

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE AND VOCABULARY TESTING:  
The pupils' vocabulary knowledge after two years' study of English  
in a Finnish comprehensive school

A Pro Gradu Thesis

by

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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää peruskoulun 3. ja 4. luokan oppilaiden englannin kielen sanavaraston eroavaisuuksia. Materiaali koostuu oppilaille kahden perättäisen lukuvuoden aikana pidetyistä englannin kielen summatiivisista kokeista. Tutkielmassa arvioidaan oppilaiden sanavaraston suuruutta 3. luokan jälkeen oppilaiden opiskeltua englannin kieltä yhden vuoden sekä 4. luokan jälkeen opiskelun kestänyt kaksi vuotta. Huomiota kiinnitetään eroihin yhden oppilaan kohdalla verrattaessa eri lukuvuosina kertynyttä sanavarastoa, sekä eroihin oppilaiden välillä. Sanaston määrällisen tarkastelun lisäksi tutkitaan sanaston laatua ja sitä, minkälaisia sanoja oppilaat käyttävät ja millainen heidän perussanavarastonsa on. Myös kokeista saatuja pistemääriä verrataan oppilaiden sanaston tuntemukseen.

Kokeiden käsittelyssä on keskitytty pelkästään sanaston aktiivista tuottamista sisältäviin osioihin. Tarkasteltavana olevat osiot koostuvat erilaisista täydennys- ja käännöstehtävistä sekä oppilaiden omista tuotoksista. Oppilaiden on päätelty tuntevan tietyn sanan, mikäli he ovat tuottaneet sen tunnistettavasti ja käyttäneet sitä oikeassa yhteydessä.

Oppilaiden englannin kielen sanavaraston väliset erot ovat huomattavia. Kun heikoimmat oppilaat tuntevat vain muutamia usein toistuvia sanoja, käsittää parhaimpien oppilaiden sanasto useita vaihtelevia ja kuvailevia sanoja. Osalla oppilaista sanaston tuntemus merkitsee sitä, että he tietävät vain joitakin yksittäisiä sanoja irrallaan kontekstista, osa oppilaista pystyy käyttämään yksittäisiä sanoja kontekstissa, ja osa on jo valmis tuottamaan omia lauseita ja pidempiä tekstejä. Oppilaiden kokeista saamien pistemäärien ja heidän sanaston tuntemuksensa välillä on joissakin tapauksissa selkeitä eroja. Erot johtuvat osaksi oppilaiden käyttämästä sanamäärästä ja osaksi heidän tekemistään virheistä sana- tai lausetasolla.

Koska erot oppilaiden vieraan kielen sanavaraston välillä kehittyvät melkoisiksi jo opintojen alkuvaiheessa, tulisi sanaston opettamiseen erityisesti heikommin menestyneille oppilaille kiinnittää suurta huomiota.

Asiasanat: foreign language vocabulary learning. vocabulary testing.

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## INTRODUCTION

After decades of neglect the importance of vocabulary knowledge has become newly appreciated in recent years. Much research has been carried out in the field. The present study is a further attempt to clarify how important vocabulary knowledge can be, what it means to know a word, and what kind of vocabulary knowledge there can be. The different methods of teaching and learning a word are also discussed. Some attention is given to the testing of vocabulary and the part it plays in the learning process.

This study does not comment on the difference sometimes made between the learning of a second or a foreign language but concentrates on the concept of foreign language. Also, no difference is made between the concepts of learning a new language or acquiring it; the general term used is learning. Furthermore, the present study concentrates on vocabulary that is lexical by nature. Lexical words, or sometimes called content words, comprise nouns (*house, dog*), verbs (*come, play*), adjectives (*big, hot*) and adverbs (*happily, brightly*). These form open classes which can consist of an unlimited number of words carrying a higher information content than words belonging to the closed classes. The grammatical words, or functional words, in the closed classes form a small and finite class including pronouns (*I, you*), articles (*a, the*), auxiliary verbs (*must, will*), prepositions (*in, on*) and conjunctions (*and, but*). The lexical words are also syntactically structured by the grammatical words. The words used by the learners who are the object of this study are mostly nouns and verbs but some adjectives and an adverb appear as well.

The purpose of this study is to examine the differences in vocabulary between 23 learners of English as a foreign language. The school curriculum in Finland requires that all pupils from the third grade on, that

is, pupils approximately nine years old, have to study one foreign language. Due to the small number of pupils of this age in the school which the pupils under examination attend, there has been no possibility of choice as to what language to study, but all third graders have had to start with English as their first foreign language. The present investigation of vocabulary is based on exams given to the learners during the school years 1993-1994 and 1994-1995 when they were attending the third and fourth grades of the comprehensive school. The focus of the study is on productive vocabulary, wherefore tests requiring mere receptive knowledge are not included in the examination. The differences between the learners' vocabularies after studying English for one year are investigated as well as the differences after studying the language for two years. In addition, some attention is given to the changes in the pupils' vocabularies to see whether the differences between the pupils become smaller or bigger or remain approximately the same. Some further attention is given to the words the pupils know, what kind of words they use and what their basic vocabulary is like. The aim is also to study to what extent the scores received from the exams correspond to the amount of words known by the learners, whether there are significant differences between the scores and the size of the learners' vocabulary or whether the scores and the vocabulary are equal. Furthermore, the performance of two pupils is more closely looked at in order to find out what is exactly meant by their vocabulary knowledge.

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to compare the figures indicating the pupils' vocabulary size to their school marks in English because they did not get any marks in the first two years of studying the language. In the third and fourth grades the pupils still got verbal evaluation of their skills in different subjects but no evaluation was given of their knowledge of English. Therefore no comparison can be made either whether there is any connection in the order from the best learner to the weakest between

the marks and the vocabulary size.

## 1 THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

Interest in the study of the importance of vocabulary knowledge has varied with time both among linguists and foreign language teachers. In the history of linguistics, meaning and vocabulary have been largely ignored since they have always posed great problems (Takala 1984:1). In the mid-twentieth century, grammar was emphasized at the expense of vocabulary because vocabulary learning was considered to have been given too much time in language classrooms earlier. It was also thought that, in order to be able to avoid making mistakes in sentence construction, mastering the basic grammar would be more important than knowing vocabulary. Furthermore, it was noticed that teaching and learning the meanings of words was not a simple process because a certain word in one language did not necessarily cover the meaning of an equivalent word in another language. (Allen 1983:1-3.)

In the recent decades, however, there has been a growing interest in the study of learning foreign language vocabulary. It has been argued that knowing only the grammar does not give the foreign language learner enough capabilities in communication. Vocabulary knowledge has been considered a basic part of foreign language learning and communication (Krashen and Terrell 1983:155, Wallace 1982:9). There are indications that the knowledge of vocabulary is more important than the knowledge of grammar in communication. According to Takala (1984:19), communication may not require detailed and constant grammatical analysis. Sampling of content words may give sufficient clues as to the meaning. To take one example, "Green cup table kitchen" is clearly more

comprehensible and communicative than "The X is on the Y in the Z". Takala (1984:19-22) and Wikberg (1980:120) refer to several investigations of error gravity which show that native speakers regard lexical errors as more serious than grammatical errors in communication. Carter (1987:145) is of the same opinion when he says that mistakes in syntax are much better tolerated outside classrooms than mistakes in lexis.

