. Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising that native speakers identify vocabulary errors to be the most serious error and the greatest impediment to successful comprehension and vocabulary knowledge to be the most important aspect of language use (Politzer, 1978).

When assessing the importance of vocabulary, we must also consider the relationship between knowledge of individual words and knowledge of grammar.
Research suggests that much of what is called grammatical knowledge actually resides at the level of individual words. Healy and Sherrod (1994; see also Healy et al., 1998), for example, demonstrate that English speakers pronounce the word the using the schwa phoneme before consonant sounds (the book, the front) and the phoneme /i/ before vowel sounds (the author, the inside) based on information stored at the level of individual words that builds up gradually over time due to exposure to many exemplars of words. Serwatka and Healy (1998) found that the ability to distinguish between count and mass nouns in English is also based on word-level knowledge.

Additionally, Barcroft (2007b) found that the ability of native English speakers to make accurate grammaticality judgments decreased dramatically when they were asked to work with unreal words instead of real words. In this study, native English speakers were presented with sentences with dative alternation violations that contained polysyllabic verbs (*John explained Mary the plan) using real verbs (explained), similar-to-real verbs (explunned), and dissimilar-to-real verbs (tidnopped) and sentences with comparative violations with polysyllabic adjectives (*Robert is demandinger than Allen) using real adjectives (demanding), similar-to-real adjectives (demunding), and dissimilar-to-real adjectives (natormunt). Although the participants were asked to treat all unreal words as real words, their ability to reject the ungrammatical sentences decreased dramatically when the sentences contained unreal words (verbs or adjectives). The similar-to-real words led to performance that fell between the other two conditions, argued to be due to partial activation of their corresponding real words, at least in the case of the adjectives. The findings of this study (see Table 1.2; rejection rates are for all experimental sentences, not only the examples provided) further demonstrate that much of what is sometimes considered to be grammatical knowledge actually resides at the level of individual words.

All of these points regarding the central role of vocabulary in language acquisition and use suggest that vocabulary should also have a central role in the design and development of L2 programs and L2 teaching. However, L2 instruction and

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<th>Intended meaning</th>
<th>Grammatical error</th>
<th>Lexical error</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>She waited for me.</td>
<td>She waited me.</td>
<td>She hoped for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want to cash a check.</td>
<td>I want cash a check.</td>
<td>I want to change a check.</td>
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Table 1.1 Comparisons of Grammatical and Lexical Errors in L2 Production

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research on second language acquisition (SLA) traditionally have focused more on the acquisition of grammar than on vocabulary. According to Zimmerman (1997, p. 5), who surveyed historical trends with regard to the treatment of vocabulary throughout the history of language instruction and SLA,

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)

Fortunately, increased research on L2 vocabulary over the past two to three decades has increased the ability to approach vocabulary instruction in a manner that is theoretically grounded and supported by more and more concrete research findings related to L2 vocabulary learning.

**PURPOSE OF THE BOOK**

The purpose of this book is to explain and exemplify an approach to L2 vocabulary instruction that relies heavily on concrete research findings and the theoretical advances that they support. The approach, known as input-based incremental (IBI) vocabulary instruction, considers the cognitive and psycholinguistic processes involved in L2 vocabulary learning and, as the name suggests, emphasizes the critical roles of (a) how target vocabulary is presented to learners as input (samples of the target language) and (b) how activities can be designed to support the incremental buildup of different aspects of vocabulary knowledge over time. The book provides brief explanations of the theoretical underpinnings of the IBI approach as well as a variety of research findings that support it. It also focuses on how to put the IBI approach into practice on a day-to-day basis and includes many sample IBI lessons and explanations of them. All of the sample lessons are designed for the context of teaching English to speakers of other languages.
(TESOL). However, instructors of other L2s can readily adapt the information and sample lessons in the book to create IBI vocabulary lessons for the languages they teach.

