

A Content Analysis on the Vocabulary Presentation in EFL Course Books

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to examine and evaluate the selected English language coursebooks from the viewpoint of vocabulary selection and teaching techniques they employ. The five coursebooks chosen by the researchers are all for adults and young adults to learn and teach English as a foreign language. The books are as follows: Countdown to First Certificate (by Michael Duckworth and Kathy Gude, Oxford University Press, 1999); Advanced Masterclass by Tricia Aspinall and Anette Capel, Oxford University Press, 1999); Grammar in Context 2 (by Sandra N. Elbaum, Thomson Heinle, 2001-3rd Edition and 2005-4th Edition); New Headway Advanced (by Liz and John Soars, Oxford University Press, 2003); Top Notch 2 (by Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher, Pearson Education CAE, 2006). As an examination and evaluation method, content-analysis was preferred in this study. As a result of this evaluation, it was seen that all selected coursebooks integrated lexis into their syllabuses, giving emphasis to word knowledge by means of separate headings and additional sub-headings, such as Vocabulary, Word Building, Word Formation, Easily Confused Words, Keyword Transformation, Near-synonyms and Synonyms. Also, by means of word lists supplied at the end of Student's Books, they provide quick-reference data for self-check. Furthermore, all of the coursebooks have colorful layouts supporting vocabulary acquisition and comprehension through pictures, graphic designs, drawings, diagrams and cartoons except for Grammar in Context 2 also which has also some pictures and drawings, but all are all in black-and-white format and fewer in number, which makes the Student's Book somehow dull and less attractive than the rest of the coursebooks.*

Keywords: *EFL (English as a foreign language), vocabulary presentation, coursebooks/textbooks, teaching techniques*

INTRODUCTION

As one of the most significant issues in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL hereafter) and English as a Second Language (ESL hereafter), acquisition and teaching of vocabulary is under inspection. It has been gaining more concern from both learners and educators gradually compared to the previous times. In his mythoclastic book, Folse (2004), with the support of ample empirical research data collected since the mid-1990s, refutes the eight prevailing misconceptions about vocabulary teaching and learning. One of those myths (Myth 8) he discusses is that "Teachers, textbooks, and curricula cover second language (SL hereafter) vocabulary adequately," and he comments as follows: "The truth is that vocabulary is lacking in the overall curriculum. ... Furthermore, except for the few vocabulary textbooks that explicitly cover vocabulary, most ESL textbooks do not systematically deal with vocabulary." (pp. 162-163)

Similarly, Zimmerman (1997) states that, "although the lexicon is arguably central to language acquisition and use, vocabulary instruction has not been a priority in second language acquisition research and methodology" (p.17). Nation (2001) also discusses the main points "in designing the vocabulary component of a language course and focuses on the importance of learner autonomy in vocabulary learning" (pp. 394-406). Another researcher, Folse (2004), relating to the same issue, states that, "students appreciate good instruction in vocabulary, which includes teaching words that students need to know,

giving many good examples of the words, and holding students accountable for the words through appropriate practice activities and systematic testing” (p. viii). Seeming to be obvious, the sequence of developments, especially in the last decade, indicates that vocabulary learning and teaching issues have gradually gained importance.

A question emerges here is that whether this trend has been reflected in coursebooks. An extensive coursebook evaluation may reveal that the famous pendulum metaphor used in relation to language teaching would prove valid also in this respect since coursebooks tend to follow the swings of teaching methods and approaches in general. Ansary (2002), aiming to systematize coursebook evaluation, did a research on ten coursebook checklists and ten coursebook reviews to find out the universal characteristics of ESL/EFL coursebooks. What he concludes is that, “perhaps, no neat formula or system may ever provide a definite way to judge a textbook,” (p. 7) and states that, “...however perfect a textbook is, it is just a simple tool in the hands of teachers. We should not, therefore, expect to work miracles with it.” (p. 8). What follows this finding is that it is not only the matter of coursebook content or system of its evaluation, but also the attitudes and competence of educators by whom coursebooks are utilized in classrooms.

