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2016 2018

Exploring the Relationship between Productive Vocabulary Knowledge and Second
Language Oral Ability

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Lex30

Lex30   PVLT

The current study represents an important development in determining which aspects of vocabulary
relate to second language fluency. Replicating and using different vocabulary tasks might support
our findings
, and lead to the creation of an implicational scale of spoken vocabulary knowledge.

                    The study have potentially useful implications for second language
acquisition research. We report that different tasks might be better employed for specific research
purposes. In using Lex30, a simple task based on word association, the study supports suggestions
that it appears more aligned to the ability to use the words (than other productive vocabulary
knowledge tasks). This implication we feel is borne out by our reporting significant correlations
between the vocabulary used in response to the scenario / speaking tasks (scen) and the Lex30 score.
 We suggest that this interpretation is important because it appears that the Lex30 task might tap
the participant's specific vocabulary knowledge. We suggest that some aspects of vocabulary might
lag behind others to the extent that knowledge of form(which we believe Lex30 accesses) comes
before other aspects of knowledge (e.g. semantic, and grammatical knowledge (which others suggest
the PVLT measures).

vocabulary and fluency

fluency vocabulary   productive receptive implicational

The research began with my interest in vocabulary knowledge. A paper published with a colleague (Fitzpatrick and Clenton, 2017) in TESOL Quarterly suggested that vocabulary tests are inconsistent in terms of the knowledge they elicit. Tests differ according to quality and quantity of the vocabulary knowledge they elicit. This (2017) paper suggested that further papers should examine the extent to which vocabulary knowledge changes, according to quantity and quality, in terms of its use. This, then, led to earlier investigations (e.g. Uchihara and Clenton, 2018) which examined the extent to which vocabulary size changes according to speaking. I therefore wanted to explore in greater detail, the extent to which vocabulary knowledge in use in speaking relates to a variety of different speaking measures.

The design of the research was to explore the extent to which vocabulary knowledge relates to various measures of speaking ability. The research led to collaboration with leading researchers in this area (e.g. De Jong, Saito, Uchihara), in exploring the extent to which vocabulary knowledge (understood according to breadth and depth) varied according to a variety of different speaking task demands and measures. This led to work examining vocabulary knowledge in relation to measuring aspects of fluency, vocabulary knowledge according to independent ratings of speech, and according to different speaking task types (such as the various task types existing in the IELTS speaking tests).

The research method consisted of partial replications of earlier research, this took the form of various threads. One thread, consistent throughout all studies, considered vocabulary knowledge according to breadth and depth, or quantity and quality. These two aspects of knowledge relate to the model in Fitzpatrick and Clenton (2017) the 'vocabulary capture map'. The vocabulary capture map was then used in the studies in order to attempt to explain the various aspects of vocabulary knowledge in relation to the speaking task types. The replications, therefore, adopted methods used in earlier papers. This includes papers by De Jong et al (2012, 2013, 2015), De Jong and Mora (2017), Saito (2015, 2016, 2019), and Tavakoli (2017).

The results relate to each independent study (below). The results support earlier papers that demonstrate relationships between speaking and vocabulary knowledge amongst advanced second language learner populations. The current project shows that the relationship between speaking and vocabulary knowledge can be indicated by task. In other words, for advanced second language users, the vocabulary task demands indicate knowledge of multiple aspects of vocabulary knowledge; for lower proficiency users, the vocabulary task demands indicate knowledge of fewer aspects of vocabulary knowledge (such as a threshold knowledge).

The findings from the current study, in which we investigate the vocabulary knowledge and fluency of a pre-intermediate participant group, are to some extent consistent with earlier fluency studies (e.g. De Jong et al., 201; De Jong and Mora, 2017;). The current study, although using different vocabulary measures, supports De Jong et al.'s (2013) finding that a higher vocabulary score correlates negatively and significantly with the number of silent pauses (Lex30) and filled pauses (NVLT). Regarding the number of silent pauses per second, we suggest this finding relates to Lex30 potentially tapping into aspects of fluent speech to the extent that our pre-intermediate participants used items from the same frequency bands for the written and fluency tasks. Second, regarding the number of filled pauses per second, the higher the NVLT scores, the fewer filled pauses in the speech measures. This specific finding, we feel, is more difficult to respond to, and we agree with Kremmel and Schmitt (2018) who suggest that 'interpreting scores from… form meaning formats as the ability to employ the target vocabulary in language use may be questionable' (p. 390). We suggest that further comparisons between receptive vocabulary level tests and fluency measures might inform this specific finding. We might tentatively, however, infer that the comparison between NVLT task scores and the number of filled pauses per second

might relate to 'mastery' of vocabulary items (Kremmel and Schmitt, 2018: p.390) that exists in about 55-65% of cases.

The findings of the current study have potentially useful implications for second language acquisition research. We suggest that different tasks might be better employed for specific research purposes. In using Lex30, the study supports Clenton et al.'s (2019) suggestion that it appears more aligned to the ability to use the words (than other productive vocabulary knowledge tasks). This implication we feel is borne out by the significant correlations between the vocabulary used in response to the scenario / speaking tasks (scen) and the Lex30 scores. While we appreciate that this finding might be exclusive to the proficiency of the participants in the study, we suggest that this interpretation is important because it appears that the Lex30 task might tap the participant's specific vocabulary knowledge. Clenton et al. (2019) suggest that some aspects of vocabulary might lag behind others to the extent that knowledge of form (which we believe Lex30 accesses) comes before other aspects of knowledge (e.g. semantic, and grammatical knowledge (which they suggest the PVLT measures). We believe the current study confirms that Lex30 scores predict aspects of fluency at a pre-intermediate level of proficiency, for the specific participants examined in the current study. However, we suggest that future studies explore suggestions (e.g. Webb and Chang, 2012; Zhang and Lu, 2013) that aspects of vocabulary knowledge develop inconsistently with increases in proficiency. We propose that for studies involving higher-level learners a test such as the PVLT (alongside other productive vocabulary tasks such as Lex30) might help to inform how the quality of vocabulary knowledge changes with proficiency. We also believe that the different receptive vocabulary task scores in the current study support the notion that different vocabulary tasks tap different aspects of knowledge. We wonder whether the development of a model akin to Fitzpatrick and Clenton's (2017) vocabulary task capture model, designed for productive vocabulary measures, might be possible for receptive vocabulary tasks.

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