

Teasing Apart Near Synonyms in the ESL/EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Integrating synonyms in vocabulary instruction promotes word consciousness and exposes learners to different word families necessary for increasing their lexicon. Classroom materials are shared, which draw from the literature on semantic theory and SLA-oriented principles of vocabulary pedagogy. Semantic webs are used to teach the nuanced similarities and differences of near synonyms, in order to enrich and increase learners' lexical knowledge.

Keywords: vocabulary acquisition, semantic theory, synonyms

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Introduction

Vocabulary development is an essential aspect in language acquisition, which enriches a student's learning experience when incorporated in activities that develop all four linguistic skills (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, listening). Current practices in facilitating vocabulary development do not call on the insights from acquisition research and linguistic theory that would promote the kind of learning that would contribute to success of language learners in developing well rounded language skills. My project draws on research in these two domains to propose a richer approach to vocabulary development in academic ESL/EFL instruction. Research (e.g., Jullian, 2000; Webb, 2007; Khosravizadeh & Mollaei, 2011; Tada, 2016) on language learning provides evidence for effective vocabulary acquisition through in-depth instructions on vocabulary learning strategies other than relying on dictionary or thesaurus sources. In order for acquisition to take place, the learner must be able to choose the appropriate definition that fits the context in which the word is used. One must recognize that words have different senses or meanings, which are shaped and revealed by context.

Presenting interrelated words helps learners gain awareness of a deeper insight into the nuanced senses of meanings of target vocabulary items. Knowing the synonyms of core words (e.g., walk, sad, happy) is not only important to reading and listening comprehension, it is also essential to writing and speaking more precisely, as it adds color to one's output and minimizes repetition of generic core words. Vocabulary knowledge is crucial to development of all skill areas, but it is distinctly associated to reading (Folse, 2010). In order to understand a reading passage, English language learners (ELLs) must know 95-98% of the words in it, about 8000-9000 word families (Nation, 2001; 2013). In addition to the lexical burden ELLs face, they are confronted with a limited time to learn the expected amount required for reading comprehension. As Cobb (1999) justly points out, students are required to know words measured in thousands

while receiving language instruction measured in months (as cited in Folse, 2010). In spite of these factors, emphasis is placed on form, grammar, and structure, instead of giving systematic attention to developing vocabulary knowledge through meaning-focused instruction. ELLs themselves express their dissatisfaction with insufficient vocabulary knowledge. Students are impacted most by these challenges in current practice of reading instruction. My project addresses these challenges by providing practical tools and guidelines grounded in aspects of semantic theory and principles of second language acquisition (SLA) involving vocabulary development. The special focus is on developing vocabulary knowledge in L2 reading ability as it has been revealed to be the biggest challenge for L2 readers to overcome. Giving students pre-reading lessons would help them build and improve their vocabulary.

To provide a foundation for the development of pedagogical materials on vocabulary development prior to a reading assignment, the first component of this paper draws from the literature on semantic theory and SLA-oriented principles of pedagogical practice involving vocabulary learning. The second component describes the teaching context and reports on an analysis of the curriculum and learner needs for which the pedagogical materials may be used. The third component consists of prototypes that incorporate the use of corpus and technology resources with the most effective language learning strategies and aspects of semantic theory that best provide the systematic structures for investigating a word's meaning.

Literature Review

In this section, I will discuss SLA principles and research in vocabulary learning, highlighting the crucial role vocabulary knowledge plays in all language proficiency skills. Justifications for presenting synonymous words in vocabulary instruction are provided. The referential or denotational approach of semantics theory is briefly discussed to provide background for the

application of both semantic field theory and componential analysis as relevant aspects of the theory, within which their systematic structures for investigating a word's meaning are utilized. Research on both effective and ineffective presentation of semantic clusters in vocabulary instruction is examined, in particular the type of learning process necessary in teasing apart the nuanced senses of meaning of synonymous terms.

Issues in Vocabulary Learning

Proponents of thorough vocabulary instruction (e.g., Seal, 1991; Bogaards & Laufer, 2004; Schmitt, 2008; Graves, August, & Mancilla-Martinez, 2013; Nation, 2013; Chung, 2018) view the approach as a crucial dimension in second language acquisition (SLA) and argue that teachers must dedicate time to deliver thorough vocabulary lessons in order to measure students' growth in vocabulary knowledge and determine how much more instruction is needed. However, what does it mean to know a word? Nation (2013) views it as a three-tier system of form, meaning, and use. Retrieving synonyms from the thesaurus and reading dictionary definitions are some vocabulary learning strategies but they are inadequate for truly knowing the meaning of a word and how to use it appropriately. Knowing the form and reading the definition in sources do not guarantee acquisition of the word; the learner must also produce in appropriate contexts for acquisition to take place.

One perspective on vocabulary instruction (Nation & Webb, 2011) holds that vocabulary learning and instruction should be tackled with the following four major strands approach: comprehensible meaning-focused input, form-focused instruction, meaning-focused output, and fluency development. *Comprehensible meaning-focused input* means that students should have opportunity to learn new vocabulary items through listening and reading activities where they focus on input from the materials they are listening to or reading. The second strand, *form-*

focused learning, is also called language-focused instruction where students benefit from direct teaching of, direct study and learning vocabulary. The third strand, *meaning-focused output*, is another important dimension in vocabulary development because speaking and writing enables learners to focus their attention to words in ways unavailable to them while reading and listening. The fourth strand, *fluency development*, allows learners to use items they are familiar with. By practicing fluency regularly, students will develop comprehension as they communicate with English speakers in a natural or authentic setting. According to Nation (2013), “if a course does not have a strong fluency element, then the learning done in the other three strands will not be readily available for normal use” (p. 3). That for a vocabulary development program to be balanced, all four strands must be equally represented - thus the teacher must dedicate 25% of each strand in a given class time. The only way to truly learn a new word is to actively use it in new contexts in written and spoken discourse.

