

NOTE: This test is worth 100 points and has three questions. Part 1 has two questions and Part 2 has one question. You must answer all three questions. You must write your answers in English. If you cite any content from the articles, please use quotation marks.

PART 1: Read the attached article *Mainstream TESOL Research and Under-represented Populations* and then

1. Write a summary of the article (about 150 to 200 words). The summary is worth 20 points. **AND**
2. In at least 300 words, give your response/reaction to the article from the point of view of a primary or secondary school teacher in Taiwan. This response is worth 40 points.

Article 1

Mainstream TESOL Research and Under-represented Populations*

—Maura Nicholson and John Bunting, Georgia State University (2001)

As graduate students in an applied linguistics program, we noticed that many of the research articles we were reading had very similar participants: students in university settings. Then several other students mentioned to us that they, as potential teachers of refugees or migrant workers, had begun to question the applicability of all these studies to the groups they would be working with. As a group, we decided to see if this disparity between the participants in applied linguistics research (specifically ESL students as research subjects) and actual ESL learners was genuine or not. The following is a discussion of why this is important and a summary of our results so far.

It is our contention that the strategies used by teachers in language classrooms are informed by, among other things, language learning findings derived from empirical research. An essential element of empirical research is the population being studied and the characteristics of that population. The choice of who is being studied affects the conclusions reached, as conclusions may not be generalizable to populations with characteristics significantly different from those of the studied population. Hatch and Lazaraton (1991) state, "We may test a group of university level ESL students and hope that we can interpret our results as applicable to other ESL students. However, if the group has been selected by 'convenience sampling' (they happened to be the group that was available), no such generalization is possible" (p. 42). The purpose of the current study is to discover how closely the subject pool for research matches the actual ESL population.

Who is learning English as a second language?

The total number of learners in federally funded programs has been estimated at 1,300,000, and the estimated number of learners who would like to be in one of these programs, but for various reasons are not, is almost 3,000,000 (Kim, Collins & McArthur, 1997). Further, some researchers have claimed that more than 600,000 new limited-English adults are being added annually to this population through immigration (Rice & Stavrianos, 1994, cited in Crossroads, 1997). In contrast, the number of ESL students currently enrolled in English programs at US colleges and universities is estimated to be 546,000 (Kim et al., 1997), which is less than 15% of the number of learners who are in the federally funded programs or who have expressed interest in these programs.

Kim et al. list the following characteristics, among others, of adult ESL learners:

- 98% were born outside the United States
- 72% spoke Spanish at home
- 21% spoke an Asian language at home

- 32% had fewer than nine years of education (of those, 9% had fewer than five years)
- 50% had completed high school

According to Kim et al., more than half of these adult ESL learners in federally funded programs are immigrants who are learning English for non-academic purposes. Among the reasons listed for why these learners are seeking English instruction are that they need to learn or improve English to get jobs or get promoted in the jobs they have, to help their children with schoolwork, to communicate with neighbors and colleagues, and to participate more fully in US society.

Who is being studied as subjects for ESL research?

To determine who was being studied in the current research, we examined six of the major journals in the field of Applied Linguistics and TESOL—*TESOL Quarterly*, *Applied Linguistics*, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *Modern Language Journal*, and *Language Learning*. We reviewed all articles that reported empirical research on English language learners from 1995 through 1999 for each journal (a total of 191 articles), and we cataloged a variety of subject characteristics such as gender, first language, immigrant status, etc. Because of space limitations, we will only discuss the results for four of these factors (socioeconomic status, purpose for learning English, level of education, and setting) in this report.

Socioeconomic status. For the journals we reviewed, the issue of socioeconomic status has been virtually ignored. Of the 191 articles reviewed, 93% (178 of 191) did not report the subjects' socioeconomic status whatsoever. One observation would be that researchers and editors in our field do not feel that this is a factor worthy of inclusion in studies of ESL/EFL learners, or that this category is too difficult to define or determine.

Purpose for learning English. This characteristic was divided into the following groupings: academic, survival, vocational, multiple, and not given. The largest group (61%) was academic. The second largest group (31%) was "not given", while survival, vocational, and multiple purposes combined totaled only 8% of the 191 research articles.

Level of education. The levels of education attained by subjects were divided into the following groupings: K-12, higher education, mixed high school/college, and unclear. Half of the articles (96 out of 191) investigated subjects who had an education beyond high school (i.e., undergraduate students, postgraduate students, and unspecified university students). The next largest groups were "not given" and K-12, each with 18% of the 191 articles.

Setting of study. Closely related to level of education, the settings of the studies were broken down into two categories—academic and non-academic. Of the total studies, the non-academic settings were negligible; only four studies (2%) were done outside of an academic setting. Of the total studies, 167 (87%) were conducted in an academic setting. Academic settings were further broken down into four categories—university/college, language institute, elementary through high school (K-12), and those that were unclear. Over 60% of these 167 studies fell into the university/college setting.

Implications

To summarize our findings, more than half of all empirical studies on ESL/EFL learners published in six major journals over the past five years dealt with university students, while such learners comprise only 15% of the estimated total number of ESL learners or prospective learners in the US (Kim et al., 1997). These results make us wonder: Can theories based on research of academic learners be gene-

ralized to learners whose primary reason for learning is survival? Do teachers of these survival skills use the current research to define their methodologies? If, as Hatch and Lazaraton suggest, the sample of the population is paramount to the generalizability of the research findings, perhaps a way should be found to broaden the pool from which that sample is chosen.