Of course, learning only words and their meanings without knowing how to use them is not enough. Even sentences constructed of familiar looking words may be impossible to understand unless the grammatical rules have been learned (Allen 1983:3). Nevertheless, a foreign language learner may have a good knowledge of the syntax of a language but may not be able to communicate in it, whereas the possession of sufficient vocabulary may give him the opportunity to communicate, although in his own way.

There has always been much change and flux in the area of foreign language learning and teaching. To a large extent, the movements in linguistics steer parallel movements in foreign language teaching. The recent emphasis on semantics and pragmatics in linguistics affect the way foreign languages are taught today. The ability to communicate in a foreign language is recognized as an essential object in foreign language teaching in Finnish schools today. The long-term goal is an adult with communicative competence, that is, an adult who is willing and capable of using the foreign language for communication. Thus, vocabulary learning and teaching are of essential importance.

## 2 FOREIGN LANGUAGE VOCABULARY LEARNING AND TEACHING

### 2.1 Vocabulary size

The question of the total size of vocabulary in a language is a difficult one to answer. For example, Schmidt (Takala 1984:26) places the estimates of German words to 5-10 million but lowers the numbers to 300,000-500,000 if technical terms are excluded. The difference between the latter numbers is explained by the way the words are counted; whether only German words are included or also loan words, whether only root words are taken into account or derived and compound words as well, and whether only current words are counted or also words that are no longer in use. The size of the vocabulary seems to be considerably large, but it should be remembered that no one, obviously, can command but a fraction of the total amount of words in a language. Estimates of the vocabulary of native speakers also vary very widely. Wallace (1982:31) notes that educated adults know 40,000-200,000 words and Gairns and Redman (1986:65) place the estimates between 45,000 and 60,000 words.

Although the size of the vocabulary of individual speakers is remarkably smaller than the total size of the vocabulary, the estimates of the vocabulary items known by native speakers are still bewilderingly high; the learning task that the foreign language learner has to face seems enormous. However, estimates of the vocabulary size needed for general communication are significantly lower. Various studies have been conducted as to what percentage of words in a text, for example, must be known at various levels of understanding. Based on her experiments, Frumkina (Takala 1984:46-47) concluded that a learner who commands the 2,000-2,500 most frequent words comprehends satisfactorily 70% of a text. A much lower estimate is given by Johnson (Takala 1984:47) who



says that only 1,300 most common words should be known in order to understand 74% of a text. The coverage percentage rises to 80 when 2,000 most frequent words are known, and the command of 5,500 most frequent words enables the learner to understand 91% of a text. Furthermore, Klychnikova (Takala 1984:47) has estimated that the main ideas of a literary text can be understood if 90% of the words are known, and that 95% of all words must be familiar if most details should also be understood. Hence, it appears that some 5,000 words are necessary for a relative effortless understanding of a literary text. According to Allen (1983:104), however, as many as about 30,000 words must be understood for "a real command" of a language. It means that a learner comprehends, for example, newspapers and books of general interest, but does not have to know how to use all those words in his own speech and writing. Only about 3,000 words need to be learnt thoroughly enough to be used in the learner's own production. A still different number is given by van Ek in the *Threshold Level* prepared for the Council of Europe (Gairns and Redman 1986:58), in which he claims that the familiarity of some 1,500 words is sufficient for basic communication. This number would seem to be much more reasonable for an average language learner to reach during the studies at school.

## 2.2 Vocabulary selection

Because only a small amount of the vocabulary of a foreign language can be taught, different criteria can be used in the selection of vocabulary. In recent years, probably the most common method of vocabulary selection has been based on the principle of word frequency, according to which a word is assumed to occur more or less frequently. The most frequent words are assumed to be the most useful ones and, therefore, ones that should be taught first to a foreign language learner.

Our common sense tells us that it is sensible to teach very common words like *big* and *small* before teaching more unusual ones like *gigantic* and *microscopic*; people presumably feel most need for the most frequent vocabulary. To assist the process of vocabulary selection, various kinds of lexical frequency counts have been conducted. A number of lists of the most frequently used English words have been published over the years. However, the lists of frequency counts, or word lists, should be critically and cautiously examined. Allen (1983:106) and McCarthy (1990:82) both note that the most frequently used words in English are usually the function words or grammatical words which also carry little information and are therefore of little help for a learner in communication situations. McCarthy (1990:66-68) lists some further criteria for the selection of vocabulary based on the frequency counts. According to him, attention should be paid to the size of corpus used to get the frequency count. An extremely large corpus would be needed if the aim was to get a word list adequate enough. One problem is the source of the corpus; whether it is based only on written or spoken language or both of them. Since it is easier to gather information about written language, this forms usually the basis for word lists whereas spoken language tends to be neglected. Another problem of source of data concerns the kind of texts the information is collected from; whether the texts cover varieties of types, topics, registers and so on. The time period when the data were collected must be taken into account as well; if a word list was compiled a long time ago it may not contain up-to-date information. The way different forms of the same word are treated in a word list is also a matter of concern; whether, for example, the forms *actual* and *actually* are counted as one word or separated. Carter (1987:183-184) agrees with McCarthy when he adds multi-word forms, phrasal verbs and fixed expressions to the problems of word frequency counts. They both question the possibility of measuring the frequency of these expressions. Furthermore, a vocabulary count may not reveal the fact that not all words, although counted under

the same heading, have the same function. The word *see*, for example, can have the meanings *understand* and *look*, the frequency of which may differ from each other. Therefore, in order to be useful, the statistics should deal with meanings as well as with form.

No matter how critically word lists based on frequency counts are studied, they need not be and, in fact, are not today, the only criterion for vocabulary selection. Various criteria other than frequency can be used to find the most useful words for a foreign language learner to start off with. McCarthy (1990:69) names *range* of a word, that is, the number of different texts or speech samples in which a word occurs, as one important criterion. Although the frequency of a word may be high, it may not occur but in very few texts and therefore its range may be quite restricted. In addition to range, the availability of a word can be used as a basis for vocabulary selection. Carter and McCarthy (1988:10) quote Michea, who has given the following definition: "Available words are known in the sense that they come to mind rapidly when the situation calls for them". Words that normally have a low frequency may be very useful in certain situations (Wallace 1982:16). In a classroom, for example, *chalk*, *blackboard*, and *overhead projector* can be fairly common but hardly ever used in other situations. Sinclair and Renouf (1988:151) add words that relate to domestic reality, such as days of the week and kinship terms, and other common lexical sets, and words that refer to physical sensations and personal emotions, and words that can be used in making evaluations to the list of important vocabulary. According to McCarthy (1990:86-87), learnability, the ease or difficulty of learning a word must also be taken into account. He connects the learnability of a word with its frequency when he says that the most frequent words may be easier to learn because they occur regularly but continues that frequency cannot predict the ease of learning a word. Allen (1983:9) stresses the importance of a learner's personal need to know a word. A learner may

feel the need for a word either because of comprehension or production, but in both cases the learning process will be easier for him. Instead of basing the vocabulary teaching on any word lists, it would be better, according to Allen (1983:108), to teach the learners words that enable them to talk about their fellow-men and surroundings, to respond to routine directions and commands, and to work in the classroom.

When selecting vocabulary to be taught to very young students starting their language learning career, their age should naturally be taken into account. It is commonly known that young students may have problems with abstract words which are not necessarily known to them even in the mother tongue. Therefore, it would be much more reasonable to start with words that represent something familiar to them and are concrete.

### 2.3 Knowing a word

The aim of the teaching of foreign language vocabulary is that the learner gains knowledge of unfamiliar words. But what does it mean to "know" a word? Or, in what ways can a word "be known"?