Before moving on to the details of IBI approach, the rest of this chapter (a) provides a brief historical perspective on how vocabulary has been addressed in different instructional methods and approaches over time and (b) presents five key questions that instructors of English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) and instructors of other L2s might ask themselves regarding their own experience with L2 instruction and possibilities for adjustments in the future. The historical review provides an opportunity for instructors to assess how their own approach to L2 vocabulary instruction compares to other instructional methods and approaches over time and to consider how the IBI vocabulary instruction differs from other trends in vocabulary instruction. The five questions encourage instructors to step back and assess their current practices and possible adjustments when it comes to L2 vocabulary instruction.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF L2 VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

Zimmerman (1997) discusses how trends in L2 vocabulary instruction have varied greatly over the past two centuries. Under the Grammar Translation Method of the 1800s, students were typically presented with a variety of literary vocabulary to be used for translation, and vocabulary was directly instructed only if a word demonstrated a specific grammatical rule (Kelly, 1969; Zimmerman, 1997). “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” (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 6). Subsequently, in Henry Sweet’s Reform Movement, which was developed in opposition to the Grammar Translation Method, speaking and phonetic accuracy, or fluency, were emphasized. Additionally, target words were to be those found in everyday usage and were selected according to their “simplicity and usefulness” (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 8). Following the Direct Method, developed by Sauveur and popularized by Berlitz, vocabulary was selected based on whether it formed part of an “earnest” question for which the instructor was truly interested in an answer and whether the sentences in which the vocabulary appeared provided enough context for learners to deduce the meaning of the vocabulary; such vocabulary was generally “simple and familiar” (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 8).

As Zimmerman (1997) also points out, in the 1920s and 1930s, a period associated with the Reading Method in the United States and Situational Language Teaching in Great Britain, Michael West (from Great Britain) was concerned about which words L2 learners should acquire. He began to focus extensively on the use of word frequency lists to advance the field in this regard, leading
to West’s (1953) *A General Service List of English Words*, which was based on frequency of word usage in English and could be used for selecting and ordering the English vocabulary that should be learned during the first 3 years of study. West’s focus on controlling the level of difficulty of vocabulary at different levels of instruction is also evident in the series of graded readers he developed as part of the New Method system in the 1920s (see Smith, 2007, for an online biography focused on West’s life and career). Other British linguists, such as H. Palmer and A. Hornsby, who were working within Situational Language Teaching, believed that vocabulary should be taught via meaningful, situation-based oral activities and through a process of selection, gradation, and presentation of linguistic structures (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). According to Zimmerman, the work of West and Palmer consisted of initial attempts to develop principles of vocabulary control and vocabulary syllabus design.

In the mid-1940s, with the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), which was developed by structural linguists such as Charles Fries, L2 instruction focused on the idea of resolving a conflict between first language (L1) and L2 linguistic systems by requiring the learner to perform a barrage of oral repetition and substitution drills. From this perspective, vocabulary was viewed as less important than grammar. Words were selected based on their simplicity and familiarity. New words were added as drills progressed but only if the new words did not inhibit drill performance, because it was believed that too many vocabulary words during the early stages of learning would give learners a “false sense of security” about their abilities in the L2 (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 11). Also tied to ALM is the idea that after establishing sufficient control of grammar, one might then move on to a massive expansion of vocabulary (see, e.g., Lado, Baldwin, & Lobo, 1967).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which enjoys widespread popularity today, emphasizes the development of communicative competence, or the ability to communicate effectively by means of a variety of different types of competence—including phonological, lexical, grammatical, pragmatic, and sociocultural. In CLT, learners are exposed to words in the input during meaningful exchanges, and lexical competence develops naturally over time. Krashen and Terrell’s (1983) communicatively oriented Natural Approach, for example, allows learners to acquire new words by exposing them to meaning-bearing comprehensible input over time. Decontextualized vocabulary-building activities are not encouraged because they do not promote the type of implicit or incidental acquisition desired. Krashen (1989, 1993) also has argued that advanced L2 learners should engage in free voluntary reading as an effective means of increasing their L2 vocabulary knowledge.
INCIDENTAL AND INTENTIONAL VOCABULARY LEARNING

In addition to the trends described thus far, as the amount of research on L2 vocabulary has risen in recent decades, substantial attention has been given to the roles of incidental and intentional L2 vocabulary learning. *Incidental vocabulary learning* refers to when students learn new words from their context without intending to do so. Two examples of incidental vocabulary learning are learning new words during free reading without intending to do so or picking up new words during a conversation without intending to do so. In contrast to incidental vocabulary learning, *intentional vocabulary learning* refers to situations in which learners actively try to learn new words while intending to do so. Two examples of intentional vocabulary learning are looking at word–picture pairs on a screen and attempting to learn the new words and completing a series of activities in a workbook in an effort to learn a set of target L2 words.