On the other hand, vocabulary development experts Graves *et al.* (2013) recommend the following four-part vocabulary program as a comprehensive plan for building students’ word bank, which can complement Nation’s set of guidelines in an integrated approach: teaching individual words, providing rich and varied language experiences, teaching word-learning strategies, fostering word consciousness. There is a need for teaching individual words in a deep, rich, and extended manner as this approach ensures a most effective result. Students are also mostly likely to understand instruction when they are provided “definitional and contextual information, when learners actively process the new word meanings, and when they experience multiple encounters with words” (Graves *et al.*, 2013, p. 4). Immersing students in rich and varied language experiences, such as reading, is another way to build students’ lexicon. Acquiring words from reading is a primary source for developing vocabulary as one can depend on contextual clues provided in the text to process the static input. The third part of the

vocabulary program is fostering word consciousness, which not only involves awareness of the communicative power of words, it also concerns learning and using newly acquired words as well as becoming more skillful and precise during production (Graves *et al.*, 2013). Promoting word consciousness is essential to sustaining vocabulary growth. The fourth part of the vocabulary program is teaching word-learning strategies, an immensely important load for English language learners. One widely recommended strategy is using parts of an unknown word to unpack its meanings. When learners use their knowledge of roots and affixes to grasp the meaning of different members of word families (e.g., *ascribe*, *ascribes*, *ascribed*, *ascribable*, *ascription*), the amount of necessary lexical items to acquire are reduced.

Students are better at handling encountered challenges in their development of vocabulary given they are equipped with effective learning strategies. The literature indicates that main issues in vocabulary learning involve determining the appropriate meaning of a word (including ontological representations of the sense of a word) and that only a few aspects of knowledge about a word are covered at any single time, in addition to the limited time teachers allocate for thorough vocabulary instruction. Acquiring a large lexicon is another major issue in vocabulary learning, the process of which requires learners to use learning strategies. Some of the most frequently used vocabulary learning strategies include studying the form (spelling), a bilingual dictionary or thesaurus, guessing from context, written and oral repetition, and asking classmates for meaning (Schmitt, 1997; as cited in Zhang & Lu, 2015). In his article on second language (L2) vocabulary learning, Schmitt (2008) underscores a substantial amount of vocabulary knowledge needed to meet the minimum level of fluency in English: reading requires 8000-9000 while speaking requires 5000-7000 word families. Acquisition of such a large English lexicon is one of the most daunting challenges learners face.

While previous research has demonstrated that vocabulary learning strategies are linked to vocabulary breadth, little is known about how various kinds of vocabulary learning strategies may be linked to vocabulary depth (Zhang & Lu, 2015). In their study on the relationship between breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary learning strategies, Zhang and Lu's results indicated that strategies which focus on learning the forms and associative meanings of words significantly predict both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. Thus vocabulary learning activities that incorporate lexical semantics positively impact the learner's acquisition.

Incidental acquisition of new words takes place when learners are engaged in a speaking, listening, writing, or reading task. Higher chances of incidental vocabulary gains occur when learners' attention are drawn to lexical semantics during development of a language skill task. To facilitate and strengthen incidental learning of high-frequency words, Nation and Webb (2011) advocate for attending to the aspects of knowledge that are less likely to be known (word parts, concept and referents, collocation). Nation (2001) takes the position that incidental and intentional vocabulary learning complement each other, where one is enhanced by the other. He suggests that teachers and students should spend time working on guessing strategies to manage unknown vocabulary because "incidental learning via guessing from context is the most important of all sources of vocabulary learning" (p. 232). However, deliberate attention to developing guessing strategies and skills is required in order to carry out incidental learning. Nation (2001) calls for computer-assisted vocabulary learning (CAVL) as it systematically combines "many of the principles of good vocabulary learning into practice, particularly with regard to providing spaced repetition and opportunity for retrieval" (p. 108). An excellent example of CAVL is in the use of Quizlet, in which vocabulary learning is strengthened as learners process words and their meanings both visually and linguistically. A study by Chun and

Plass (1996) of incidental vocabulary learning and use of multimedia found a significantly higher learning rate for target items that were annotated with images and text than for those with text only or text and video. Incidental vocabulary learning through reading increases vocabulary size. Learners' vocabulary size is more closely related to their reading than to their listening ability.

When reading is complemented with vocabulary exercises either in the pre-reading or while-reading stage it can result in vocabulary improvement. When learners are not provided explicit vocabulary focus in reading classes, their acquisition of new lexical knowledge necessary for comprehension of assigned text is negatively impacted. Studies comparing vocabulary acquisition in reading and listening found significantly higher vocabulary gains in the reading than listening mode (Vidal, 2011; Van Zeeland, 2013). Listeners are less likely to use contextual clues than readers, as listeners do not have access to a static text they can depend on for clues nor the time necessary to process the context of spoken input. Nation (2001) points out that "control of the reading skill can be a major factor in vocabulary development for both native and non-native speakers" (p. 144). With respect to writing, Nation and Laufer (1995) found a positive effect of a large L2 lexicon as a base to develop the writing skill. To facilitate word retention, using the newly acquired word in writing should be encouraged.

The only reliable way to properly learn a new word is to actively use it in new written and spoken contexts. Given that vocabulary acquisition research indicates that deciding the appropriate meaning of a word is a major issue in vocabulary learning, dedicating time to address this challenge will only benefit the learners. Another challenge in vocabulary acquisition for ELLs is the daunting task of knowing a large amount of words. Complementing the four-part vocabulary program (Graves *et al.*, 2013) with Nation's (2013) set of guidelines in an integrated approach provides a comprehensive plan for building on students' lexical knowledge. In this comprehensive strategy, there is an emphasis on promoting word consciousness as essential to

sustaining vocabulary growth, which entails providing learners with rich and meaningful vocabulary instruction. Incorporating lessons on synonyms in vocabulary instruction not only promotes word consciousness but also exposes learners to many word families they must acquire in order to increase their lexicon.

Issues in Learning Synonyms

This paper is in line with the belief that learning synonyms of known words may be easier because of the similar meanings between synonyms than learning words without known synonyms. As English contains many words that are difficult to explain directly, using synonyms to paraphrase these difficult words facilitate easier access in learning their meanings. In his study on the effects of synonymy on word knowledge of 84 Japanese students learning English, Webb (2007) found significantly higher scores on output knowledge and receptive knowledge, indicating that “learning words with known synonyms may be easier than learning words without known synonyms because learners may be able to transfer their knowledge of syntax and collocation from known synonyms to less frequent synonyms” (p. 121). In another study on learning related words, Tada (2016) found facilitative effects of presenting semantically related target items as clues for retrieval, which suggests that learning associates of familiar words is an effective approach for vocabulary acquisition.