The first distinction can be drawn between receptive and productive knowledge. Receptive vocabulary consists of words that are only recognized and understood when read or heard, whereas productive vocabulary means words that can be recalled and used in speech and writing. Every foreign language learner comprehends a greater number of words than he can actually produce. The difference is hardly surprising because, as Wilkins (1974:33) comments, every learner spends more time receiving language, spoken or written, than producing it. Similarly, in foreign language teaching, a distinction is made between material which is worth learning for active command, to be used accurately and productively by the learner, and material which is to be recognized and

understood when it is encountered (Gairns and Redman 1986:65). The teacher is in an important position when deciding on the most relevant items to be learned productively by the learner since his knowledge of the language is likely to be superior to the learner's knowledge. However, this selection is not totally made by the teacher; the learner may decide to acquire a word productively regardless of the teacher's intentions. Both productive and receptive vocabulary are important for the learner, but in saying this it should not be assumed that the vocabulary for production ought to be exactly the same as that for reception. Wilkins (1974:65) points out that the language we understand in our mother-tongue is far more diverse than the language we produce ourselves. Therefore, it would be somewhat unrealistic and unnatural to expect that our knowledge of a foreign language should be different in this respect. Generally, the receptive vocabulary of a foreign language learner is larger, more abstract, and more complicated than the productive one.

It is a common practice in foreign language vocabulary teaching that productive vocabulary is central at the beginning level, productive and some receptive at the intermediate level, and a greater amount of receptive vocabulary at the advanced level. Hammerly's (1982:452) presentation of this practice is presented in Figure 1:

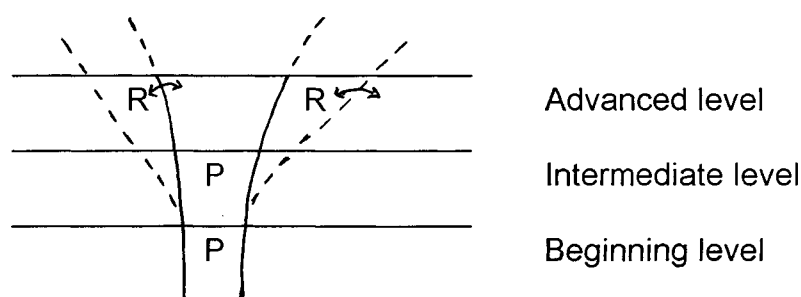


Figure 1. Productive (P) and receptive (R) vocabulary

The small arrows indicate that words which are not known can become part of the receptive vocabulary through exposure and words that belong to the receptive vocabulary can become productive through practice. In the opposite direction, lack of practice can turn productive vocabulary into receptive and through lack of exposure receptive vocabulary is forgotten.

The recognition of the significance of receptive vocabulary knowledge affects the way linguistic materials are selected and used. The achievement of a good receptive vocabulary is helped by a massive exposure of the learner to the language. The sufficient exposure is probably best achieved through extensive reading in the foreign language. Rivers and Temperley (1978:225) note that reading can be of two kinds: intensive, where reading is linked with further study and practice of grammar and vocabulary, and extensive, where vocabulary items, for example, are not specially explained and practiced. Through extensive reading the learner will meet many words which may become part of his receptive vocabulary.

Madden (1980:112-113) has divided a learner's knowledge of vocabulary into three levels of competence. At Level One, the learner can recognize and understand a large number of words but is not able to use them. At Level Two, the learner knows how and when to use the words in the correct context, but cannot give them a definition. The words that the learner can also define are at Level Three. It is not necessary that a new word enters the learner's vocabulary at Level One; it may jump straight to Level Three. However, the most common way for a new word to become part of the learner's vocabulary is through comprehension at Level One; then, after having experienced the word in various contexts, the learner may feel confident enough to use it and the word enters Level Two. Level Three is reached when the learner can offer a definition for the word. The whole process takes time, and it may happen that not every word

advances to the last Level.

Some researchers have presented more detailed descriptions of what it means to "know" a word. A more precise definition is given by Carter (1987:187) and Wallace (1982:27), according to whom a word is known when several different preconditions are fulfilled. The word should be recognized in either spoken or written form or in both; it should be related to an appropriate object or concept; it should be pronounced and spelled correctly; and it should be recalled when needed. A learner should also know how to use the word productively, although in some cases only recognition is necessary, and be aware of its syntactic frames as well as its grammatical forms and derivations. Moreover, the relations of the word with other words in the language, its collocations, and the different meanings it can be associated with should be familiar to the learner. In addition to the different levels of style and formality of the word, its more marked pragmatic and discursal functions should also be known as well as its possible usage in fixed expressions. To put it briefly, knowing a word means that the learner understands its meaning and is able to use it correctly in every conceivable way (Yin, 1980:76).

Obviously, it cannot be demanded that a pupil starting to learn a new language would know a word as accurately as described above. At this level the pupils can "know" a noun, for example, in the sense that they are familiar with the basic meaning of it, that is, a *house* is a building in which people live. They can also know the basic form of an adjective, for example *small*, without knowing its comparative and superlative forms *smaller* and *smallest*. Furthermore, the present tense of a verb like *sing* is learned early on whereas the past forms *sang* and *sung* will be learned only later. An average language learner may never be able to know the meaning of a word precisely since further contact with it and experience of its usage will always add something new to its meaning. This should not

be seen as a problem, however, since according to Nation (1990:33), even the vocabulary of native speakers develops throughout their lives when they learn totally new words or new meanings to the already familiar ones.

## 2.4 Vocabulary teaching

The importance of vocabulary teaching is discussed by Nation (1990:1-2). He considers it necessary to consciously teach vocabulary because thus the learner can be directed toward words that are most likely useful to him. The teacher can also introduce to the learner a wide variety of ways of learning new words. One of the reasons for systematic vocabulary teaching is the fact that vocabulary is considered perhaps the most important element in learning a foreign language. Learners think that many of their difficulties in using the new language result from inadequate vocabulary knowledge. Finally, the teaching of new vocabulary cannot be totally avoided because the words thought to be needed by the learner must always be given attention to in any approach to language learning.

Brown (1980:2) says that the primary meaning of a word should be taught before secondary meanings. Also, students should learn normal collocates before infrequent ones. The meaning of a new word can be conveyed through a visual approach, demonstration or verbal description (Madden 1980:115). The visual approach includes showing the object itself or a picture of the object to the learners when a new word is presented. The word can be introduced through demonstration using mime and gestures. Verbal description offers more possibilities between which to choose. Madden suggests the use of the techniques of contrast and of integration. Contrast involves the introduction of two words which are opposites to each other whereas integration links the new word to words that are already familiar to the learner. Another proposal for the



options that the teacher has in the presentation of word meaning is made by Wikberg (1980:121), whose suggestion is presented in Figure 2:

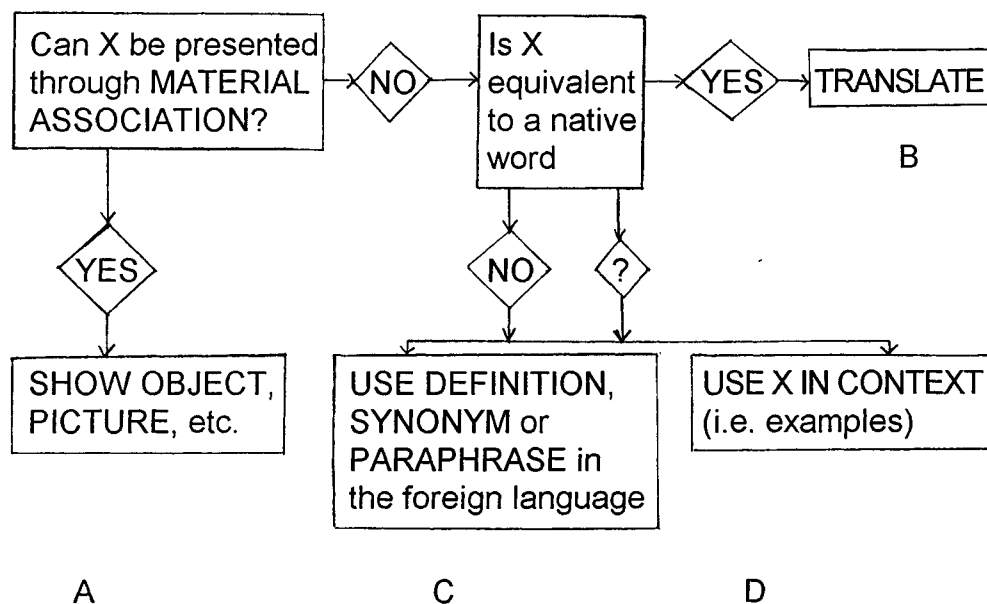


Figure 2. The presentation of word meaning.

The first option in Figure 2, that is, option A includes Madden's visual approach but because Wikberg does not separately mention the strategy of demonstration in teaching the word meaning it could be presumed that demonstration could be compared to the use of concrete objects and other visual aids. Thus the first option could be said to contain the techniques of non-verbal presentation of word meaning. Options B to D make use of verbal presentation and can be compared to Madden's verbal description. In option B it is the native language that is chosen in order to clarify the meaning of a new word whereas the language used in options C and D is the foreign language. The two ways of presenting word meaning are more thoroughly discussed in the following.

#### 2.4.1 Non-verbal presentation

Non-verbal presentation can be used when it is possible to present a new word through material association. The teacher can, for example, show the learners concrete objects, pictures or films, or he can act out various actions or emotions. Or, as Nation (1990:51) puts it, the teacher can use an object, a cut-out figure, a photograph or other pictures, he can use gestures or perform an action, or he can draw a picture or a diagram to the blackboard.

Obviously, the means of non-verbal presentation cannot be used every time a new word occurs. It could be argued that it is a rather time-consuming procedure to show a picture of every new word in the lesson, for example, or that a picture for some learners may not contain the same meaning as it does for the teacher (Nation 1990:53). The use of a single visual image may lead the learner to draw wrong conclusions about the meaning of the word. Also, the meaning may not always be very precise because all the connotations of the word cannot be taken into account. Moreover, it is practically impossible to use objects or pictures when abstract words and idiomatic expressions are presented. Therefore, due to the restricted use of the means of non-verbal presentation, they are more valuable in the early stages of vocabulary learning when the new words are more concrete (Allen 1983:33).

However, there are some advantages in the use of non-verbal presentation. The learner may have better chances to remember words that have been presented to him with the help of visual techniques. According to Allen (1983:7), the more senses it is possible to employ in the learning process, the better are the results of learning. Furthermore, successful language learning outside the school happens generally in situations where the learner can see or touch the object the name of which

is unfamiliar and new to him (Allen 1983:33). An object or a gesture in the right place at the right time can produce good results.

#### 2.4.2 Verbal presentation

Verbal presentation can be divided into two areas: one uses the learner's native language, the other the foreign language to be learned in the conveyance of the meaning of new vocabulary items. Translation is used in order to give an approximate equivalent to the foreign language word or expression. It is a method that has been at different periods either accepted or controversial, depending on prevailing objectives and teaching preferences.

According to Wilkins (1972:220), the choice of translation as a means to teach meaning implies the belief that learning a foreign language is learning to map it on to the mother tongue or that eventual use is aided by the mediation of the mother tongue. However, different languages reflect also different perceptions of reality which means that words in different languages cannot be equated. It is erroneous to believe that there is an exact equivalent in the foreign language for every word in the native language. Hence, translation from one language to another may sometimes cause problems. Also, the meaning of a word is the product of its relations within the language in which it occurs since words are not usually found in isolation but are surrounded by other words. Wilkins (1974:81) argues that because the word is associated through translation with a different language, it cannot be said that translation teaches meaning. If any meaning is associated with the foreign language word, it will be the meaning of the native language word. The use of the native language may also hinder the learner from building associations necessary for remembering a word. Rivers (1983:126) notes that when new foreign language words are encountered they can hardly ever be

matched in a one-to-one relationship to the words in the native language wherefore it is not possible to profit from the already existing interconnections. The new words must be linked up with their own culture-specific inferences. When a learner studies a new language, he has to learn a new way of classifying things (Wilkins 1974:20). Nevertheless, it should be noted that some languages are both linguistically and culturally closely related to one another and do not chop up external reality in radically different ways. Thus, we can expect fairly consistent similarities between the vocabularies of different languages even though not complete identity.

Although the use of translation has obvious disadvantages, the general opinion seems to be that it need not be rejected altogether. Gairns and Redman (1986:75), for example, argue that translation can be very effective in conveying the meaning of unfamiliar words. One of its benefits is that valuable time can be saved when long and unsuccessful explanations need not be given in the foreign language. Also, translation can be done quickly especially when the question is of words of low frequency and minor importance. According to Nation (1990:62), translation is not limited to any special kinds of words but can be used to explain several different types of words. It can be used when the teacher wants to know if the learners have understood something that was presented in another way. Furthermore, translation offers a chance for comparisons between the native language and the foreign language which help the learner to find out about the nature of different languages and their ways of organizing the world (Nation 1990:63).

On the whole, however, translation should be used sparingly in teaching word meaning. The time that is spent using the learner's mother tongue is taken away from the exposure to the foreign language. Wallace (1982:48) is of the opinion that it would be better to explain a word by giving it a

simple definition in the foreign language as soon as the learner's competence is adequate enough. When the learner later needs the word but cannot remember it, he can give an explanation. Too frequent use of translation can also reduce the amount of effort given to the guessing of meaning from the context. As Rivers and Temperley (1978:327) note, the skill of inferring meaning from context is considerably important in autonomous language use. The ability to infer meaning from context is a skill that can be acquired by practice. Every time the teacher translates a word for the learner, he robs the learner a chance to practice this skill. In addition, the habit of translating everything may hinder fluency. Many learners do not realize that they do not have to give their thoughts a linguistic form first in the native language and only after that translate their ideas into the foreign language. They do not know that it is possible to learn to comprehend and think in the foreign language directly. Unfortunately, the translation of more or less isolated sentences from the native language to the foreign language has been a popular type of exercise in various language learning books. The sentences may have been of improbable or infrequent occurrence and contained such grammatical and lexical problems that they have made foreign language learning an ordeal for many learners.

Another way of using verbal presentation in clarifying word meaning is that of using the foreign language itself. In Figure 2 on page 16 Wikberg suggests that the teacher can use foreign language in explaining the meaning of an unfamiliar word if it does not have an equivalent in the native language. However, this may be too simple a solution. The teacher should rather choose the foreign language whenever it would be possible and more reasonable to use it.