Instructional activities designed to promote incidental vocabulary learning can be referred to as *indirect vocabulary instruction*. In indirect vocabulary instruction (or incidentally oriented vocabulary instruction), an instructor does not explicitly ask students to attempt to learn new words. Instead, the instructor has students engage in certain types of activities, such as reading a text for meaning or completing an information-exchange task, with the understanding that learners may acquire new words incidentally during these types of activities. *Direct vocabulary instruction*, on the other hand, refers to instruction that engages learners in intentional vocabulary learning. It may involve a variety of activities, such as working with a picture file to teach learners new words or workbook activities in which learners are asked to try to learn new words by filling in blank spaces with the words, matching words to their definitions, and so forth.

Many contexts of vocabulary learning are neither purely incidental nor purely intentional, however; they can be viewed on a continuum because attention is not a dichotomous entity (Gass, 1999; Haynes, 1998). For example, an instructor talking to students about various objects in the classroom while focusing on meaning (e.g., *I really like where they placed the windows and the blinds; it allows the room to get a lot of sun.*) may not be a completely incidental context because one or more students may decide intentionally to try to remember a new word (e.g., *blinds*). Reading a text for meaning while paying some additional attention to new words in the text also would not constitute an instance of completely incidental nor completely intentional learning. As another example, a learner may hear a series of new words repeated one by one in a communicatively oriented context while focusing on a particular task, such as checking to see if all of the pieces in a game are present (e.g., *OK, we need the ball, the dice, the cards, the score card. Can you double-check? OK, let’s see. Ball? Dice? Cards? Score card? OK, I think we’re set.*). The listener may be focusing on the larger task of preparing to play the game, but
also paying careful attention to one or more of the new words (e.g., dice) being repeated in the process.

Although researchers and instructors alike acknowledge that a vast amount of L2 vocabulary can be learned incidentally, research on incidental L2 learning has led to what many have viewed to be disappointing results. Schmitt (2010, p. 29) notes that “early research on vocabulary acquisition from incidental exposure in reading found a discouragingly low pickup rate” but attributes some of these findings to methodological weaknesses. Other studies have demonstrated that an intentional orientation (simply instructing learners to attempt to learn target words) leads to more vocabulary gains than an incidental orientation (instructing learners to read for meaning without instructing them to attempt to learn specific target words; e.g., Hulstijn, 1992). Findings such as these have led to another, more recent trend in L2 vocabulary instruction: calls for direct L2 vocabulary instruction as a complement to incidental vocabulary learning alone. Nation (2001) argues that this research “underlines the need for training learners in guessing from context and for complementing learning from context with more deliberate vocabulary focused learning” (p. 120). Acknowledging the limitations of relying on incidental vocabulary learning alone, researchers and instructors have brought the need to include direct L2 vocabulary instruction (and intentional L2 vocabulary learning on the part of students) to the forefront.

All of the historical trends in L2 vocabulary instruction described so far suffer from limitations. Some lack empirical support, such as the approaches of early L2 instructional methods and Krashen’s (1989, 1993) general call for incidental vocabulary learning through free reading, in light of research findings demonstrating superior vocabulary learning for intentional as compared to incidental orientation (Hulstijn, 1992; see also Barcroft, 2009; Paribakht & Wesche, 1997). Others fail to present a fully developed program for effective L2 instruction, as is the case with many of the calls for more direct L2 vocabulary instruction. What is needed is a more fully developed approach to L2 vocabulary instruction that is theoretically grounded and supported by the expanding body of research afforded by increases in L2 vocabulary research in recent decades. IBI vocabulary instruction was designed to meet these needs. It is a more fully developed approach and is based directly on a variety of recent developments in theory and research on L2 vocabulary learning.