Applying aspects of semantic theory to vocabulary development

For approaches to synonyms in teaching vocabulary to be effective, we need to draw on linguistics research on semantic analysis. The most prevalent and important relationship in the English language is synonymy. In their study of semantic relationships between an enormous amount of English words, Miller and Fellbaum (1991) demonstrate the usefulness of

understanding these relationships for explaining the meaning of words and for generating activities to enrich learners' understanding of words (as cited in Nation, 2013).

Semantic Theory

Semantics is the study of meaning of individual words and of sentence meanings. Semantic knowledge involves establishing how a word's meaning relates to its use in a given sentence or a situation. Two important theories in semantics are the referential/denotational approach and the representational approach, the former one being of relevance in this curriculum project. The *referential* (or *denotational*) approach talks about the relationship between linguistic expressions and the world, while in the *representational* approach a language represents a theory about reality (i.e. a speaker or writer may choose to have different perspectives on the same situation). Semantic theory provides the systematic structure for analyzing a word's properties, including how its meaning is associated to other words in its vicinity.

Aspects of semantic theory featured in this paper are semantic field theory and componential analysis. Semantic field theory holds the premise that language consists of many interrelated networks (semantic fields) of relations between words (Channell, 1981). An example of a semantic field would be 'verbs of perception': *watch, look, see, gaze, glare, stare, notice, observe*. The field can be expanded by placing *glare* as a member of the field 'angry stare': *glare, glower, scowl, frown*. Words can belong to the same semantic field when they share some aspects of meaning. By teasing apart the semantic webs of a set of words we are able to recognize their interrelated networks. Componential analysis is another aspect of semantic theory which provides a systematic structure of describing similarities and differences of a word. It breaks down the word's meaning into different pieces or components. With each component enclosed in square brackets, an analysis of *gaze* could be: [+look] [+attentively] [+with great

curiosity, wonder, interest, pleasure] [+at something/someone]. An analysis of *watch* could be [+look] [+attentively] [+at something/someone], without the indication of experiencing the situation with curiosity or pleasure. By looking at the semantic features of words associated with each other, nuanced similarities and differences are revealed. The semantics theoretical construct strongly corroborates the concept that there is value in presenting semantically related words in order for learners to recognize their distinctions and gain a full coverage of the different senses of their meanings (Channell, 1981; Brown & Perry, 1991; Jullian, 2000; Gao & Xu, 2013; Tada, 2016).

Semantic Relations in Vocabulary Learning and Teaching

Employing semantic links or networks in L2 vocabulary teaching aids in disambiguating representations of meanings of target lexical items. Not only should ESL/EFL learners know the basic sense of each newly acquired lexical item, they should also recognize its semantic relation to other items (Channel, 1981; Jullian, 2000; Amer, 2002; Khosravizadeh & Mollaei, (2011); Wangru, 2016). However, there are arguments against teaching semantically-related sets (e.g., Folse, 2004). Semantic sets would include hypernym-hyponym (*animal: fish, cow, bird*), near synonyms (*frugal/thrifty*), and antonyms (*frugal/extravagant*). Certain scholars, Tinkham (1993; 1997), Waring (1997), Finkbeiner and Nicol (2003) discourage presenting new vocabulary in semantic sets as the approach made acquisition more challenging to language learners than presenting unrelated words (as cited in Papathanasiou, 2009). In her study on using unrelated words and semantic networks of related words in vocabulary instruction of beginner adult and intermediate high school students, Papathanasiou (2009) concluded that only novice learners had difficulty learning semantically related clustering, while intermediate level learners demonstrated no significant difference in test scores between related and unrelated vocabulary.

Studies (e.g., Jullian, 2000; Webb, 2007; Khosravizadeh & Mollaei, 2011; Tada, 2016) provide evidence for the usability and effectiveness of explicitly presenting semantically related vocabulary in classroom activities, although Jullian and Webb chose words that were already familiar to their intermediate and high-intermediate participants. Jullian's rationale for introducing learners to a full semantic set of related words is to help students increase word-meaning awareness, expand their active vocabulary, and prevent overuse of generic core words. Core words that are commonly used are, for example, *sad*, *bad*, *good*, *watch*, *walk*, *happy*, and so forth.

To ensure successful vocabulary acquisition, the four-part vocabulary program approach by Graves *et al.* (2013) should complement Nation's (2013) vocabulary learning strategies and his four strands approach to vocabulary learning and instruction, emphasizing on promoting word consciousness as essential to maintaining vocabulary knowledge. Integrating lessons on synonyms in vocabulary instruction not only promotes word consciousness but it also enables students to be familiar with many word families they must acquire in order to improve their lexical bank. Presenting semantically-related words is an appropriate approach to vocabulary instruction for intermediate to advanced proficiency levels, which would provide L2 learners opportunities to deliberately learn words associated with familiar words. As the research on vocabulary acquisition states, students are better at handling encountered challenges in their development of vocabulary when they are equipped with effective learning strategies.

Vocabulary Teaching Materials Project

This section of the paper is composed of the needs analysis, in which details the academic context for which the developed vocabulary teaching materials are to be applied; and the prototypes of three lessons incorporating semantics analysis and SLA-oriented principles of

vocabulary teaching and learning. Although the materials herein were created for a low-intermediate ESL/EFL context, they may be used in any English class, low-intermediate to advanced level, to help students build their lexical storage, native speakers or otherwise.

Micro Needs Analysis

According to Richards (2017), the needs analysis serves as the starting point in designing a course for language teaching, in which the first step is to determine the purpose(s) of the course at hand. Collecting information on the nature of activities and purposes for which English will be used is an important phase in curriculum development.

Context. English 202 is the second semester of a two-semester, low-intermediate accelerated course (English 201-202; 4 units/semester) for multilingual students at San Francisco State University. English 201 is focused on developing essential skills including academic reading, writing, vocabulary building and editing techniques. English 202 builds on these skills by revisiting and practicing reading and writing strategies. In their reading, students continue to work on improving their fluency and comprehension, on developing different reading techniques, and on practicing a range of strategies for improving vocabulary. Students will also continue to develop their writing fluency as well as their ability to organize and support their ideas in written mode through journal writing and other written assignments.

