

WORD KNOWLEDGE IN THE INITIAL STAGE OF LEARNING ENGLISH AND GERMAN

Olga S. Hrebik

Doctoral School of Education, University of Szeged

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Our research is aimed at examining the English and German word knowledge of 6th grade students. The aim of this paper is to present the process of determining the vocabulary constituting the basis for the examination. Major issues: (1) How can the amount of words to be measured be determined? (2) How is the internal structure of the word list organized? (3) What is the extent of equivalency between English and German basic vocabulary? Learning words is a traditionally privileged area in the acquisition of foreign languages. The school curricula lay down the quantitative and content criteria for the required vocabulary growth in each phase of education. According to *Nation* (2001, 2006), the most common 2000 lexemes cover about 90% of the lexemes used in everyday conversations. The specific levels of vocabulary are important conditions for the development of language skills, including reading comprehension (*Qian*, 1999; *Zareva et al.*, 2005). *Nation* (2001) also emphasizes that students should directly acquire the most common words of a foreign language so that their word knowledge will be adequately developed to enable them to enrich their vocabulary implicitly, through reading, similarly to native speakers. First, we collected words on the basis of the word frequency lists of the British National Corpus (*Kilgarriff*, 1997), the Corpus of Contemporary American English (*Davies and Gardner*, 2010) and of the frequency of German words (*Tschirner*, 2008). After that, in accordance with the recommendations of the curricula all the relevant English and German words were selected at levels A1 and A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (2001). The selection of words to be measured was carried out along the same principles in the two languages, by seeking to find the highest possible degree of equivalency. About 600 English and German words were selected on the basis of the curricula, the word frequency lists as well as on the basis of levels A1 and A2 of the CEFR (2001). Words strongly influenced by the native language (proper nouns, international words, etc.), words that have no meaning of their own (articles, pronouns, etc.) as well as vocabulary elements with special meaning (e.g., technical words, some words with abstract meaning) were deleted from the list. The ratio of the two levels (A1–A2) is 50–50% in both languages. The word lists typically represent the predominance of nouns (45–48%) and verbs (22–23%). There are 360 (60%) words with the same meaning in the two lists. 40% of the words have the same word meaning and are at the same CEFR-level; in addition, 37% also have a similar word frequency rank. Based on the word list compiled, suitable measurement tools can be created which make it possible to examine students' word knowledge and to compare the vocabulary of those learning English and German.

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