A TESOL Symposium on Vocabulary
Words Matter: The Importance of Vocabulary in English Language Teaching and Learning

Papers Presented by
Ron Carter
Tom Cobb
Michael McCarthy

with closing comments by
David Palfreyman

Delivered at Dubai Men’s College
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
March 27, 2006

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TESOL acknowledges and appreciates the assistance of TESOL Arabia, College of the North Atlantic Qatar, and Christine Coombe.
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Montreal
Quebec, Canada

What Is an Advanced Level Vocabulary?
Michael McCarthy
School of English Studies
University of Nottingham,
Nottingham, United Kingdom

What Is Advanced-Level Vocabulary?
The Case of Chunks and Clusters
Ron Carter
University of Nottingham
Nottingham, England

Summary and Final Thoughts
David Palfreyman
Zayed University
Dubai, UAE
TESOL Symposium on Vocabulary

Words Matter: The Importance of Vocabulary in English Language Teaching

Overview

On March 27, 2006, 116 participants gathered at Dubai Men’s College in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), for the TESOL Symposium on Vocabulary: Words Matter: The Importance of Vocabulary in English Language Teaching. The symposium attendees were from the UAE, India, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom (UK), Japan, Armenia, Canada, Egypt, France, Qatar, and Turkey.

The TESOL symposium featured three leading experts sharing their work and research on diverse aspects of the role of vocabulary in English language teaching. Michael McCarthy and Ron Carter, both from the UK, focused on different aspects of advanced-level vocabulary. Tom Cobb, from Canada, focused on teaching vocabulary based on Arabian Gulf research.

Jun Liu, President of TESOL, welcomed the participants and gave special thanks to the symposium sponsors: Cambridge University Press, Dubai Men’s College, the Higher Colleges of Technology, AMIDEAST, and the American University of Sharjah. He also acknowledged, with appreciation, the assistance of TESOL Arabia, the College of the North Atlantic Qatar, and Christine Coombe.

In the morning session, McCarthy and Carter shared highlights of their work and research. Christine Coombe also presented on the role of vocabulary in language assessment. (Tom Cobb, who was unable to be present at the symposium, gave his presentation on vocabulary in a special session at the 2006 TESOL Arabia Conference, which took place March 29-31 in Dubai, UAE.)

In the afternoon, McCarthy and Carter each led an interactive breakout session. In the wrap-up session, David Palfreyman, from the UK, a teacher and teacher educator at Zayed University in Dubai, summarized key insights from the symposium presentations and papers and facilitated a discussion involving the speakers and participants. Mark Algren thanked the presenters and attendees and provided closing remarks.

The three original papers and summary of the proceedings published here provide pertinent research and insights on the important topic of vocabulary in English language teaching.
TESOL Symposium on Vocabulary

Words Matter: The Importance of Vocabulary in English Language Teaching and Learning

March 27, 2006
Dubai Men’s College Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Symposium Agenda

9 am-10 am  Check-in and Coffee

10 am-10:15 am  Welcome and Opening Remarks (DMC Auditorium)
  •  Jun Liu, President, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.
  •  Bill Vega, Director, Dubai Men’s College

10:15 am-12:00 pm  Introductory Presentations (DMC Auditorium)
  •  On Basing Arabian Gulf ESL/ESP on Arabian Gulf Research  
    Tom Cobb  
    *Due to the absence of Tom Cobb on this morning, Christine Coombe provided an overview of issues in vocabulary assessment.
  •  What Is Advanced Level Vocabulary?  
    Michael McCarthy
  •  What Is Advanced Level Vocabulary? The Case of Chunks and Clusters  
    Ron Carter

12:00 pm-1:30 pm  Lunch (Dubai Men’s College Cafeteria)

TESOL acknowledges and appreciates Dubai Men’s College for providing the catering for lunch and breaks at the symposium