Inal (2006) looks into the issue of coursebook selection criteria applied in English language teaching in Turkish schools. He concludes that coursebooks should be in line with the goals of the institutions, objectives of the language program, and the needs of the students attending the program. In consolidating these issues, he considers checklists beneficial tools but finds them not fully satisfactory unless they are adapted to the specific needs by the contribution of those involved in the selection process.

Jahangard (2007) carried out a study to evaluate the EFL textbooks used in Iranian public high schools and consolidated a 13-item checklist extracted from ten different checklists offered by various authors. What makes Jahangard’s study important for the present paper is that one of the checklist items is specifically related to vocabulary, namely sound vocabulary explanation and practice. He notes that two types of problems are detected and states them as follows: “One is concerned with the lack of correspondence between the different senses of the word introduced in the New Words Sections and the senses which are used in the Reading Comprehensions. The other type is attributable to the poor contextualization of the new vocabulary in the New Words Sections.” (p. 5) The study is a comprehensive one with a detailed search on all the items in scope.

In the case study he carried out in South Korea on an EFL coursebook, Litz (n.d.) covers also vocabulary issues and presents a Teacher Textbook Evaluation Form which includes four items for vocabulary evaluation (Table 1).

Table 1. Teacher textbook evaluation of vocabulary issues

The textbook includes a detailed overview of the functions, structures and vocabulary that will be taught in each unit.
An adequate vocabulary list or glossary is included.
The grammar points and vocabulary items are introduced in motivating and realistic contexts.
The progression of grammar points and vocabulary items is appropriate.

Miekley (2005) presents a Textbook Evaluation Checklist to help make the evaluation process more efficient for classroom teachers and programme directors and puts forth the four questions in relation to vocabulary issues (Table 2).

Birdal et al. (n.d.) pose the rhetorical question “Is vocabulary learning material included in its own right?” in their paper (p.10), and search for the answers to six questions listed in Table 3.

Table 2. Evaluating vocabulary learning material

Are the new vocabulary words presented in a variety of ways (e.g. glosses, multi-glosses, appositives)?
Are the new vocabulary words presented at an appropriate rate so that the text is understandable and so that students are able to retain new vocabulary?
Are the new vocabulary words repeated in subsequent lessons to reinforce their meaning and use?
Are students taught top-down techniques for learning new vocabulary words?

Table 3. Evaluating vocabulary learning material

How much vocabulary is taught?
Is there any principled basis for selection of vocabulary?
Any distinction between active and passive vocabulary, and classroom vocabulary?
Presented in a structured, purposeful way?
Are learners sensitized to the structure of the lexicon through vocabulary learning exercises based on semantic relationships, formal relationships, collocations, situation-based groups?
Does the material enable students to expand their own vocabularies independently by helping them to develop their own learning strategies?

By referring to the above mentioned studies, the present coursebook evaluation for vocabulary aimed to evaluate the selected English language coursebooks from the viewpoint of vocabulary presentation and teaching techniques they employ. It was conducted to observe if there was a difference among the presentation techniques and among the types of techniques regarding the dates of publications.

METHOD

The ‘content-analysis’ technique was used in this study. First, a brief information on the content and layout of the selected coursebooks were provided. Then notes on vocabulary issues that were provided in the student’s books and, when available, in the teacher’s books were quoted under the headings reserved for the individual coursebook being evaluated. Since pronunciation is deemed to be a part of vocabulary acquisition, any comments on pronunciation were also included in the notes. Details and examples of the vocabulary and pronunciation sections were given following the notes. The coursebooks chosen by the researchers are listed below in chronological order. All the selected coursebooks address adults and young adults who seek to learn English language. Two of the titles, namely Grammar in Context 2 and Top Notch 2, are intermediate, and the remaining three titles are advanced level coursebooks.

1. Countdown to First Certificate Student’s Book
by Michael Duckworth and Kathy Gude; Oxford University Press, 1999.
2. Advanced Masterclass CAE Student’s Book
by Tricia Aspinall and Anette Capel; Oxford University Press, 1999, New Edition.
3. Grammar in Context 2
by Sandra N. Elbaum; Thomson Heinle, 2001-3rd Edition and 2005-4th Edition.
4. New Headway Advanced Student’s Book
by Liz and John Soars; Oxford University Press, 2003.
5. Top Notch 2 Student’s Book
by Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher; Pearson Education, 2006.

