

RESULTS OF A DIAGNOSTIC ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE VOCABULARY TEST BATTERY AMONG YOUNG LEARNERS

Tibor Víg^{*}, István Thékes^{**}

^{*} *Institute of Education, University of Szeged*

^{**} *Doctoral School of Education, University of Szeged*

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The aim of our study was to explore the word knowledge and the organization of English as a foreign language vocabulary of 5th graders. We created an online vocabulary test applicable for beginning young learners of English on the basis of the foundations of diagnostic assessment (Vidákovich, 1990). We also intended to gain information concerning the basic vocabulary of young learners on overall test performances and on different performance levels to compare the size and characteristics of students' word knowledge in terms of word level, class, frequency and task solving activity. Meara (2009) interprets vocabulary breadth as the number of words learners know. Using visual stimulus is an efficient way of assessing breadth of vocabulary. There are validated diagnostic tools that use pictures to assess foreign language vocabulary knowledge. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn and Dunn, 1997) is a type of such instrument. As for other studies applying pictures, ter Doest and Semin (2005) and Farley et al. (2012) reported use of visuals.

In our research, a diagnostic test triplet was developed for the testing of English vocabulary of 5th graders. Besides the considerations of the curriculum, we selected the words based on such corpora as the BNC (Kilgarriff, 1996) and the COCA (Davies and Gardner, 2010). Each test consisted of 18 tasks and all tasks contained a picture and four words. Students had to decide whether each word or phrase was suited to the picture or not. They had to apply either identification or implication to solve the tasks. Based on CEFR-level, we also differentiated between A1 and A2 level words. 497 5th graders took the tests during class time in June 2013. The Cronbach's α values of the tests are .82, .81, and .86.

The results show that the performances on the first English test version (73%) were significantly lower ($p < .05$) than achievements on the other two tests (77% and 75%). Five performance levels were defined based on the whole test battery; there were no significant differences among the three tests within each level. Significant differences were found between the words in terms of word class, frequency, level and task solving activity (identification and implication) on each performance level (in most cases, $p < .001$). In all groups, the means of A1 words were significantly higher ($p < .001$) than those of A2 words. As for word classes, low achievers ($N=105$) perform significantly better in the case of nouns, adjectives and other words (all about 60%) than in the case of verbs (52%). However, the differences between the performances on nouns and other word classes were significant ($p < .001$) in the group of high-achievers ($N=98$).

The results show that the developed test battery is appropriate for gaining diagnostic information about students' word knowledge, furthermore, it enables detailed analysis by performance level. These analyses of students' achievements offer guidelines concerning the characteristics of successful word acquisition.

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