1:30 pm-3:15 pm  Concurrent Discussions
  •  On Basing Arabian Gulf ESL/ESP on Arabian Gulf Research  
    Tom Cobb (B 121)
  •  What Is Advanced Level Vocabulary?  
    Michael McCarthy (L115)
  •  What Is Advanced Level Vocabulary? The Case of Chunks and Clusters  
    Ron Carter (B 114-116)

3:30 pm-4:15 pm  Closing Session/Questions & Answers (DMC Auditorium)
  •  David Palfreyman, Zayed University

4:15 pm-4:30 pm  Closing Remarks (DMC Auditorium)
  •  Mark Algren, American University of Sharjah
Speaker Bios and an Overview of the Presentations

On Basing Arabian Gulf ESL/ESP on Arabian Gulf Research
Tom Cobb

It if often said that the Arabian Gulf is the largest ESL/ESP project in existence but with almost no research coming out of it or on which to base it. This observation while humorous ignores a coherent if fragmented program of area-based research extending over 30 years that includes empirical data and provides a clear basis for instructional development, particularly in vocabulary. In my talk I will pull this research together and argue for its continuing relevance.

Tom Cobb taught English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Hong Kong. These experiences convinced him of the value of vocabulary in ESP and of the computer in vocabulary instruction. He next undertook a PhD in educational technology focusing on computer-assisted vocabulary growth, and then became a professor of applied linguistics with a website dedicated to sharing his work with practitioners.

What Is Advanced Level Vocabulary?
Michael McCarthy

How big does a receptive vocabulary need to be at different levels? How does the advanced level differ qualitatively from other levels? At the advanced level little may be gained by simply learning more and more words, and depth of learning becomes more important than breadth. Using corpus data we investigate what 'depth of knowledge’ involves.

Michael McCarthy is Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics, University of Nottingham, Adjunct Professor of Applied Linguistics, Penn State University, USA, and Adjunct Professor of Applied Linguistics, University of Limerick, Ireland. He is co-director (with Ronald Carter) of the 5-million word CANCODE spoken English corpus project, and author of many books.

What Is Advanced Level Vocabulary? The Case of Chunks and Clusters
Ronald Carter

Recent corpus-based research has underlined that vocabulary should not be seen simply as individual words and even not simply as significant collocations and has underlined that knowing vocabulary at an advanced level entails knowing patterns of words. What are these patterns? How big or small or are they? To what extent do they contribute to fluency in a second or foreign language? Are these 'chunks' and 'clusters' different in written and spoken English? What are the implications for language teaching and learning?

Ronald Carter is Professor of Modern English Language at the University of Nottingham. He has written and edited more than 50 books in the fields of literary-linguistics, language
and education, applied linguistics and the teaching of English. He has taught and lectured in over thirty countries world-wide and published over 100 academic papers. In the UK he has worked closely with QCA and the DfES on English in the National Curriculum and the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum and is currently part-seconded to the DfES as linguistic advisor on Basic Skills, Literacy and ESOL. Recent and forthcoming books include: *Exploring Grammar in Context* (CUP, 2000) (with Michael McCarthy and Rebecca Hughes); *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages* (CUP, 2001) (edited with David Nunan); second editions of *Working with Texts* and (with John McRae) *The Routledge History of Literature in English* (Routledge, 2001) and *The Routledge Guide to Modern Writing* (2003). *Language and Creativity: The Art of Common Talk* (Routledge) was published in 2004 and forthcoming in 2006 is *Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide to Spoken and Written English and Usage* (with Michael McCarthy). Professor Carter is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, a fellow of the British Academy for Social Sciences and is currently chair of the British Association for Applied Linguistics.

**Closing Remarks**

**David Palfreyman** has been a TESOL teacher and teacher educator in Europe and the Middle East for 20 years. He currently works at Zayed University, teaches English language and teacher education programs, and contributes to the University's Centre for Teaching, Learning & Assessment. His research interests include the role of socio-cultural context in language education, vocabulary curriculum.