There are various alternative ways to exploit the foreign language when the meanings of new words are explained. The teacher may use

definitions or paraphrases or he may illustrate the meaning of a word by giving a series of contextual examples of its use. The teacher may also make explicit use of the sense relations that exist between the words of a language. The use of definitions or paraphrases means explaining the meaning of a word or an expression with other, different words that are familiar to the learner. According to Nation (1990:56), an adequate definition shows the learner the grammatical functions of a word, the typical sentence patterns in which it occurs, and its other formal aspects. But, as Gairns and Redman (1986:74) comment, definitions alone are not often adequate enough but need some sort of clarification with the help of contextualised examples in order not to give the learner a misleading explanation of the meaning of a word. However, Scholfield (1980:24-25) defends the use of paraphrases since they constitute the commonest way of definition in monolingual dictionaries but he also warns of the possible misunderstandings unless paraphrasing is done with care. Scholfield (1980:26-33) also lists some important features that must be taken into account in paraphrasing: The word or phrase in question should be paraphrased in the right sense and the result should be easier than the original word or phrase. The paraphrase should be neither too broad nor narrow for the purpose in hand. Finally, the teacher should show how to integrate the paraphrase into the context.

Sense relations, for their part, include the use of synonymy, antonymy or contrast, and hyponymy or the use of a headword in vocabulary teaching. According to Wallace (1982:70), however, synonyms and antonyms have not been quite accepted by all linguists due to the absence of "true synonyms" or "true antonyms". For example, if the concept of synonym is strictly interpreted as an exact equivalent of another word in all possible contexts, it would be misleading to use synonyms at all. But if it is understood in a broader sense it can substitute a word in a given context; the synonymy will be with some of the semantic features of the word but

not with all of them.

One of the ways of foreign language usage in verbal presentation is to give contextual examples of the unfamiliar word. According to Nation (1990:61), a contextual definition does not directly explain the meaning of an unfamiliar word but it encourages the learner to find out the meaning by examining the grammatical surroundings of the word and its associations with other words. The teacher's presentation of words in context will show the learner the contextual limitations that the words may have. Contextual presentation should also get the learner into the habit of inferring the meaning of new words from context since the teacher can teach only a relatively limited amount of vocabulary due to the limited time available. Takala (1984:77) notes that there are two kinds of context: pedagogical and natural. Pedagogical contexts are especially designed for teaching words that are new to the learner, whereas natural contexts contain those new words that could be found anywhere else. However, natural contexts may not be very helpful or sufficient enough in providing clues to promote initial acquisition of the meaning of a word (Takala 1984:78). This may well be true in the case of the initial presentation of the word's meaning when it may be more appropriate and effective to use pedagogical contexts or other means of conveying meaning. But natural contexts need not be totally rejected in vocabulary acquisition; they are very useful in further development of vocabulary with more advanced learners or when the learners are working on their own. The importance of natural contexts is also stressed by Nation (1990:61), who suggests that teachers ought to give the learners a chance to meet the new words in various contexts often enough in order to grasp their meanings.

In addition to these approaches to verbal presentation, Nation (1990:58-59) lists the use of analytical definition. By analytical definition is meant the examination of the different parts of the meaning of a word. The

attention is given to the most important ideas and the basic features a word contains in an attempt to clarify the meaning. However, analytical definition should always be used with contextual examples giving further explanation no matter how accurate or complete the definition itself would be.

On the basis of the discussion above it cannot be said that one way of teaching the meaning of an unknown word is better than some other way. Carter and McCarthy (1988:15) note that even though teachers often prefer the learning of vocabulary in context specifically with more advanced learners, there is no convincing evidence that the information learners obtain from meeting words in several different contexts is more beneficial than, for example, translation. It is not an easy task to tell exactly when the learners are able to benefit more from context-based inferencing than from other methods of conveying meaning, and therefore the best solution in most situations could be to apply a mixture of approaches. Sometimes the use of concrete objects may clarify the meaning best, sometimes a verbal explanation, depending on the learners' proficiency and the nature of the word.

## 2.5 Vocabulary learning

The concepts of vocabulary learning and vocabulary teaching cannot be clearly separated but are closely related to each other. Much of what applies to teaching is also true of learning. In the following, however, the focus is more on the learners' side of becoming familiar with foreign words. After the elementary level the learners' individual needs begin to differ from each other wherefore the teacher cannot always select material that would be equally useful to all learners. That is why the learners become increasingly responsible for their own learning.



Just as there are several various techniques for teaching unknown vocabulary, there are different ways for learning it as well. A foreign language learner may study new words in isolated lists, check them up in a dictionary, ask other learners for more information, or guess the meaning from the context, for example. Many researchers are in disfavour of learning isolated words but there are some who defend the use of this method. Nation (1990:126-127), for instance, notes that whereas learning words in lists has not been very popular among language teachers for quite a long time, learners themselves often use this technique in order to enlarge their vocabulary. One of the benefits of word lists is that plenty of words can be learned in a relatively short time. Learning also becomes more efficient if the unknown word is associated with an equivalent word in the native language rather than giving it a definition in the foreign language. The particular types of association between the foreign word and its mother tongue translation are more important than the number of times the word is repeated. However, learning words in lists is only "the first step" in acquiring new vocabulary. After all, it is not enough to know only the mother tongue translation of a word but learning the translation provides a useful basis for future learning. An opposite view of the usefulness of isolated lists is represented, for example, by Schouten-van Parreren (1989:76-77). She argues that when words are presented in isolation they cannot be remembered very well but are soon forgotten. Also, if the words are listed in an alphabetical order, learners may suffer from interference. The meaning of a word does not always become very clear because there is no context to define the word. Finally, isolated words do not carry a message and, therefore, do not present a psychological reality.

The use of dictionaries in foreign language vocabulary learning has also been widely criticized. Especially the bilingual dictionaries have been thought to give sometimes unreliable and inaccurate meanings to the

words. In her article, Summers (1988:111-118) strongly defends the use of dictionaries as a means of clarifying word meanings. She points out that the context does not always give sufficient clues for guessing the meaning of an unfamiliar word, or the word may seem ambiguous in a certain context, and therefore dictionaries can help in such cases to clarify the uncertainty. Also, when a learner needs a certain word for productive purposes, a dictionary may be the only source available since it helps with the collocations and grammatical functions of the word. However, learners should be taught to use the dictionaries properly and not just let them to expect to find one-to-one correlations between the words in the mother tongue and the foreign language. A good dictionary does not only define a word but contains some examples of it in various contexts and explains its grammatical possibilities. Furthermore, as Gairns and Redman (1986:79) comment, a learner knowing how to properly benefit from a dictionary can continue learning new words outside the classroom and make autonomous decisions about his own learning.

The role of context in vocabulary learning is often considered much more important than the learning of isolated words. Guessing from context is the most frequent way to discover the meaning of new words but to be able to do it the learner often needs some guidance. Nattinger (1988:63) lists the topic, the surrounding words and the grammatical structure as possible aids when inferring the meaning of an unfamiliar word. Brown's (1980:10-11) list of context clues contains definition, learners' experience of the world, contrast, inference, and analysis. Clarke and Nation (Nation and Coady 1988:104-108) suggest a five-step strategy for guessing from context. The first thing to do is to find the part of speech of the unknown word. Second, the immediate context should be examined and, after that, the wider context. The learner should then guess the meaning and, finally, check that the guess is correct. Once the learners become more familiar with the use of the clues, they need not follow the steps so accurately.

The ability to guess from context is a valuable skill from which the learners are able to profit as soon as they know about two to three thousand words (Nation 1990:160). They may then guess the meaning of even 80 per cent of unknown words in a text. However, Gairns and Redman (1986:84) stress the importance of the fact that the context from which the word is to be guessed must be adequate to the task. If the target word is surrounded by other unknown words the learners may make false assumptions of the meaning of the particular word. Therefore, most of the words that make up the context should be familiar to the learners (Nation 1980:23). Even though learners may successfully guess the meaning of unknown words from a context that contains plenty of them, it is better that this task is not made too heavy.