Needs Analysis. Through informal conversations with the instructor and her answers to a questionnaire, I was able to gather sufficient information about the objective and subjective needs of students. Reviewing the course syllabus and materials also provided me with the information necessary to plan out the materials. Vocabulary development in English 201-202 is taught by usually frontloading new vocabulary during a pre-reading task that students might be unfamiliar with and will need to understand the assigned text. Frontloading vocabulary before a

reading assignment helps students prepare for the reading and prevent potential confusion when students come across unfamiliar words while they read. It also reduces the extent to which students have to look up words, which potentially breaks the flow of their reading.

Providing students vocabulary learning strategies for active-reading is another crucial approach in vocabulary development as it mitigates any potential anxiety students might experience when coming across unfamiliar words. In one classroom context of English 202, students are instructed to keep a notebook of vocabulary words that the teacher wants them to acquire and apply in their writing. Students find the vocabulary notebook very helpful despite its tedious process. Students recognize the value in expanding breadth and depth of their vocabulary repertoire as having such a large lexicon makes it is easier for them to express their ideas in writing as well as in speech. Target vocabulary items are usually verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and phrases as these are the words that typically carry most of the meaning. According to one instructor, “these are the ‘mortar’ words that students need to understand in order to comprehend what they're reading. Nouns are usually pretty easy to just look up and find synonyms or even visuals for, but verbs, adjectives, adverbs are not as easily defined. I also select words that I'd like the students to use in their academic writing, so the words are high frequency academic words - not the words that are specific to a content area or that rarely show up in newspaper articles or other academic text.”

Pedagogical Materials

The pedagogical goals of the materials to be detailed will be to develop reading and study skills fundamental to success in academic coursework, specifically students will learn about effective vocabulary learning strategies with emphasis on knowing how to tease apart semantically-related

vocabulary items. Students will also learn about the following aspects of semantic theory as one way of presenting and investigating the meaning of synonymous terms.

Aspects of semantic theory:

- Componential analysis
- Semantic field theory

Highlights of effective types of vocabulary learning strategies (Nation, 2013):

- Planning what to focus on and when to focus on it: *Choosing strategies* enables learners to draw on a wide range of vocabulary learning strategies, which ensures more successful learning of target words; *choosing words* and *aspects of word knowledge*; *planning repeated attention* to target items (p. 328)
- Using sources to find information about words: *Analysing words* (affixes and stems of French, Latin, or Greek origins) as basis for awareness of links between related words, strengthening form-meaning connections, and checking guesses from context; *using context* (drawing on a range of background knowledge and linguistic cues); *consulting a reference source* in L1 or L2 (p. 330)
- Processes of establishing vocabulary knowledge: *Generating creative use* (of semantic mapping, word analysis, scales and grids, visualized examples of target words) is the most effective strategy; *retrieving* (strengthens link between the cue and retrieved knowledge); *noticing* involves recording target words in vocabulary notebook, putting term on a word card, and oral repetition of target words (pp. 331-332)
- Enriching fluency across the four skills

Introduction to Pedagogical Materials

Although the context herein is lower-intermediate level ESL, the following lessons can be implemented in other English classrooms, intermediate to advanced levels, to help English

language learners develop the breadth and depth of their vocabulary knowledge. Target words are from *Reading with Patrick: A Teacher, a Student, and a Life-Changing Friendship*, a memoir by former English teacher, Michelle Kuo. This book is a core reading in the course for which the materials are created. The focus on this text is a way of incorporating the vocabulary teaching in this paper into the existing curriculum, to complement it and enhance the ways that vocabulary learnings is supported in the course. The vocabulary lessons below provide significant structured activities in which take into consideration approaches brought forth by vocabulary development experts (Graves, August, & Mancilla-Martinez, 2013; Nation, 2001; 2013; Nation & Webb, 2011), they are alternate ways of presenting the new Chapter 5 vocabulary in *Reading with Patrick*, as informed by SLA vocabulary acquisition research and semantic theory. The activities ensure students receive comprehensible meaning-focused input and output (word consciousness), form-focused instructions, and fluency development as well as provide word-learning strategies and meaningful language experiences. The first lesson provides a rich and meaningful language experience for the learners by introducing students to a full semantic content of related words to the select vocabulary items for Chapter 5. The second lesson incorporates corpus and technology resources with componential analysis while the third lesson provides a vocabulary lesson that integrates semantic analysis with a mind-mapping technology resource to engage learners in a rich and meaningful vocabulary learning experience.

Vocabulary Lesson #1: Word Relationships (30 minutes)

Rationale. Introducing students to a deeper understanding of the semantic content of related words helps them increase awareness of word-meaning, expand their active vocabulary, and prevent overuse of generic core words. Lexically rich language includes a wide range of

different words (i.e. type-token ratio). In contrast, lexically poor language consists of a fewer number of different words with more repetition of those words (Nation & Webb, 2011).

Objectives:

- Ss will be able to (SWBAT) disambiguate meaning of related words to target items by looking at word parts, analyzing nuances of differences and similarities
- SWBAT expand knowledge of select vocabulary items by exploring their sense(s) in Visuwords
- SWBAT have wider grasp of vocabulary items by associating them with visuals through Quizlet

Lesson Context. Prior to this lesson, students would have previewed on [Quizlet](#) the vocabulary list in Chapter 5 of *Reading with Patrick: A Teacher, a Student, and a Life-Changing Friendship*. The following example sentences are drawn from Chapter 5.