FINDINGS

Countdown to First Certificate

The coursebook is divided into fifteen units, each organized around a topic. The units cover the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and also focus on vocabulary building and language use, following out a study plan that is parallel to the 'First Certificate Examination' paper requirements. The cyclical content page, named 'Framework', indicates that the units are divided into seven frames, namely 'Reading', 'Use of English', 'Speaking', 'Listening', 'Writing', 'WordPower', and 'Let's Reflect', the last of which contains a set of self-evaluation quizzes of multiple-choice cloze, key word transformation, mistake spotting, and vocabulary check. The Student's Book is designed in a consistent layout that integrates texts with a variety of colorful pictures, graphic designs, drawings, and caricatures. The information for the 'First Certificate Examination' is provided at the beginning of the coursebook (pp. 4-5) to guide the students in studying for all five paper-types, each explained in line with the parts comprising the papers.

Student's Book

Although there is a separate section in every unit for vocabulary study, namely 'WordPower', words and phrases are given emphasis also in other sections by listing, underlining, and checking in exercise format such as matching definition and filling-in-the-blank quizzes. New vocabulary items are introduced in all sections of the units, and signposts with a reference to the 'WordPower' section are placed within the related sub-headings to draw students' attention to new vocabulary. For example, in Unit 1, under the 'Writing' section, students are asked to write an article about an important person in their life. It is required that the students refer to the physical and personality traits of the person described. Under the 'Writing' task sub-heading, a 'WP3&4' signpost is placed, directing the students to 'WordPower' Item 3, physical descriptions, and Item 4, describing personalities, wherein they can find a set of samples, such as mousy, auburn, and ginger for hair color, and plump, slim, chunky for general build.

Distributed among the frames, there are several sub-headings related specifically to vocabulary, namely Word formation, Keyword transformations, Phrasal Verbs, and Words easily confused. With the exception of three units, there are also Vocabulary sub-headings in the 'Reading' frames, and in one unit, there is an extra 'Vocabulary' sub-heading in the Listening frame. The general approach to vocabulary building all through the coursebook is to have the students first guess the meaning of the new words from the context of the reading passages. For example, in Unit 5, students are referred to line 15 and the surrounding text to guess what the word essential means.

An alphabetically ordered checklist of 83 phrasal verbs covered in the coursebook is given at the end of the Student's Book to function as a mini-dictionary (p. 175). Also a reference section (pp. 176-191) is provided, wherein the new vocabulary presented in each unit is given, grouped according to the frames in which the words first appeared. For example, Unit 9 – Frame 4, the students perform a pair-work task on the given six words connected with diving: aqualung, flippers, life jacket, mask, snorkel, and wetsuit, the pictures of which are presented on pair-work pages for discussion. The students are required to describe the item in their own words following an example given in the unit. The activity is called paraphrasing and the example is a weight belt, described as "something that you put on and it helps you to dive" thereby making the item be learned and retained with the help of visual aids and interactive tasks.

Advanced Masterclass CAE

The Certificate in Advanced English (CAE), Cambridge Level 4 Examination coursebook consists of fourteen units, and each unit, structured around a theme, is divided into four sections organized in a way to cover all five papers to be graded in the exam. The first three sections cover reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills in varying order, whereas the fourth section always covers structure issues. Vocabulary and style are covered in all four sections in the appropriate parts, and the 'English in Use' sections appear in the most relevant parts in all four sections. The Student's Book layout is enriched with colored pictures, graphic designs, cartoons, diagrams, and charts.

Student's Book

The quotations such as “The vocabulary syllabus is effectively supported by an innovative ‘Vocabulary Resource’ section which rationalizes, reinforces and extends words and phrases students have come across in each unit.” are taken from the back cover of the book which actually explains the vocabulary presentation well. They were justified with a thorough examination which stated below. The lists in the Vocabulary Resource Section include vocabulary practiced in the units and also bring in other related words and phrases, as well as common collocates.

