

## DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT OF 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADERS' GERMAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE VOCABULARY

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This study aims to analyse the characteristics of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students' vocabulary. We focused on (1) the students' test results; (2) the similarities and differences between the lowest and the highest achievers' word knowledge along some linguistic factors; and (3) the relationship between students' vocabulary patterns and their test results.

At the beginning of language learning, students should directly acquire the most common words of a language (*Nation, 2001*) to be able to enrich their vocabulary implicitly, similarly to native speakers. Concrete words are generally learned first. At the same time, vocabulary selected for young learners to learn must have a high level of demonstrability, e.g. pictures can help them to memorise words (*Kersten, 2010*). Pictures can also be used in the assessment of children's word knowledge (*Dunn and Dunn, 1997*). The size of students' word knowledge is a factor determining the success of their foreign language learning, and vocabulary size is a good predictor of students' overall language proficiency (*Eyckmans, 2004*). Tests of vocabulary size are useful tools for diagnostic purposes (*Meara, 1992*). They allow teachers to identify and remedy gaps in their students' vocabulary (*Schmitt, 1994*).

The size of students' vocabulary and the link between word form and meaning were assessed online by visual stimuli. The words were selected on the basis of their frequency, the descriptors of CEFR levels A1 and A2, and the recommendations of the curricula. Three test versions were administered, each containing 18 tasks. Each task included a picture and four words or phrases. Students had to decide whether the words fitted the picture. The test versions have good reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values of .87, .87, and .82). 194 5<sup>th</sup> graders in different schools were involved in the online testing conducted in June 2013.

(1) The students' performances on the third test version (69%) were significantly lower than on the other two tests (76%, 72%;  $p < .05$ ). (2) The groups of the lowest and the highest achievers ( $N_1=38$ ,  $N_2=31$ ) were identified on the basis of the whole test battery. In both groups, the means of A1 words were significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ) than those of A2 words. As for word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives and others), achievements in case of nouns were in both groups significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ) than in case of verbs. (3) There was a significant difference in the task solving activity (between identification and implication) only on the lowest performance level. The cluster analyses suggest that words with different characteristics (level, class and frequency) may lead to different answer patterns of students with different knowledge not only on the difficult tasks, but also on the easy ones.

The vocabulary test measures the basic German word knowledge independently of the learning context. A detailed analysis of the individual differences in students' vocabulary offers teachers guidelines for further development.

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