**FIVE KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT L2 VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION**

Many instructors of ESL/EFL and other L2s are interested in providing effective vocabulary instruction for students but may not be sure of what specific steps to take in order to do so. The multitude of teaching contexts in which instructors find themselves also makes it impossible to provide a one-size-fits-all solution
Input-Based Incremental Vocabulary Instruction

to L2 vocabulary instruction. Whereas one instructor teaches English to Korean high school students in Seoul, another teaches English to Canadian elementary school children of immigrants in Toronto, another teaches private English lessons to university-level students who have traveled to England to complete university studies at Oxford, another teaches English to Spanish-speaking university students in Argentina or any other Latin American country, and so forth. With these examples in mind, let us begin by addressing five key questions that are pertinent to all instructors, regardless of teaching context, as they consider how to approach L2 vocabulary instruction on a day-to-day basis:

1. How do you currently teach vocabulary (if at all)?

2. What resources are available to you for teaching vocabulary?

3. What are your current ideas about effective vocabulary learning?

4. Why should you adopt the IBI approach?

5. How can you use IBI vocabulary instruction in your classroom?

1. How do you currently teach vocabulary (if at all)? As noted earlier, the numerous different teaching contexts in which instructors find themselves necessitate a certain degree of flexibility when making adjustments to improve L2 vocabulary instruction. Nevertheless, one thing that all instructors can do is to make an assessment of their own current teaching practices when it comes to vocabulary. How do you currently teach vocabulary? How do you select target words? Are the target words preselected for you based on your use of one or more specific course texts or course readings? How do you present vocabulary to students? What do you do to help ensure that students have remembered target vocabulary over time? How do you test target vocabulary? How do you score vocabulary tests?

Some instructors may assert that they do not really teach vocabulary but instead simply create the conditions in which L2 vocabulary learning can happen. One can contemplate how this approach might be a viable and defendable one. Consider how much vocabulary children learn in this manner when they acquire their L1. They learn vast amounts of vocabulary in this context and typically do so in the absence of any type of formal program of vocabulary instruction. This vocabulary is acquired incidentally and in an incremental manner over time as children listen to and attempt to communicate with other individuals in their environment. If children can learn such a large amount of L1 vocabulary in this manner, why not work to create similar conditions in the classroom for learners to be able to acquire large amounts of L2 vocabulary?

When addressing this question, it is helpful to consider some of the key differences between L1 vocabulary learning among children and the variety of contexts in which L2 vocabulary learning can occur. Children learning their
Getting Started With Five Key Questions

L1 typically have numerous hours “on task” listening to native speakers of the L1 in question, including consistent exposure to vocabulary. Therefore, even if incidental vocabulary happens slowly or only in spurts (such as during the “fast mapping” stage of L1 vocabulary learning), this context of vocabulary learning allows plenty of time for children to learn hundreds and thousands of words incidentally. Individuals learning L2s often do not enjoy the luxury of such a large amount of time. Many are learning the L2 in a classroom, in a country where the L2 is not spoken as the primary language, or both. Therefore, direct vocabulary instruction and intentional learning may be more appropriate when it comes to those L2 learning contexts, at least for the large number of L2 learners with limited time available and limited exposure to the target L2.

2. What resources are available to you for teaching vocabulary? In addition to defining current teaching practices with regard to vocabulary, it also may be helpful to make an assessment of resources that are available to you for teaching vocabulary. Are the resources for vocabulary instruction primarily tied to the course texts you use? Besides course texts, what other supplementary materials are available to you to facilitate developing effective L2 vocabulary instruction lessons? To what extent do you currently use resources available online? If you do not currently use online resources, what adjustments could you make for them to be more readily available?