Teacher's Book

There are many sentences in the Teacher's Book stating what kind of vocabulary presentation takes place in the book, such as “Vocabulary is focused on throughout the course as students will need to cope with the lexis presented in the authentic texts.” (Introduction, p. 1); “In additions, there are Vocabulary sections which exploit the texts and provide extension exercises...”; “Reading: ... Some editing has occurred to reduce the length and density of some texts but vocabulary and structure has been left as in the original.” (Introduction, p. 6); “Vocabulary: ...students must increase their knowledge of vocabulary substantially and be able to produce a wide range of language...”; “Extensive vocabulary development occurs throughout Advanced Masterclass. Particular attention is paid to confusable words, prefixes and suffixes, collocation, prepositional phrases and phrasal verbs. ...”; “It is particularly important in the CAE examination to be able to deduce meaning from context because the authentic texts are bound to contain some words which students have not met before. Students are trained to tackle unfamiliar vocabulary and understand the gist of text.” (Introduction, pp. 8-9); “Vocabulary Resource: ... provides relevant lists of words and phrases, which students can refer to from the writing and speaking sections in the units.”; “The vocabulary resource is organized alphabetically under main functional headings, for example Argument; Comparison and Contrast. In this way, it ties in with the exam requirements and can be accessed easily by students working on their own.” (Introduction, p. 9)

Details and Examples

The Vocabulary column of the ‘Contents Chart’ presented in the Student's Book covers the following vocabulary issues all through the units: word building; compound adjectives; words with similar meanings; phrasal verbs; confusable words; metaphorical language; expressions; suffixes; order of adjectives; collocations; forceful language; prefixes (pp. 2-4). Furthermore, as seen in the ‘Reading’ column, vocabulary comprehension is included in the ‘Reading’ sections of the seven units out of the total fourteen. Selecting appropriate vocabulary in the ‘Writing’ section and word formation in the ‘English in Use’ section are included as a part of vocabulary issues covered in the coursebook.

The Vocabulary section of Unit 5 is an example of working with affixes. Therein, “a list of eleven words are given” (p. 68), all of which end with a different suffix. The students are asked to group these words into nouns, adjectives, and adverbs in order to make them aware of the word endings signaling the word forms. The following cloze exercise makes use of these suffixes by providing words in various forms to be changed into the appropriate form that would fit the sentence by means of adding the correct suffix to the base word.

Although there are sections reserved to lexical issues under ‘Vocabulary’ headings dispersed all through the book, word knowledge is covered in every section and sub-section integrated with other skill areas. For example, Unit 1 does not contain a ‘Vocabulary’ section, but ‘Listening and Speaking’, ‘Reading, and Writing’ sections include four vocabulary sub-sections, whereas Unit 2 has a ‘Vocabulary’ section but also covers vocabulary issues in the ‘English in Use’ and ‘Speaking’ sections as well. In summary, the coursebook extensively focuses on lexical items in all sections. The main approach is to have the students try to guess the meanings from the context and then consult their dictionaries to check the meanings.

The table below (Table 4) shows the distribution of the words and phrases listed in the ‘Vocabulary Resource’ section at the back of the coursebook (pp. 193-195). The groups and the sub-groups are given in the order presented in each section, and the corresponding number of items listed for each sub-group. This might give a clear idea about the actual distribution of the vocabulary items in the book.

Table 4. Words and phrases in vocabulary resource

#	Group	Sub-group	# of Words and Phrases
1	Apologizing	--	10
2	Argument	Describing arguments and reasons	6
		Introducing an argument	15
		Referring to arguments and explanations	12
3	Comparison and contrast	--	18
4	Competition	People	6
		Things	3
5	Complaint	Linking devices	7
		Mentioning shortcomings	6
		Problems	7
		Solutions	5
		Stating your case	9
6	Description	Adjectives to describe character	52
		Adjectives to describe a book / film/ play	34
		Adjectives to describe a place	33
		Identifying and specifying position	14
7	Evaluation	Benefits and drawbacks	11
		Stating what is typical	8
8	Information (giving and requesting)	Introducing topic-specific information	13
		Referring to content	10
		Requesting information	6
		Text elements	8
9	Opinion	Expressing your opinion	4
		Highlighting your opinion	13
		Intensifying your opinion	14
10	Persuasion	Persuading someone	6
		Suggestions	6
11	Reporting	--	40
12	Recommendation	Making recommendations	7
		Reacting to recommendations and suggestions	5
	Total number of the words and the phrases		386