All the strategies for learning new words complement each other. Learning words in lists may be the most useful and easiest way to discover the meaning of unfamiliar words in the early stages of learning a new language whereas guessing from context demands some knowledge of the language in question and of the whole world. Checking up the word from dictionary may be recommended when the meaning cannot be conveyed from the context or is otherwise ambiguous. It is the learner who decides what is the best strategy for him to use with various words.

### 3 FOREIGN LANGUAGE VOCABULARY TESTING

#### 3.1 Categories, characteristics, and purposes of language testing

Language testing has sometimes been considered separate from teaching and learning and it has been thought to use up valuable class time. But, for example, Harrison (1983:1) believes that testing and teaching are

closely interrelated since tests provide useful information for both the teacher and the learners of the extent of success of the learning task.

Language tests can be divided into four different categories. They include placement, diagnostic, achievement, and proficiency tests (Hughes 1989:9-14). Placement tests are designed to provide information that will help to sort new learners into teaching groups that are most appropriate to their abilities. The learners can start a course at the same level as the other learners in the group. Diagnostic tests are intended to show how learners have learned particular elements in a course, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. The tests are to ascertain what areas of language learning need to be stressed in the future. The purpose of achievement tests is to establish how learners have progressed in their studies. The tests check the results of learning over a longer period than diagnostic tests, for example a whole course or even a year. Proficiency tests aim to measure learners' ability in a language regardless of, for example, the content of the course the learners may have followed. In the present study the focus is on examining the vocabulary on the basis of achievement tests given to the learners two or three times a year.

The two most important characteristics of a good language test are reliability and validity (Davies 1990:21-24). Reliability has to do with consistency and accuracy of measurement. When an exactly similar version of a test is repeated on different occasions or by different persons it should give similar results. Reliability can usually be said to increase with the length of the test and the homogeneity of test items. A valid test is one that measures what it is supposed to measure. If, for example, the test is to be an achievement test, it should not contain material which was not encountered by the learners during the course. Wallace (1982:111-112) argues that reliability rarely causes problems in vocabulary testing whereas validity may be more problematic. For example, when a test is

intended to find out whether learners can recognize the meanings of certain words in a given context, the learners should not be asked to write a synonym of the words because then the nature of the test changes; the skills needed are not only those of comprehension but of production as well. Rather, the learners should be given a list of words with which to match the words taken from the context.

Before giving a test it is important that the teacher makes it clear why the learners are being tested and what purpose the information is gathered for. According to Davies (1990:20), the main purposes of language testing are selection of learners, feedback to the syllabus, evaluation of materials and methods, and the uses for experimentation and research. The more precise reasons for vocabulary testing are listed by Nation (1990:8). Tests indicate the learners' total vocabulary size and they can be used to compare vocabulary knowledge before and after a particular course. They are helpful when investigating learning, the progress of each learner can be continuously checked, and they can encourage learning especially with good results. From the teacher's point of view, tests can show how effective the teaching has been.

### 3.2 Fields of vocabulary testing

Two different fields of vocabulary testing can be distinguished from each other: recognition and production. Of these, recognition tests concentrate on finding out if learners know the meaning of a word after encountering it. Nation (1990:79-82) suggests three ways of testing the learners' skills of comprehension. After encountering a foreign language word the learners either translate it to the mother tongue or give it a synonym or definition in the foreign language. Nation argues that translating a word into the mother tongue is the best way of testing recognition. The advantages of this kind of testing are that the tests are easy to make and

ask the learners to do what they ordinarily do when reading or listening. However, the marking of the tests can be complicated and they require that the teacher knows the learners' mother tongue, which, anyway, is mostly the case in Finnish schools. The use of synonyms and definitions demands a reasonable proficiency in the foreign language and is therefore more suitable for advanced learners. Checklist tests are another way of testing word recognition. The learners are to mark the words from a given set which they think they know. The most obvious disadvantage is that learners may overestimate their vocabulary knowledge. A good way of preventing this is to add some nonwords to the list. The advantages of checklists are that they are easy to mark and plenty of words can be dealt with in a short time. The third way of using recognition tests is making multiple-choice tests. The learners are given a foreign language word to which they choose an equivalent from a set of pictures, mother-tongue words, or foreign language synonyms or definitions. However, multiple-choice tests are not very easy to construct because all the words in a group should be the same part of speech but not closely related to each other in meaning. When the tests are carefully made they are easy to mark.

Valette (1977:172-182) describes the recognition tests more thoroughly when she divides them into tests using pictures, and checking words in and out of context. Picture tests can consist of multiple-choice items, when a correct single word or a whole phrase responding to a certain picture must be chosen from the given alternatives. There can also be several pictures each having a corresponding expression to be matched with. One alternative is to ask the learners to indicate whether the statements describing certain pictures are true or false. Tests checking vocabulary knowledge out of context can, for example, ask the learners to identify a correct synonym or category to which the given word belongs. The learners can be required to select a correct definition or a native language

equivalent to the word, or they can be asked to associate pairs of words. Tests checking vocabulary in context can also have synonyms but now the learners should indicate the words which are closest in meaning to certain words in a sentence. Another way is to ask the learners to complete a sentence by selecting a correct word omitted from it. Question and answer pairs are a further example of controlling vocabulary in context.

Another point of view is taken into vocabulary testing when the interest is in the learners' capability of producing a word. The learners write or say the needed foreign language word after encountering a mother-tongue equivalent, a foreign language synonym or definition, or seeing a picture representing the word (Nation 1990:79). Again, Valette (1977:223-231) examines the production tests by dividing them into picture tests, and tests checking words in and out of context. Picture tests include producing the names of certain parts of the picture, answering short questions, completing sentences, or producing short sentences according to the pictures. Tests concerning vocabulary out of context can be made of parts checking the knowledge of synonyms and antonyms, related word forms, mother-tongue equivalents, or cognates. Vocabulary in context can be tested by asking the learners to use synonyms and antonyms in context, complete a sentence with the needed word, give a paraphrase, or produce a mother-tongue translation for a word in context or for a whole sentence.

Some criticism towards vocabulary testing is represented by Hughes (1989:141-150). He argues that despite the importance of vocabulary knowledge to the development and demonstration of linguistic skills vocabulary may not need to be tested separately. Since it is language skills that are usually of interest, it is these that should be tested directly and not the abilities that underlie them. Any skill contends more than the sum of its parts; therefore, it cannot be concluded that if a learner knows

the vocabulary and grammar, he also knows the language. However, vocabulary testing need not to be rejected altogether. Tests that measure the extent of vocabulary learning can also encourage it and show what kind of development has taken place.

The kinds of tests that are currently used when examining vocabulary include checklist, multiple-choice, or word-definition matching tests (Read 1993:355-356). Cloze tests, that is, tests where learners supply a missing word in a blank, or tests that involve composing a sentence containing the needed word are also common but they require the use of productive skills. Generally vocabulary tests focus more on how many words are known to the learners rather than examining how well particular words are known (Read 1993:357). In addition, testing vocabulary in context is preferred to testing it in isolation because the learners can understand the words as they occur with other words rather than just as independent items.

The present study concentrates on examining vocabulary that is produced either in isolation or in some kind of context. The selection of test material is more thoroughly described below.