Even if your primary resource for teaching vocabulary to date has been only your course text(s), a number of online resources are available to you for selecting target words and addressing other aspects of L2 vocabulary learning. For example, the online Academic Word List (AWL; Coxhead, 2000; www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist) is a list of 570 word families that do not form part of the 2,000 most frequent words in English, which is useful for ESL/EFL students who are beyond the beginning and low-intermediate levels. It was developed for use by ESL/EFL instructors teaching students preparing for tertiary (university-level) study or by students studying vocabulary alone in an attempt to learn vocabulary needed for tertiary-level study. The 5,000-word level of the Vocabulary Levels Test developed by Schmitt, Schmitt, and Clapham (2001; see also Schmitt, 2010) has been described as “perhaps the most widely used vocabulary size test in the ESL/EFL context” (Schmitt, 2010, p. 197). Because the test reflects word frequency in English, including the 5,000-word level, it includes words of substantially low frequency in English and is appropriate for selecting (and testing) target words for higher level learners. The test is copyrighted by Norbert Schmitt, but he has made it freely available for noncommercial research and pedagogical purposes at www.nottingham.ac.uk/~aezweb/research/cral/doku.php?id=people:schmitt#other_output. To access the test, click on the pdf file below the listing of “Schmitt, N., Schmitt, D. and Clapham, C. (2001)” under the heading “Journal Articles” and view the test in the Appendices of the article.
Going beyond individual words, Martinez and Schmitt (2012) also developed a list of the 505 most frequent English phrasal expressions (formulaic sequences such as *money talks* and *on the other hand*), which instructors also now can begin to use to include formulaic language when identifying and working on target vocabulary (for more information on the development of this list, see, e.g., Martinez & Schmitt, 2011). This list, known as the PHRASE List, is available at http://sfsu.academia.edu/RonMartinez/Papers/1335501/A_Phrasal_Expressions_List.

In addition to target vocabulary lists based on frequency, numerous other online lists of L2 vocabulary are available, including field-specific vocabulary such as for business at http://businessvocabulary.org (a website that provides free exercises, videos, and lessons related to finance/banking-related vocabulary) and for health-related fields at www.vocabulary.com. Field-specific vocabulary can be found on a variety of other different websites as well. Another website that may be of use to instructors of ESL/EFL and other L2s is Tom Cobb’s Compleat Lexical Tutor (www.lextutor.ca), which offers a number of beneficial features, including the ability to cut and paste English texts to determine information about the relative frequency of the words in the text and a word-associates test. These are just some of the many online resources available to instructors interested in providing students with more effective L2 vocabulary instruction.

3. What are your current ideas about effective vocabulary learning? In addition to making assessments about current teaching practices and available resources, it also can be beneficial to reflect on your own ideas about what conditions and tasks help to promote L2 vocabulary learning in the most effective manner. As human beings, we often have intuitions and maintain world views about the way different phenomena in the world work or should work, including with regard to the effects of specific learning conditions (e.g., presenting new words many times as opposed to one time) and tasks (e.g., writing new words in sentences, copying new words) on L2 vocabulary learning. Sometimes our intuitions are confirmed when evidence becomes available to support them. Other times they are disconfirmed when evidence becomes available to contradict them. In the latter case, it is important that we reevaluate our intuitions and adopt a new perspective.

When it comes to L2 vocabulary learning, it is fortunate that today we can make use of an increasing body of empirical evidence about the relative effectiveness of different learning conditions and tasks in order to assess and reassess our current ideas about what we think is or should be effective on a fairly regular basis. To explore this issue further, complete Activity 1.1, which asks you to indicate your beliefs about how L2 vocabulary learning is affected by different types of tasks and learning conditions. After you have finished this activity, the rest of the chapter expands on the important role of research in helping explain various processes involved in L2 vocabulary acquisition and improving L2 instruction through the development and implementation of evidence-based practices.
### Activity 1.1 Your Current Ideas About Effective L2 Vocabulary Learning

Complete the table below by indicating with an X the effect that you think each of the following tasks and learning conditions would have on learning new words in an L2. Unless otherwise indicated, you may assume that vocabulary learning is *intentional* and that the posttest measures include assessment of the learners’ *productive* knowledge of target words (see a picture or L1 translation and try to produce the target L2 word).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task or Learning Condition</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>No Effect</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Writing target words in original sentences</td>
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<td>2. Copying individual target words</td>
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<td>3. Answering questions about the meaning of target words</td>
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<td>4. Making pleasantness ratings about the meaning of target words</td>
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<td>5. Counting letters in target words</td>
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<td>6. Making pleasantness ratings as compared to counting letters (Mark “positive” if pleasantness ratings have a more positive effect and “negative” if pleasantness ratings have a more negative effect.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Generating L1 synonyms for target words while reading a text (<em>with</em> explicit instructions to learn the target words)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Generating L1 synonyms for target words while reading a text (<em>without</em> explicit instructions to learn the target words)</td>
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<td>9. Presenting eight 3-second repetitions of a target word as compared to presenting two 12-second repetitions of a target word</td>
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<td>10. Allowing learners to generate target words on their own</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. While holding constant the total time of exposure, gradually increasing the amount of time between presentations of a target word</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Presenting target words in an acoustically varied format based on multiple speakers, voice types, or speaking rates</td>
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</table>
The findings of various studies on L2 vocabulary acquisition suggest that the answers to Activity 1.1 are as follows. The effect of each task for Numbers 1–8 is negative (Barcroft, 1998b, 2000, 2002, 2003b, 2004a, 2006, 2009), whereas the effect of each task or learning condition for Numbers 9–12 is positive (Bahrick, Barcroft, & Bahrick, 1993; Barcroft, 1998a, 2007a; Barcroft & Sommers, 2005; McNamara & Healy, 1995; Royer, 1973; Sommers & Barcroft, 2007). To what extent were your ideas consistent with the answers suggested by the research? If at least some of your answers differed from those suggested by the research, the principles and approach to L2 vocabulary presented in this book may help you to view certain aspects of L2 vocabulary acquisition from a different perspective.