Procedures:

1. Front Loading Vocabulary (5 minutes): Prior to main activity, front load vocabulary by using the contexts in the book. The students should already have an idea of what the target words mean if they did their homework and previewed the vocabulary list on [Quizlet](#) before class. To check current knowledge of the words, the teacher asks students to guess the meaning of the vocabulary word in each sentence below:
 - a. Unprompted and garrulous, Aaron *gestured* at our passing landscape and said that he was going to give me a tour of “Hell-Town.” (p. 118)
 - b. We *gazed* together at the makeshift memorial, a ragged, colorful hodgepodge of objects. (p. 118)
 - c. He grimaced, *affronted* - he still expected words to mean what they promised to mean. (p. 123)
 - d. “I’m in,” I said, *resolving* to avoid Ms. Alvarado, lest she try to speak to me in Spanish. (p. 126)
 - e. I answered questions, often *logistical*: What city was this in? How did I get there? (p. 128)
 - f. Patrick *recast* important events in his life as premonitions he’d ignored. (p. 130)
 - g. In the three years I had been absent, we had not simply lost touch with each other, we had *ceased* to have anything in common.
 - h. I had assumed just being together would *suffice*. (p. 131)
 - i, j. And what if I only knew to relate to Patrick by *exerting authority* over him? (133)

2. Warm Up (5 minutes): For warm up, write on the board the first word on the vocabulary list for Chapter 5, *gestured*, then elicit from students whether target item is a verb, adjective, or noun. Write the students' answers on the board. Focusing on the correct word category, write down the definition of present form *gesture*, "to express with physical movements, typically using hands." Proceed by writing on the board the sentence in which vocabulary item *gestured* is used in *Reading with Patrick*. Then ask students which other words are evoked when they think of *gesture*. Write on the board related words to *gestured*: signaled, indicated or expressed with physical movement. To ensure a higher learning rate of target word, access Chapter 5 vocabulary study set in [Quizlet](#) and explain how the visual input of *gestured* illustrates the concept to which is referred in the definition. Follow with discussion of the meanings of remaining vocabulary items and their visual input.
3. Introduce Online Resource *Visuwords* (3 minutes): Before continuing to the main activity, instruct students to take out their laptop and visit <https://visuwords.com/> for opportunities to explore target vocabulary items on the handout. Again, using *gestured*, model the activity by exploring the target item together with the class. Explain how related words to target items are near synonyms, and may rarely be absolute synonyms. As shown on [Visuwords](#) the verb form of *gesture* is synonymous with *motion* and *gesticulate*.
4. Componential Analysis: Explain to students the synonymous pair *motion* and *gesture* are actually near synonyms, as both terms refer to someone moving their hand or head in a particular direction, but *gesture* is more specific in that it can be used as a *motion* for showing or telling someone something. In this case, alert students to the reality that they

are interchangeable only in certain situations, such as, “She motioned/gestured for the waiter to bring the bill.”

Analysis of *gesture*: [+to move] [+hand or head] [+to show or tell]

[+someone something]

Analysis of *motion*: [+to move] [+hand or head] [+in a particular direction]

5. Using Visuwords to Explore Word Meanings (10 minutes pair work): Have students work with a partner. They can refer to the Visuwords to help them complete the matching task on the handout. Once students finish matching the words on the handout, proceed with lesson by having students write down on the third column of the hand out related words or important senses of the word as explored in Visuwords.
6. Activity Wrap Up (5 minutes): Get the class back together and ask for volunteers to write one sentence on the board. For those students who do not demonstrate understanding of target items, clarify by referring back to the example sentences in the text and unpacking their meaning, using your own additional sentences to illustrate the meaning in different contexts.
7. Homework (2 minutes): “Now going deeper, you should know that *gesture* is not only a verb, it is also a noun. As a countable noun, it defines a movement that communicates a feeling or instruction. As an uncountable noun, it defines the use movement to communicate, especially in a dance move. Since we can’t cover deeply all of the vocabulary list in one setting, your homework will be to look up the synonyms of the rest of the words in Chapter 5 on Visuwords and determine whether they are true or near synonyms.

HANDOUT | Chapter 5 Vocabulary Exercise: Match the related words on the right to vocabulary items on the left by drawing a line. On the third column, write down the definitions or important senses of the word as explored in Visuwords.

41. Gestured 118	Operational, strategic, organizational	
42. Gazed 118	expressed or indicated with physical movements, signaled	
43. Affronted	glared, looked fixly, observed	
44. Resolving	offended, confronted, insulted	
45. Logistical	expending, wielding, exercising ability or influence	
46. Recast	control, power, influence	
47. Ceased	enough, adequate, satisfy	
48. Suffice	coming to a definite decision, making up one's mind	
49. Exerting	stopped, finished, ended, culminated	
50. Authority	repair, tweak, adjust, correct	

Vocabulary Lesson #2: Knowledge of Collocations (25 minutes)

Rationale. It is important to focus on knowledge of collocations as it is one of three aspects of which students may not yet have adequate knowledge (Nation & Webb, 2011). Since collocation has often been a source of error for ELLs, it is the teacher's responsibility to direct students' attention to those collocations that are regarded as high priority. Conzett (2000) points out that "it is empowering for both the students and the teacher to be able to identify an area of difficulty, address it and provide a general, and generalizable explanation" (p. 75) Knowledge of collocations is useful because they allow speakers to produce more accurate output. Phrases and collocations are worthy of language teaching as they bear much weight on language production.

Objectives

- Ss will be made aware of the existence of collocations by looking at the contexts in which they are used in *Reading with Patrick* and COCA
- Ss will be trained to observe and note collocations using COCA
- SWBAT practice sentence completion that reinforces collocation of select items through a communicative and controlled practice task
- SWBAT have wider grasp of vocabulary items by associating them with visuals through Quizlet

Lesson Context. Prior to this lesson, students would have previewed on [Quizlet](#) the vocabulary list in Chapter 5 of *Reading with Patrick: A Teacher, a Student, and a Life-Changing Friendship*. They would also have been assigned for homework a search through COCA for collocates of target vocabulary words (Appendix A). Students must bring their vocabulary notebook to class to be used in the lesson's main activity.

Procedures:

1. Frontloading Vocabulary (5 minutes): Prior to main activity, front load vocabulary by using the contexts in the book. Students should already have an idea of what the target words mean if they did their homework and previewed the vocabulary list on [Quizlet](#) before class. To check current knowledge of the words, the teacher asks students to guess the meaning of the vocabulary word in each sentence below:
 - i. Unprompted and garrulous, Aaron *gestured* at our passing landscape and said that he was going to give me a tour of "Hell-Town." (p. 118)
 - j. We *gazed* together at the makeshift memorial, a ragged, colorful hodgepodge of objects. (p. 118)
 - k. He grimaced, *affronted* - he still expected words to mean what they promised to mean. (p. 123)
 - l. "I'm in," I said, *resolving* to avoid Ms. Alvarado, lest she try to speak to me in Spanish. (p. 126)
 - m. I answered questions, often *logistical*: What city was this in? How did I get there? (p. 128)
 - n. Patrick *recast* important events in his life as premonitions he'd ignored. (p. 130)