## 4 THE PRESENT STUDY

### 4.1 Background

The present study examines the English vocabulary of 23 third and fourth grade pupils of a Finnish comprehensive school. The vocabulary is collected from five different exams given to the pupils in the years 1993-1995. Two of the exams are from the third grade from the school year



1993-1994, and three exams are from the same pupils in the fourth grade from 1994-1995. The pupils were of the age of 9-10 and 10-11, respectively. The exams studied are part of the pupils' normal school life and not made up for this study.

The vocabulary of each pupil has been collected from various kinds of tests in the exams. The tests include fill-in tests, translations of either single words or whole sentences, and production of pieces of the pupils' own texts based either on illustrated or verbal directions or written completely on their own. All the tests examined have to do with active production; listening tests and those demanding passive recognition are excluded from the investigation.

The words known by the pupils have been counted very gently. Mistakes in grammar or spelling have not affected the way the words have been examined if the words have still been recognizable by pronunciation, for example, *hedeig* = *headache* and *nonber* = *number*. Furthermore, *gau* is accepted as a *cow*, but *cirken* as a *chicken* is more questionable, and *sadke* as some sort of an animal is not accepted at all. The spelling mistakes have not been considered to cause a problem since the pupils have just began to learn a new language which has a different kind of spelling system from the mother tongue. However, the words must have been used correctly in an appropriate context in order to have been accepted to be part of the pupils' vocabulary. It has been concluded that although the learners may have known how to spell a word correctly but have used the word in an inappropriate context, they therefore have not known what the word means or refers to.

The names of the pupils are substituted by letters which are given to them in the alphabetical order according to their names. Examples of different tests are given when the students' performance in the exams is analyzed.

In the examples the students' answers are printed in bold type and the unacceptable answers are marked with a star (\*).

#### 4.2 Description of the exams

The first exam in the third grade, called exam 1/3, consists of seven parts, of which the first three are listening tests. The maximum scores from the tests are 6, 6 and 8, respectively. Exercise number 4 is a fill-in test, the maximum scores of which are 4. Test number 5 asks the pupils to tell about themselves in complete sentences. The maximum scores are 8. Test number 6 has to do with the recognition of equivalent Finnish and English words. The maximum scores are 8. The last test in the exam is an extra one. There are no maximum scores of this test but in practice the highest scores given are 2. The maximum scores for the whole exam 1/3 are 40. In this study the focus is on tests number 4 and 5 as well as on the extra test due to their productive nature.

In test number 4 of exam 1/3 the pupils are expected to complete the sentences with their name, age, place of living and address. However, the name and address are naturally written in the same way as in Finnish, and only the age and the name of the country, that is, *Finland* in the case of the place of living are in English. Therefore, this test can be considered only partially a practice of production and partially a practice of understanding. The test is shown in example (1):

(1): 4. Kerro itsestäsi englanniksi. Täydennä lauseet.  
 My name is \_\_\_\_\_  
 I am \_\_\_\_ years old  
 I live in \_\_\_\_\_  
 My address is \_\_\_\_\_

It can be said that test number 5 requires the pupils to continue the

previous test in the sense that they are supposed to write more about themselves. There are some verbal examples given; for instance, what the pupils play, how many sisters or brothers they have, what their favourite colours are, who their best friends are, and what they like or do not like. The pupils are asked to mention four things and to write the answers in complete sentences. Example (2) describes the test:

(2): 5. Kerro lisää itsestäsi englanniksi. Kirjoita kokonaisia lauseita. Kerro, mitä pelaat tai soitat, montako siskoa tai veljeä sinulla on, mikä on lempivärisi, kuka on paras kaverisi, mistä pidät tai mistä et pidä jne. (Mainitse ainakin neljä asiaa.)

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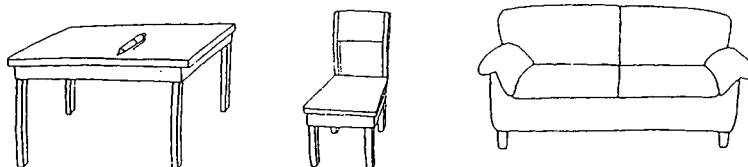


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In the extra test the pupils are given one drawing and an example of a sentence describing the drawing. They are asked to add to the two other drawings the things they want to and write at least two sentences about the drawings. Example (3) illustrates the test:



(3): Lisätehtävä. Piirrä kuvaan esineitä tai eläimiä ja kirjoita sitten englanniksi, missä ne ovat.

The pen is on the table.

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The second exam in the third grade, called exam 2/3, has altogether ten tests with two extra ones. Tests number 1 and 2 are listening tests, number 3 deals with the recognition of correct English and Finnish words. The maximum scores for the first three tests are 10, 8 and 8, respectively.

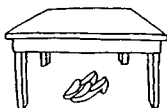
Test number 4 is a sort of fill-in test with 8 as maximum scores. The first extra test has to do with word lists but no scores have been given for this test. The fifth test is again a listening test of which the maximum scores are 10. In test number 6 the pupils are supposed to tell about themselves using complete sentences. The maximum scores are 6. In the seventh test of this exam the correct Finnish and English sentences should be recognized and connected. The maximum scores are 10. Test number 8 as well as the second extra test deal with translation. The maximum scores of test number 8 are 10 but there are no maximum scores of the second extra test though the highest scores given are 2. The total maximum scores of exam 2/3 are 70. From this exam tests number 4, 6, and 8 and the two extra tests have been taken under examination.

In test number 4 of exam 2/3 there are three pictures given and the beginnings of three sentences describing the pictures on the basis of which the pupils should have completed the sentences with more than one word. The pupils may draw the fourth picture themselves and write down a sentence about it. Example (4) shows the directions to test number 4:

(4): 4. Kirjoita englanniksi, missä esineet ovat.



1. The cat is \_\_\_\_\_



2. The shoes are \_\_\_\_\_



3. The book is \_\_\_\_\_

Piirrä itse samantapainen kuva ja kerro siitä englanniksi.

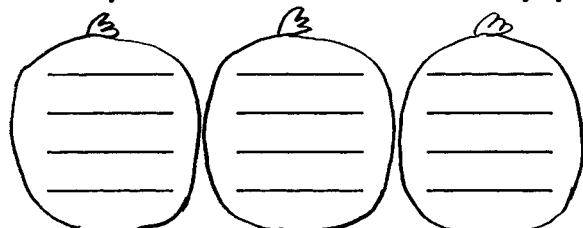


4. \_\_\_\_\_

In the first extra test the pupils are asked to list words referring to colours, animals, and food and drinks. There is space for four words in each group. The test is illustrated by example (5):

(5): Lisätehtävä. Kirjoita sanapusseihin sanoja englanniksi.

värejä:                      eläimiä:                      ruokia ja juomia:



Test number 6 in exam 2/3 is much the same as test number 5 in exam 1/3; they both ask the pupils to tell about themselves with complete sentences. The pupils should now have written six sentences and the verbal examples given are the name, age, place of living, how many sisters or brothers the pupils have, and what they like or do not like. The directions to the test are shown in example (6):

(6): 6. Kirjoita nyt sinäkin itsestäsi Alicelle englanniksi! Voit kertoa ainakin seuraavista asioista: oma nimesi, ikäsi, missä asut, montako siskoa tai veljeä sinulla on, mistä pidät, mistä et pidä. Mainitse ainakin 6 asiakohtaa. Kirjoita kokonaisin lausein.