Total number of words and phrases presented in the book

As seen in Table 4, there are 13 main categories for vocabulary presentation in terms of functional perspective. They are namely, apologizing, argument, comparison and contrast, competition, complaint, evaluation, description, persuasion, opinion, reporting and recommendation. There are also sub-categories related to the main categories and 386 words and phrases are presented regarding all of the categories.

Grammar in Context 2

As the name suggests, the coursebook is organized around grammar issues presented in context. The author states that learning a language through meaningful themes and practicing in a contextualized setting promotes both linguistic and cognitive development. Although the organization is set around grammar, all four language skills are covered through reading passages, listening and speaking activities and writing tasks. For example, the audio programme is integrated into the 'Reading' section to enable students hear the reading texts. Reading passages are selected to reflect the social life and customs in America as to make the language learners become acquainted with the culture. There is no mention of vocabulary except for the footnotes provided below the reading passages which either explain the cultural aspects or give the definition of a limited number of words.

There are more pictures and drawings in the new edition, although all in black-and-white in both coursebooks. Extra drawings are mostly added to convey the meaning of the concrete nouns, which is a distinct way of defining new vocabulary items. Neither coursebook provides a word list except for those that refer to grammar issues, such as irregular verb forms or the verb *get*.

Student's Book (both editions)

There are not comments on vocabulary in either coursebook.

Teacher's Book (fourth edition)

There are no comments on vocabulary teaching except for the Reading Glossary noted below some texts, providing definitions of a limited number of words.

Details and Examples

Both issues of the same coursebook were especially covered in the study as to compare the differences between the two consecutive editions within a time span of four years and see whether there is any change in the approach to vocabulary. Although the volumes of the two Student's Books do not differ significantly (450 pages in the third, and 467 pages in the fourth edition), there are more reading passages in the newer edition (45 compared to the 30 in the former). The number of lessons is one less in the latter which spares an average of four extra pages to each chapter. For example, Lesson 1 in the older issue has two reading passages, one on 'Pets' and the other on 'American Customs', whereas the newer edition has three additional reading passages expanding the issue on pets, namely Dog Walkers, Guide Dogs, and Search and Rescue Dogs. In the former edition, only one definition is given for the first reading passage, whereas in the latter edition, two more definitions are given for the same passage and three extra definitions for two of the other reading passages. The Teacher's Book of the newer edition gives fifteen definitions in five Reading Glossaries.

Fifteen extra reading passages provide a wider scope of context. Therefore, a greater number of words are naturally encountered, and thus larger vocabulary is covered although not necessarily pointed out. The coursebook follows a topic based syllabus apparently dominated by grammar and reading (context), but both receptive and productive skills are emphasized throughout. The communicative approach is employed to prepare learners for everyday language tasks. Expanded linear format of the 'Contents' page lists the lessons that are based on themes and detailed with respect to functions and structures. There is no mention of vocabulary issues, although pictures and drawings provided along with the passages indicate an indirect approach to vocabulary acquisition.

New Headway Advanced

The coursebook is divided into twelve units, and every unit is organized around a theme presented in eight components, namely 'Starter', 'Reading', 'Listening', 'Speaking', 'Language Focus', 'Vocabulary', 'The last word', and 'Writing', in different order and sometimes, two components combined under one heading. A 'Stop and check' section is included after every three units. 'Language Focus' section in each unit covers a grammar point, all of which are summarized by giving the essential rules in the 'Grammar Reference' section at the end of the coursebook. The Student's Book has a colorful layout enriched with pictures, graphic designs, and charts.