- o. In the three years I had been absent, we had not simply lost touch with each other, we had *ceased* to have anything in common.
 - p. I had assumed just being together would *suffice*. (p. 131)
 - i, j. And what if I only knew to relate to Patrick by *exerting authority* over him? (133)
2. Warm Up (3 minutes): Remind students that collocations also exist in their L1, and just like in their mother tongue, English also contains words that go together. To illustrate an example from the Chapter 5 vocabulary list in *Reading with Patrick*, select the phrase *exerting authority* (p. 133). Ask students what kinds of things are *exerted*? Write down their answers on the board. Access Chapter 5 vocabulary study set in [Quizlet](#) and explain how the visual input of vocabulary words #9 and #10, *exerting authority*, illustrates the concept to which is referred in the definition. Associating vocabulary words with visuals ensures a higher learning rate of target items. Follow with discussion of the meanings of remaining vocabulary items and their visual input, if students are unclear about the provided definitions.
 3. Using COCA to Explore Collocations (3 minutes): For a deeper exposure to target terms, provide contexts other than the ones in *Reading with Patrick*. One way of doing this is by introducing students to Corpus of Contemporary American English. (Please see Appendix A for instructions on how to use the COCA website). To illustrate common collocations of vocabulary items, model the collocations of a couple of words by searching in COCA the contexts in which they are used. For example, when looking up vocabulary item *exerting*, students will notice words other than *authority* (as used in *Reading with Patrick*) that go with it. As print support, write down on the board some of the following top twenty results: *effort, opinion, pressure, agency, influence, control*. To make acquisition of the word more personal and meaningful, ask students to pair up and think of an example of when they had to *exert* something. Call on a couple of students to share their sentences.

4. Verb + Noun Collocations & Componential Analysis (14 minutes): Main activity focuses on the most important kind of collocation, *verb + noun*. Bring students' attention to the definition of *exert* (to put power into use, exercise ability or influence) and its near synonyms below. Using componential analysis, point out explicitly to students that words with similar meanings are usually not interchangeable, such as the following set of synonymous verbs (shown in PowerPoint slides):

Analysis of *exert*: [+to exercise] [+ability, influence, or power]

Analysis of *expend*: [+to spend] [+time, money, or effort] [+doing something]

Analysis of *wield*: [+to exercise] [+power, influence, or authority]; [+to use] [+a weapon or instrument] [+effectively]

Analysis of *exercise*: [+to apply] [+power or skill]; [+to use] [+a right or privilege] [+practically]

After the lecture on componential analysis and verb + noun collocations, instruct students to work on the handout (Appendix B) with a partner. This task involves both controlled and communicative practice, which makes acquisition more meaningful as students are engaged in talking the task through with their classmate while being exposed to additional contexts other than the core reading.

5. Class Discussion (3 minutes): Ask students to refer to their COCA homework (Appendix A) and vocabulary notebook to help them better understand the discussion. Point out to students how synonymous pair *exert* and *exercise* can be used interchangeably with the noun collocates *power*, *influence*, or *authority*, as demonstrated in the analysis of each word in the set and the example sentences in the handout. However, when these noun collocates go with the verb *wield*, the proposed meaning entails one is exerting or exercising *power*, *influence*, or *authority* as a weapon or a tool.

6. Homework (2 minutes): Praise the students for their efforts and wrap up the lesson with another homework assignment on COCA. This time, ask students to find at least 5 possible noun collocates for the other verbs in the vocabulary list.

Vocabulary Lesson #3: Semantic Mapping (25 minutes)

Rationale. There is a need for teaching individual words in a deep, rich, and extended manner as this approach ensures a most effective result. Semantic mapping provides students with a deeper exposure to the target words in order to become more familiar with them. Given that vocabulary acquisition research indicates that deciding the appropriate meaning of a word is a major issue in vocabulary learning, dedicating time to address this challenge will only benefit the learners.

Objectives:

- Students' word consciousness is fostered as they sharpen and expand their use and knowledge of target vocabulary words through a mind mapping activity
- Ss will be made aware of the existence of collocations by looking at the contexts in which they are used in *Reading with Patrick* and COCA
- SWBAT engage in deeper exposures of target synonymous words by examining their nuanced similarities and differences

Lesson Context. Prior to this lesson, students would have previewed on [Quizlet](#) the vocabulary list in Chapter 5 of *Reading with Patrick: A Teacher, a Student, and a Life-Changing Friendship*. They would also already be familiar with using COCA as a resource for looking up collocates.

Procedures:

1. Frontloading Vocabulary & Warm Up (5 minutes): Prior to main activity, front load vocabulary by using the contexts in the book. The students should already have an idea of

what the target words mean if they did their homework and previewed the vocabulary list on [Quizlet](#) before class. To check current knowledge of the words, the teacher asks students to guess the meaning of the vocabulary word in each sentence below:

- q. Unprompted and garrulous, Aaron *gestured* at our passing landscape and said that he was going to give me a tour of “Hell-Town.” (p. 118)
- r. We *gazed* together at the makeshift memorial, a ragged, colorful hodgepodge of objects. (p. 118)
- s. He grimaced, *affronted* - he still expected words to mean what they promised to mean. (p. 123)
- t. “I’m in,” I said, *resolving* to avoid Ms. Alvarado, lest she try to speak to me in Spanish. (p. 126)
- u. I answered questions, often *logistical*: What city was this in? How did I get there? (p. 128)
- v. Patrick *recast* important events in his life as premonitions he’d ignored. (p. 130)
- w. In the three years I had been absent, we had not simply lost touch with each other, we had *ceased* to have anything in common.
- x. I had assumed just being together would *suffice*. (p. 131)
- i, j. And what if I only knew to relate to Patrick by *exerting authority* over him? (133)

2. Semantic Field Theory and Componential Analysis (10 minutes): Use a PowerPoint slide with attractive visuals to help illustrate the concept of near synonyms (Appendix D). Without revealing the following two sentences on the slide, read out loud the first sentence, “The student watched the meteor shower last night.” Then ask students to substitute the verb *watched* with a synonym. Get students to share their chosen synonym. “Thank you! Those are appropriate substitutions!” Follow up by reading the second sentence, “The student gazed at the meteor shower last night.” Explain why the verb *gazed* was chosen, that it illustrates a situation where the subject was *looking intently, with wonder and admiration*, at the meteor shower rather than simply watching it, as what the first sentence refers to. Read the third sentence, “The student observed the meteor last night.” Explain that this sentence conveys the student was looking at the meteor shower *carefully and attentively*, suggesting that she was observing the meteor shower as a task, maybe for an astronomy assignment.