Most of the findings referred to in the preceding paragraph are the product of research focused on L2 vocabulary learning from an input-processing perspective. Input refers to any sample of the target language to which we are exposed. Input processing refers to how we attend to different aspects of the input (e.g., the formal component, the meaning conveyed, grammatical structures) from a cognitive perspective. As will be discussed further in Chapter 2, a substantial number of research findings in this area (on word-level input processing) contradict some commonly held beliefs about the effects of different learning conditions and tasks on L2 vocabulary learning. One common misconception is that elaborating on word meaning (by means of writing words in sentences or addressing questions about word meaning) is a good way to learn words from the start. Another is that copying target words while trying to learn them should be helpful. The origins of these misconceptions and the research that refutes them (e.g., research demonstrating the negative effects of sentence writing, questions about word meaning and word copying on early L2 word learning) are discussed in more depth in Chapter 2.

4. Why should you adopt the IBI approach? IBI vocabulary instruction is an approach that emphasizes the presentation of target vocabulary as input early on and the incremental (gradual) buildup of different aspects of vocabulary knowledge over time. There are a number of reasons why adopting the IBI approach can work for instructors of ESL/EFL and other L2s in their efforts to provide more effective vocabulary instruction to students. Consider the following five reasons.

First, the IBI approach is based on a theoretical perspective that is consistent with all of the research findings behind the answers to Activity 1.1 and many other research findings. As mentioned earlier, the idea that writing target words in sentences or copying target words produces negative effects on the initial stages of L2 word form learning may be counterintuitive to many, but that is what the research indicates. Therefore, it is better to follow an approach that is designed to be consistent with research findings as opposed to designing activities that studies have demonstrated to be ineffective, or just relying on wishful thinking without considering research at all. Of course, this applies not only to
what is ineffective at a particular stage of L2 word learning (e.g., writing target words in sentences, copying words at the early stages of learning a set of new L2 words) but also to what is effective. For example, if immediate L2 word learning increases from 38% to 64% when target words are spoken by six talkers instead of one talker (holding the overall number of repetitions constant), as Barcroft and Sommers (2005) demonstrated, why not make provisions to include more talker variability when presenting target words to students so that they can enjoy the benefits of this type of spoken input? The IBI approach is designed to help students benefit from existing research in this way as much as possible. The more carefully the approach is applied, the greater the benefits.

Second, IBI vocabulary instruction takes learners into account from a cognitive perspective and considers learners’ limited processing resources when it comes to L2 vocabulary learning. There are numerous aspects involved in learning a new word. Among these are the word form; all of the word’s meanings, including L2-specific meanings and usage that differ from those found in the learner’s L1 (e.g., a Spanish-speaking English learner needs to use the phrase to cash a check instead of to change a check, the latter of which is a literal translation of to cash a check [cambiar un cheque] in Spanish); and all of the word’s various collocations (words that co-occur with a word, e.g., we say a brief visit instead of a less natural sounding phrase such as a quick visit or a fast visit because the sequence brief + visit is a collocation). Clearly, a learner cannot be expected to learn all of these aspects of word knowledge at once. What is needed is an approach that encourages a gradual buildup of word knowledge over time, and IBI vocabulary instruction is designed to do just that.