Student's Book

“A focus on lexis and spoken language in challenging language syllabus” (back cover)

Teacher's Book

“The aims of the New Headway Advanced are as follows: ...to encourage students to analyze the systems of language use, to extend their range of vocabulary...” (Introduction, p. 4); “There is often some vocabulary work that follows on from the text, and some What do you think? questions to provoke discussion. ... There is work on synonyms and antonyms, phrasal verbs, talking about statistics, homonyms, homophones, homographs, metaphors, and idioms.” (Introduction, p. 5)

Details and Examples

New words introduced in the reading texts are covered under ‘Vocabulary work’ that lists the definitions or synonyms of the vocabulary in focus. Students are requested to find the words or phrases in the texts to match the denotations given under this sub-heading. The aim here is to have the students guess the meanings from the text before looking the word up in the dictionary. ‘Synonyms in context’ sub-headings provide italicized words in a sentence, followed by another sentence to be completed by filling-in the blank with the synonym of the word supplied, some of which are more than one word in most cases. Some synonyms and near-synonyms are requested to be found and be used in sentences illustrating the differences in their meanings. For example, the word enemy is used in contrast with competitor, rival, and opponent. In some units, antonyms are also covered along with the synonyms.

Further new words and phrases are presented in double sub-headings such as ‘Vocabulary and Speaking’, ‘Vocabulary and Listening’, ‘Vocabulary and Pronunciation’, and ‘Vocabulary and Reading’, wherein adverbs, phrasal verbs, metaphors, and proverbial and idiomatic uses are presented. All in all, the level of vocabulary is highly advanced all through the coursebook, and the number of vocabulary items is great and the scope of vocabulary is considerably extensive.

Pronunciation is stressed on in some units, and phonetic symbols are employed to distinguish homonyms, homophones, and homographs. Other phonetic issues, such as word linking and intrusive sounds, are also brought up in pronunciation. A list of phonetic symbols is provided on the inside back cover for easy reference.

Top Notch 2

The coursebook is divided into ten units, and each unit is divided into four lessons ending with a unit ‘Checkpoint and Wrap-up’ section. Unit goals are given at the beginning of each unit, and a topic preview is presented, followed by a discussion section for brain storming and prior knowledge activation.

Student's Book

“Intensive vocabulary development with active recycling; Thorough attention to pronunciation” (back cover); “In Top Notch, the term vocabulary refers to individual words, phrases and expressions.” (Content and skills chart, p. iv); “In Top Notch, students conclude each class session with a controlled or free practice activity that demonstrates their ability to use new vocabulary, grammar, and social language; High-impact vocabulary syllabus; In order to ensure students’ solid acquisition of vocabulary essential for communication, Top Notch contains explicit presentation, practice, and systematic extended recycling of words, collocations, and expressions appropriate at each level of study. The extensive captioned illustrations, photos, definitions, examples, and contextualized sentences remove doubts about meaning and provide a permanent in-book reference for student test preparation. An added benefit is that the teachers don’t have to search for pictures to bring to class and don’t have to resort to translating vocabulary into the students’ native language.” (‘To the Teacher’ section, p. ix); “Pronunciation activities and supplements; Vocabulary cards and cumulative vocabulary activities” (Components of Top Notch 2 section, p. x); “Alphabetical word list ... list of all productive vocabulary in the Top Notch 2 units. The numbers refer to the page on which the word first appears or is defined.” (p. 122-123)

Teacher's Book

“The heavily illustrated Student’s Book depicts or defines all vocabulary taught for productive use; Top Notch provides concise and useful information about frequency, collocations, and typical native-speaker usage; Top Notch vocabulary is further reinforced in two effective ways. Two-sided vocabulary flash cards come with teacher’s notes that provide ideas for games, alternative presentations, substitution in pair work activities and other ways to ensure vocabulary mastery. Cumulative vocabulary activities reinforce vocabulary meaning throughout the course through critical thinking and application of practical learning strategies.” (The Top Notch approach section, pp. xiv-xv); “Vocabulary is explicitly presented through pictures or definitions. The vocabulary presentations in the Student’s Book serve to convey meaning of each new vocabulary item and to provide reference for self study, especially valuable as students prepare for tests. Vocabulary in Top Notch is presented at word, phrase, and sentence level—including expressions, idioms, and collocations. For vocabulary learning, vocabulary building strategies such as word associations, classification, and marking stress are included.” (Methodology section, p. xxi)