For a deeper exposure to target synonyms, examine the differences and similarities of the words that belong to the verbs of perception (semantic field analysis). For example, the verb *watch* can be synonymous with *observe*, as both refer to *one who is looking carefully and attentively at something/someone*, however, as illustrated in the previous activity, the verb *observe* suggests a more formal act of looking. To illustrate a different sense of *look*, point out that *stare* can be synonymous with *glare*, *gape*, or *scowl* as the set refers to ways one can stare at someone or something. For instance, *glare* refers to someone projecting an angry *stare*.

Write on the board or present on a PowerPoint slide the following analysis of synonymous verbs:

Analysis of *gaze*: [+look] [+attentively] [+with great curiosity, wonder, interest, pleasure]
[+at something/someone]

Analysis of *watch*: [+to look] [+attentively] [+at something/someone].

3. Using MindMeister (5 minutes): Introduce students to [MindMeister](#) website to illustrate how to map the interrelated networks of meanings of a vocabulary item. Model activity by pointing Ss' attention to the items the concept refers to (e.g., verb form of *gaze* as shown in [MindMeister](#)). "The verb form refers to one 'looking fixedly at something/someone' while the noun form refers only to a 'steady and intent look'; the noun loses the properties of 'wonder and admiration' conveyed in the verb form and because the noun loses these properties, various types of adjectives must be used to modify the noun *gaze*, as what COCA demonstrates."
4. Pair work (3 minutes): Instruct Ss to pair up and discuss with their partner what other words does *gaze* make them think of and what other words they could use as substitution for its verb form.
5. Homework (2 minutes): Provide a handout with directions on how to navigate the site (Appendix C), which students can use as a substitute to a vocabulary notebook.

Conclusion

Word consciousness sharpens and expands learners' use and knowledge of target vocabulary words. The semantics theoretical construct strongly corroborates the existing value of presenting semantically related words in vocabulary instruction, so that learners may recognize their distinctions and gain a full coverage of the different senses of their meanings. As learners increase their lexicon they improve the way they read, write, speak, and listen as well as build confidence as they produce output in a more accurate and expressive scope.

Developing vocabulary is vital to one's intellectual growth. It also plays a big factor on generating high levels of cognitive frequency. The process of learning new words in a second or third language has been studied to delay the onset of symptoms of dementia (Bialystok, Craik, & Freedman, 1998; Freedman, Alladi, Chertkow, Bialystok, Craik, Phillips, Duggirala, Raju, & Bak, (2014).

Implications

Implications of this project suggest that language teachers recognize the value of explicit vocabulary instruction, as habitual practice, in either the pre-reading or while-reading stage of the text to ensure acquisition of unfamiliar words while learning incidentally the synonyms associated to target items. Future goals for this paper will be to pilot the devised materials and further revise them based on how students receive and process them. This project could have important implications for teacher training in semantic analysis and collocations as well as suggested pedagogical techniques to enrich vocabulary instruction that is already an incidental part of their reading instruction. I argue for the value of providing learners with these tools to help them be better autonomous learners of English vocabulary in the academic work outside of specialized English language classes.

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Appendix A

Collocations in Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

Directions for searching verb + noun collocations:

Step 1: Visit the COCA website: <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>

Click on the “search” menu tab on the upper left corner of the screen.



Step 2: Right below the “search” and “frequency” menu tabs, you will see options for the types of search (List, Chart, Collocates, Compare, KWIC). Click on “Collocates.”



Step 3: In the “Word/phrase” box, type in the word “exert” and click on “Find collocates”

EE CONTEXT: CLICK ON WORD [HELP...]			
	<input type="checkbox"/>	CONTEXT	FREQ
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	INFLUENCE	530
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	OVER	335
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	CONTROL	282
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	PRESSURE	254
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	EFFORT	122
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	POWER	116
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	EFFECTS	82
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	EFFECT	81
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	FORCE	79
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	STRONG	58

Step 4: Allow a moment for the search results to appear. You will see a list of nouns that occur with “exert,” listed from the highest frequency at the top, on down to the lowest frequency at the bottom.

To view examples of the language context, click on any of the nouns in the list. You will see a list of examples from actual texts. Write down 5 possible collocates of “exert” in your vocabulary notebook.

Step 5: Now do the same for the synonyms *expend*, *wield*, and *exercise* and write down 5 possible collocates for each synonym of word “exert.”

Appendix B

Collocations Exercise

Please fill out the correct verb or noun collocate in each sentence below:

1. Each clan attempts to _____ **influence** through its own path.
2. In the end, the bullies are able to **exert** some personal _____ and in turn are recognized for their efforts.
3. Give it too much gas, and you **expend** _____ on unnecessary acceleration and heat.
4. Israel's military would probably _____ significant **resources** and suffer heavy losses of men and material over Iran.
5. However, I will tell you that institutions _____ considerable **authority** over individuals who are part of their community.
6. Only when women **wield** _____ in sufficient numbers will we create a society that genuinely works for all.
7. You had to _____ **power** in the absence of money.
8. When subjects successfully _____ **control** over a magical object, they harness its power to advance their own.
9. They were told they had 10 days to _____ their **rights** to buy club seat licenses, or lose the rights.
10. They no longer _____ **authority** or influence.