Third, IBI vocabulary lessons are easily incorporated into a variety of instructional contexts. The approach was designed keeping in mind that acquiring English or any other L2 is largely an implicit process that takes place gradually over time as learners attempt to communicate in the target language. Therefore, as will become evident in the various example vocabulary lessons presented in this book, the IBI approach fits seamlessly within an approach to teaching that is largely meaning oriented and that encourages the development of communicative competence (e.g., all of the various types of linguistic competences, including sociolinguistic competence) over time through exchange of meaning (e.g., comprehending messages, producing messages) and interaction (e.g., negotiation of meaning, clarification, repair). In other words, the approach fits well into programs that involve “real-world” use of the target language. Additionally, if an instructional program happened to involve many form-focused drills divorced from communicative language use, the incorporation of IBI vocabulary lessons would necessarily bring more communicative language use into the program.

Fourth, IBI vocabulary instruction is designed to promote the development of all aspects of vocabulary knowledge over time, including learning L2-specific meanings and usage, and collocations. As mentioned earlier, numerous aspects
are involved in learning any word or lexical phrase, and learners simply cannot learn everything all at once. The IBI approach is designed to respond to this situation by gradually but persistently encouraging learners to build up various aspects of word knowledge over time. What is known and what remains to be learned about a word or a lexical phrase varies according to the background of the learner in question and the extent to which they have been exposed to the target word or lexical phrase in question. As Nation (2001) notes,

the “learning burden” of a word is the amount of effort required to learn it.
Different words have different learning burdens for learners with different language backgrounds and each of the aspects of what it means to know a word can contribute to its learning burden. (p. 23)

The IBI approach is designed to support learners in meeting the learning burden for any target vocabulary by focusing on how the vocabulary is presented as input and pushing learners to build up multiple aspects of vocabulary knowledge in an incremental but thorough manner over time.

Fifth and finally, the IBI approach is designed to incorporate not only current but also future research findings related to L2 vocabulary learning. As will be made clear in Chapter 2, the final principle of IBI vocabulary instruction is to incorporate current and future research findings that have direct implications for L2 vocabulary instruction on an ongoing basis. Instructors following the IBI approach are encouraged to maintain a list of research findings that have direct implications for L2 vocabulary instruction in the classroom, vocabulary-related activities to be completed by students outside of class, or both. One research finding that can be included in this list is the positive effect of having multiple talkers present target words in the input, as mentioned previously. Instructors (and designers of instructional materials) can prepare recorded materials spoken by multiple talkers instead of just one talker when presenting target words in the classroom or in computer-based activities for students outside of class. Another research finding that can be included in the list is the positive effect of background music on L2 vocabulary (de Groot, 2006). Instructors can plan lessons that incorporate background music at the appropriate time so that students benefit from it. The IBI approach encourages maintaining an ongoing list of research findings such as these in order to provide students with the most up-to-date evidence-based approach to L2 vocabulary instruction possible.

5. How can you use IBI vocabulary instruction in your classroom? The best way to incorporate the IBI approach in your classroom is to (a) learn the 10 principles of IBI vocabulary instruction presented in Chapter 2, (b) make use of the seven-item checklist for the design and implementation of IBI activities presented in Chapter 3, and (c) take advantage of the numerous sample lessons presented in the remainder of the book. The 10 principles may include some unfamiliar terms, such as semantic elaboration and forced output without access to meaning, but these terms are defined and exemplified when the principle in ques-
tion is explained and discussed in Chapter 2. The seven-item checklist presented in Chapter 3 is designed to be used and reused as needed in order to make sure that the vocabulary lessons that you design continue to be consistent with the basic tenets of the approach, such as presenting target vocabulary in the input first and gradually increasing the difficulty of activities over time. Chapter 3 also includes a sample lesson along with commentary on how the lesson satisfies each of the seven items on the checklist and provides a set of target words that you can use to create your own vocabulary lesson and to assess the extent to which it conforms to the seven items on the checklist. The numerous sample lessons and corresponding commentary in the remaining chapters are designed to demonstrate the IBI approach in action. You can use these lessons as needed to promote learning target vocabulary in your classroom and to gain more experience in how to design and implement IBI vocabulary lessons on your own for any given set of target vocabulary.