Details and Examples

Although ‘Vocabulary’ and ‘Pronunciation’ sub-headings are separately presented in each unit, the former even often more than once, every other sub-heading repeatedly uses the introduced vocabulary in the same unit. Also in the following units, when the topic covered is appropriate for using the recently learned words and phrases, the previous vocabulary is recycled.

New vocabulary is not only introduced in the ‘Vocabulary’ sub-headings, but also enriched by addition of new words and reinforced by repetition in all other areas of language skills, namely Conversation, Listening, Grammar, Reading, and Writing. A wide variety of practice opportunities are provided in the Interaction, Discussion, and Pair-Work sub-headings with an array of exercises such as using the new vocabulary, role-playing, filling-in the blanks, making sentences, and responding to questions.

Extra words and phrases are introduced also in ‘Topic Preview’ sub-headings through explanatory pictures and graphic designs. For example, in Unit 5, twenty personal care products are presented through a store-shelf drawing, and in Unit 7, forty four colors are introduced through a color chart in the preview sections. Vocabulary is reviewed in the ‘Checkpoint’ sections of each unit integrated with other skills.

The alphabetical word list presented at the end of the Student’s Book gives the 373 new words covered in the coursebook. Table 5 shows the frequency distribution of 176 words taught in under ‘Vocabulary’ sub-headings and also the distribution of ‘Pronunciation’ sub-headings. The comparison of the number of words presented in ‘Vocabulary’ sections with that of in the alphabetical list clearly shows that slightly more than half of the new words (53%) were presented in other sections than Vocabulary sub-heading.

DISCUSSION

As indicated before, all five coursebooks used in the study, address adult and young adult learners of EFL. Two of the titles, namely Grammar in Context 2 and Top Notch 2, are intermediate, and the remaining three titles are advanced level coursebooks.

Among the five coursebooks, only Grammar in Context 2 needs to be separated from the rest because it differs greatly in respect to its approach to vocabulary acquisition. In fact, although the Communicative Approach is employed throughout the book, apparently the coursebook is based on teaching grammar through reading passages. Vocabulary not being specifically mentioned, it could rightly be assumed that the new words are expected to be learned naturally during language learning process. Despite the fact that both the third and the fourth editions of this title are quite recent, 2001 and 2005 respectively, the general trend followed by the contemporary coursebooks in respect to vocabulary acquisition is not seen in either edition. This point deserves to be commented on.

Folse (2004) refutes two myths that seem to be followed in this title. One is about grammar: “In learning another language, vocabulary is not as important as grammar or other areas.” The other basically is related to incidental vocabulary acquisition through reading: “Guessing words from context is an excellent strategy.”

Table 5. Reference frequency of vocabulary and pronunciation issues

Unit	Lesson	Vocabulary section (# of words / phrases)	Pronunciation
I	2	6	
	4		+
II	1		+
	2	8	
	3	7	
III	1		+
	2	8	
	3	10	
IV	1	25	
	2	5	+
	3	9	
V	1	20	
	2	5	+
	3	6	
VI	1	6	
	2	10	+
	4	10	
VII	1	8	+
	1		+
VIII	2	7	
	4	5	
	1		+
IX	2	12	
	3	5	
	1	4	+

Total number of words and phrases: 176 out of 373 included in the word list

He states that “people can generally communicate their meaning with less than perfect grammar whereas incorrect use of vocabulary can substantially impede communication” (p. 26) and suggest that teachers make vocabulary teaching one of their primary objectives (p. 28).