Answer Key:

1. exert
2. power
3. energy
4. expend
5. wield
6. power
7. exercise or wield
8. exercise or wield
9. exercise
10. exert or exercise

Appendix C

Semantics Analysis Using Mind Mapping Technology

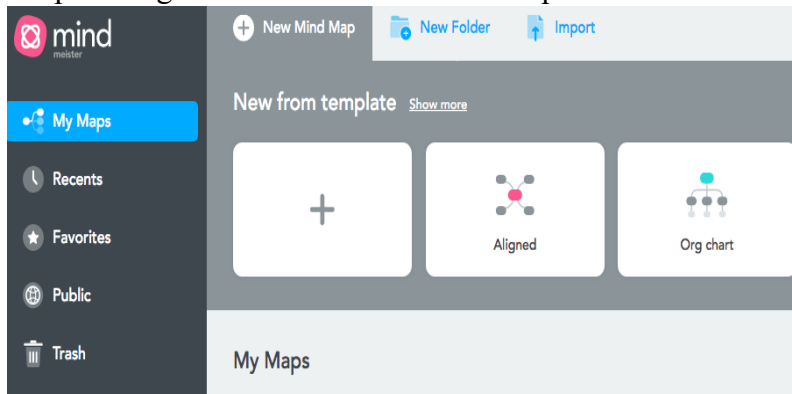
Directions for creating mind maps in MindMeister:

Step 1: Visit the MindMeister website: <https://www.mindmeister.com/>

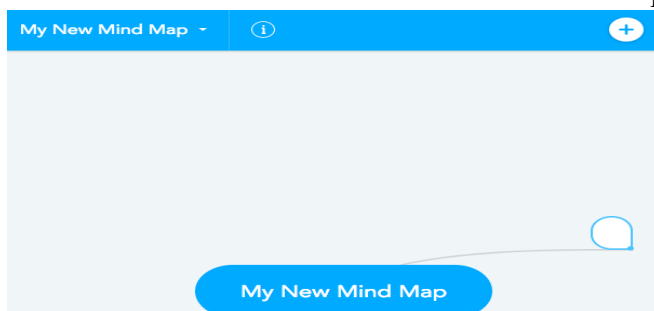


Log in with your Google account for free.

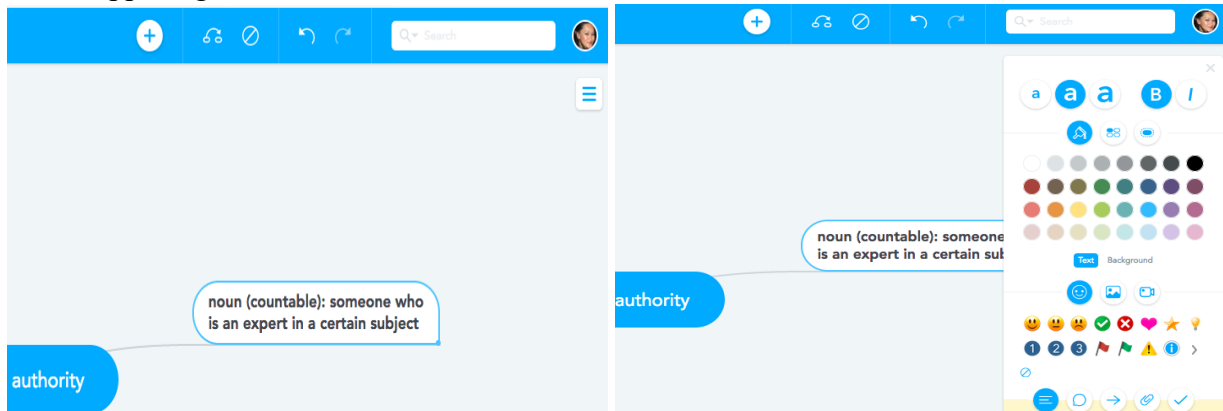
Step 2: In the upper left corner area, you will see the + icon for creating a “New Mind Map.” To create your own mind map for a vocabulary word or phrase, you may select from the available templates right below the “New Mind Map” menu tab. Click on your preferred template.



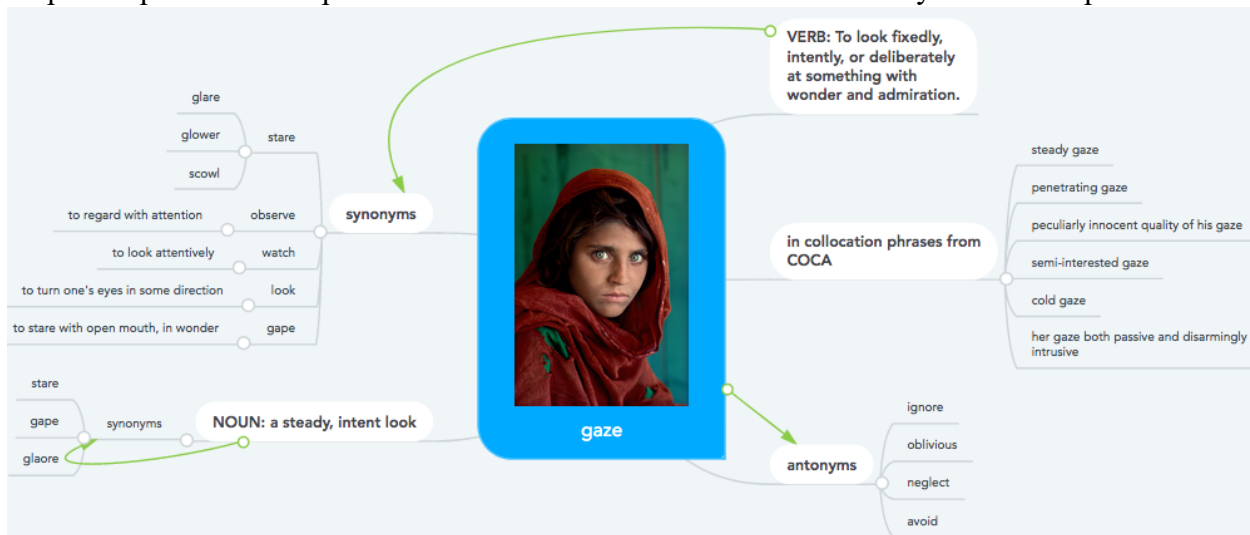
Step 3: Wait a moment for your new mind map template to load. Then type in your vocabulary word in the “My New Mind Map” box. To add ideas, click on the + icon (idea tab) located otop middle area of the site. That idea can be further expanded by clicking on the + icon again.



Step 4: To add an image, video, or to enhance your map, click on the “Toggle Sidebar” located on the upper right corner.



Step 5: Repeat the same procedure for the other words in the vocabulary list for Chapter 5.



Appendix D
PowerPoint Slide

*The student **gazed** at the meteor shower last night.*
*The student **watched** the meteor shower last night.*
*The student **observed** the meteor shower last night.*