Notes

More information about the data and the ongoing research can be obtained by contacting the authors at ibunting@yahoo.com or mbnicholson@mindspring.com.

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*from *TESOL Research Interest Section Newsletter*, 8(1), 4-5.

PART 2: Read the following article *Vocabulary Must Be Learnt, Not Taught* and then do the following:

3. In at least 300 words, write a critique (critical analysis) of the article from the point of view that vocabulary can be/should be taught. This question is worth 40 points.

Article 2

Vocabulary Must Be Learnt, Not Taught*

--Norman Coe, Autonomous University, Barcelona, Spain (1997)

Some 15 years ago certain people began to claim that in TEFL relatively more teaching time should be given to vocabulary. Morgan and Rinvoluceri¹, for example, said that their book 'proposes practical exercises to help students learn words'. This has a certain semblance of logic, since language users need words just as much as structures. The sense of the appeal turns, however, on the assumption that vocabulary can, in any serious sense, be taught through specific practices, and it is this assumption which I would question.

In order to understand what 'teaching vocabulary' means, we need first to look at what 'knowing vocabulary' and 'learning vocabulary' mean.

In examining 'knowing vocabulary', I will take as my example my knowledge of the word *cry*. I know that it rhymes with *fry*, etc.; that it is both a regular verb, with the past form *cried*, and a count noun.

As to meaning, I take it the verb means 'shed tears because of a certain feeling'. *Cry* implies certain sounds, *weep* or *shed tears* being more likely if there is little or no sound. Feeling is necessary: on a cold day my eyes *water* or *run*, but I wouldn't say I *cry*. The emotion has to be sadness or pain (or joy), but if it is frustration we are more likely to use *weep*. *They wept out of sheer frustration*. If the appropriate emotion would be sadness but it is in fact absent, I can say that someone is *crying crocodile tears*. I also

know that *cry* has another meaning, more or less synonymous with *shout*. However, while the first sense is common in both speech and writing, the second is virtually confined to written fiction. I know that we can *cry out*, *cry off* and *cry somebody down*, but I know there is no corresponding *cry in*, *cry on* or *cry somebody up*. I know that the noun has uses corresponding to both senses of the verb, and I have already said that the noun is grammatically 'count': we say *a cry* rather than *some cry*, etc. However, I also know that while *three cries* would be normal in the second sense, e.g. *Three cries were heard from behind the house*, such enumeration would be unlikely in the first sense. We would say, e.g. *The following day Tom cried three or four times*, rather than *he had three or four cries*.

I know people can have *a good cry*, related to the first sense, but not *a bad cry*. I know that there is *a far cry* but no corresponding *a near cry*. I know you can insult somebody with *crybaby*, related to the first sense.

Let us now turn to the learning of vocabulary. My knowledge of the word *cry* is the outcome of a gradual learning process involving many, many experiences, verbal and non-verbal, over a long period of time (and my experiences will continue to change my vocabulary until I die). Of course a language learner's knowledge of *cry* is unlikely to be as extensive as a native speaker's, but it is just as true of the language learner as it is of me that the word is not fully learnt at one time or through one experience.

It is salutary at this point to consider Nagy and Herman's² study of the learning of vocabulary in the L1. They calculated the growth of vocabulary in the average American school child. On even a conservative estimate of the time needed to teach each item, there is simply not enough class time available for all the words to be *taught*. There will obviously be an occasional indication of the meaning of a word (though not necessarily by the English teacher), but it is clear that school children pick up the vast majority of their vocabulary through extensive contact with the language, especially through reading. In the case of EFL, clearly the number of words to be learnt will be lower. But, in the vast majority of cases, the time available will be more or less in proportion.

With all this in mind, I suspect vocabulary teaching and specific practice:

- a) can never cover all the words that EFL students need;
- b) can make some words salient for students and can indicate a basic meaning.

However, I am tempted to say, with but little exaggeration, that when the 'teaching' of these items is done, the students' learning of them is still to come. This learning—the gradual approximation to the multifarious connections of the advanced speaker—will only take place through a wider and wider exposure to English, not through better planned or more intensive vocabulary teaching, even less through specifically prepared materials and exercises.

Linguistic items fall along a continuum from more to less regular. Sentence structures fall towards the more regular end, vocabulary towards the less regular end. It makes sense for language lessons to include some concentration on aspects which, because they exhibit regularities, allow generalisations. However, this intensive study is unsuitable for vocabulary, precisely because it is irregular. The intensive study of structure needs to be complemented by extensive exposure to (not study of) a range of texts. The only way to make a serious improvement in one's knowledge of words is through extensive and varied reading and listening, not through more teaching or more exercises.

Notes

1 In *Vocabulary*, by John Morgan and Mario Rinvolucri (OUP 1986). Compare also *Working with Words*, by Ruth Gairns and Stuart Redman, (CUP 1986) and the *Test Your Vocabulary* books by Peter Watcyn-Jones (Penguin 1985).

2 Nagy, W.E. & Herman, P.A. (1987) 'Breadth and Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge: Implications for Acquisition and Instruction', in McKeown & Curtis: *The Nature of Vocabulary Acquisition*, Erlbaum.

*from *Modern English Teacher*, 6(3), 47-48. (1997)