Nation (2001) likewise mentions that “there are principles that some teachers and course designers follow that go against research findings” and mentions several of them in relation to vocabulary, two of which are “All vocabulary learning should occur in context,” and “Vocabulary learning does not benefit from being planned, but can be determined by the occurrence of words in texts, tasks and themes.” (p. 384)

Laufer (1997) indicates that, “no text comprehension is possible, either in one’s native language or in a foreign language, without understanding the text’s vocabulary” (p. 20) because good vocabulary knowledge is essential for reading comprehension. She verbalizes this fact as follows: “Reading my well be a psycholinguistic guessing game. But words are the toys you need to play it right.” (p. 32)

In sum, explicit vocabulary teaching is an indispensable tool for helping students to acquire vocabulary commensurate with the level of language knowledge they aim to attain. It should be borne in mind that only “small amounts of incidental vocabulary learning occur from reading” (Nation, 2001; p. 149). Moreover, “learners are more likely to infer an incorrect meaning of an unknown L2 word in an L2 text when no cue has been given to its meaning” (Folse, 2004; p. 76).

What distinguishes the remaining four coursebooks in the group is that they all integrate lexis into their syllabuses, giving emphasis to word knowledge by means of separate headings and additional sub-headings, such as Vocabulary, Word Building, Word Formation, Easily Confused Words, Keyword Transformation, Near-synonyms and Synonyms. Also, by means of word lists supplied at the end of Student’s Books, they provide quick-reference data for self-check. Furthermore, all of the coursebooks have colorful layouts supporting vocabulary acquisition and comprehension through pictures, graphic designs, drawings, diagrams and cartoons. Although Grammar in Context 2 also has some pictures and drawings, all are all in black-and-white format and fewer in number, which makes the Student’s Book somehow dull and less attractive than the rest of the coursebooks.

A comment on guessing word meanings from context needs to be given for comparison. Like the Grammar in Context 2 title, all the other coursebooks encourage students to guess word meanings but urge them to check their dictionaries and also guide them in vocabulary learning strategies rather than expecting incidental learning to take place.

The Top Notch 2 title deserves further comments on vocabulary building tools it offers, such as flash-cards and vocabulary activities. Furthermore, it is the only coursebook that specifically emphasizes recycling of the newly learned words.

Two of the titles, namely Countdown to First Certificate and Advanced Masterclass CAE, both of which aim to prepare students for proficiency exams, cover highly advanced words and teach students strategies to cope with the unknown words during the exams. The latter coursebook is distinguished by the emphasis it puts on learning affixes. This attitude is explained in the Teacher’s Book as follows: “It is particularly important in the CAE examination to be able to deduce meaning from context because the authentic texts are bound to contain some words which students have not met before. Students are trained to tackle unfamiliar vocabulary and understand the gist of texts.” (Introduction, p. 8-9)

Pronunciation is an issue that is basically related to speaking, but it goes without saying that students must learn not only how to spell, but also how to pronounce words when acquiring vocabulary. Two of the intermediate level titles, namely New Headway 2 and Top Notch 2, give emphasis to pronunciation skills. ESL coursebooks, especially when they are used in EFL environments, are almost always the main source of learning how to utter the word. Recordings provided for Listening skills, of course, are indispensable, but guiding students in learning the intricacies of pronunciation and teaching them the related symbols would serve another purpose: to have them practice reading symbols, and thus help them use their dictionaries more efficiently not only for obtaining definitions, but also for learning how the words are pronounced.

One of the main points to be discussed was the probable differences due to the publication dates of the selected coursebooks. It is seen that all of the coursebooks covered in the study more or less have the same objectives and technique types in terms of vocabulary except for Grammar in Context. However, the difference was not related to the date of publication but the ultimate target of the book which was covering grammar. The other four books with different publication dates have almost the same tendency in giving significance to the presentation of vocabulary.

One last point left to mention is that none of the titles refers to the level and frequency of the vocabulary covered in the coursebooks. When one of the main foci is vocabulary in evaluating a coursebook, educators would better be informed about the scope of the vocabulary their students will be dealing with during the course. It would give the teachers a tool to compare the word knowledge of their students and look for the

ways to fill the gap if already acquired vocabulary levels of their students are below the level of vocabulary covered in the coursebooks the teachers choose or are required to use in their classrooms.

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