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In test number 8 there are four interrogative sentences to be translated from Finnish into English. The pupils should write the fifth sentence on their own. Example (7) describes the test:

(7): 8. Luokallesi on tullut ulkomaalainen oppilas. Haluat tietää hänestä joitakin asioita. Miten kysyt niitä englanniksi? Kirjoita kysymys vihjeen mukaan viivalle.

1. Mikä sinun nimesi on? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Pidätkö Suomesta? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Onko sinulla kissaa tai koiraa? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Mikä on puhelinnumerosi? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Mitä vielä kysyisit vieraalta? Keksi oma kysymys ja kirjoita.  
\_\_\_\_\_

The second extra test is the last test of the exam. This is a translation test as well even though a little different; there are eight English words of which the pupils should draw a picture, not translate verbally. The test is illustrated by example (8):

(8): Lisätehtävä. Piirrä kuvat seuraavista sanoista.

a snake	an ice cream	a king	a ladder
a house	a rabbit	a pig	a ring

The first exam in the fourth grade, called exam 1/4, is made of seven different tests. The first test is a listening test with 8 maximum scores but the second one is a fill-in test which includes one sentence to be produced by the pupils on their own. The maximum scores are 10 and 1 score from the own production. Test number 3 deals with the connection of correct Finnish and English sentences. The maximum scores are 8. In test number 4 the pupils are asked to answer five questions on the basis of a picture beside the questions. The maximum scores are 10. Test number 5 is based on different illustrations and the maximum scores are 8. Test number 6 deals with word lists with 5 as maximum scores. The extra test also includes the listing of various words. No maximum scores

are given of this test but the highest scores are 3. The maximum scores of exam 1/4 are 50. Tests number 2, 4, 5, and 6 and the extra test are investigated from this exam.

In test number 2 of exam 1/4 there are ten empty spaces which the pupils could fill in with either one word or by completing the sentence with a longer structure. Furthermore, the pupils have a chance to write a sentence of their own related to the text in the test. Example (9) shows the test:

(9): 2. Täydennä kertomus. Lisää lauseisiin sopivat sanat.

This is Kate Pilkington. She is \_\_\_\_ years old.

She has got \_\_\_\_ hair and \_\_\_\_ eyes.

She has got a brother and two \_\_\_\_\_.

Her mother is \_\_\_\_\_.

Her father is \_\_\_\_\_.

She likes \_\_\_\_\_.

She doesn't like \_\_\_\_\_.

She collects \_\_\_\_\_.

Now she is wearing \_\_\_\_\_.

Keksitkö vielä jotain kerrottavaa Katesta?

\_\_\_\_\_



In test number 4 the pupils are given a picture with five questions of it. The pupils are expected to answer the questions if not with whole sentences at least with more than one word. Example (10) describes the test:

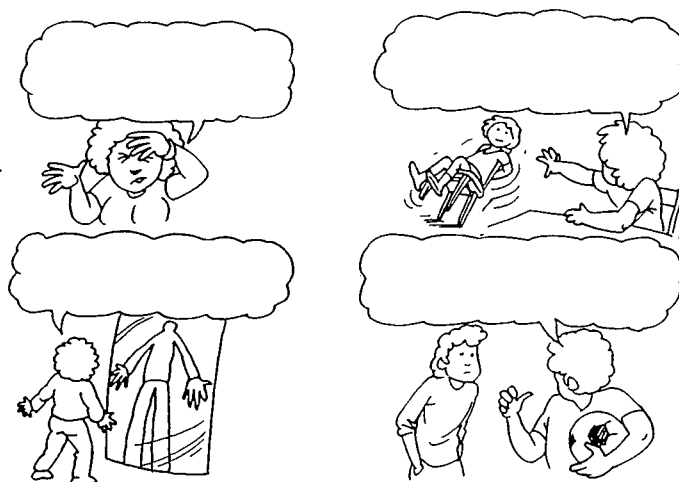
(10): 4. Katso kuvaa ja vastaa kysymyksiin englanniksi.

1. Where is Ken? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What time is it? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What's Ken doing? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What's he wearing? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Where is Nobody? \_\_\_\_\_



Test number 5 consists of four different pictures with a balloon of one person in each picture and the pupils should fill the balloons with a line suitable to the picture in question. The test is illustrated by example (11):

(11): 5. Kirjoita puhekuplat englanniksi.



In test number 6 the pupils are inquired five names of different parts of the body in the form of a word list. Example (12) shows the test:

(12): 6. Mitä ruumiinosien nimiä muistat englanniksi? Kirjoita viisi sanaa.

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The last test of the exam is an extra one in which the names of clothes, animals, jobs, or food should be listed. Example (13) describes the instructions to the test:

(13): Vapaaehtoinen lisätehtävä. Kirjoita kääntöpuolelle tai erilliselle paperille sanaryhmiä englanniksi, esimerkiksi vaatteiden, eläinten, ammattien tai ruokien nimiä. Voit kirjoittaa otsikot joko englanniksi: Clothes, Animals, Jobs, Food tai suomeksi.

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The second exam in the fourth grade, called exam 2/4, has six tests and an additional extra test. The first one is a listening test from which the maximum points are 6. Test number 2 is divided into two parts; in the first part correct question and answer pairs are to be found and in the second part the pupils should make their own questions and answers. The maximum points are 8 and 4, respectively. Test number 3 inquires the learners the opposites of certain adjectives and has 8 as maximum points. Test number 4 checks the pupils' knowledge of time whereas the fifth test deals with translation. The maximum points of each test are 6. The next test, number 6, includes a fill-in part and a space for the pupils to write something by themselves. The maximum points are 8 from the first part and 4 from the second. The extra test in this exam requires the learners to produce a dialogue. There are no maximum points of this test but the highest points given to any pupil are 3. The total points of exam 2/4 can reach 50. The second part of test number 2 and tests number 3, 4, 5, and 6, and the extra test are more closely looked at of this exam.

The second part of test number 2 of exam 2/4 has the same topic as the first part of the test. As the first part included connecting the correct question and answer pairs, the second part continues with questions and answers but now the learners should write the lines by themselves. The test is shown in example (14):

(14): 2. Mitä muuta Wam kyseli? Kirjoita Wamin kysymyksiä ja Leenan vastauksia.

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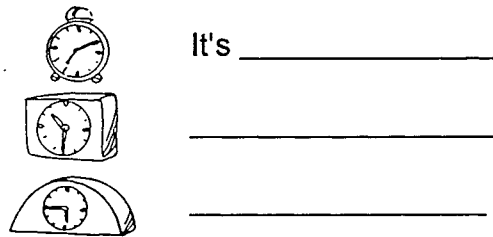
In test number 3 the sentences should be filled in with the opposites of the underlined adjectives. In one case there is an adverb to be found. Example (15) describes the test:

(15): 3. Kirjoita alleviivattujen sanojen vastakohtat.  
(Esim. iso - pieni)

1. Maria has a big sister and Fred has a \_\_\_\_\_ sister.
2. Ken is upstairs but Jeff is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Wendy is sad but Judy is \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Fred has short hair but Maria's hair is \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Mr Lewis is old but Mrs Lewis is very \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Jeff has new jeans but Fred's jeans are \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Mr Williams is thin but Mr Brown is \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The door is shut but the window is \_\_\_\_\_.

Test number 4 deals with time. There are pictures of three clocks each showing a different time and the pupils are expected to write the correct time in the form of a sentence. Example (16) illustrates the test:

(16): 4. Kirjoita kellonaika englanniksi.



The fifth test consists of three sentences that are to be translated from Finnish into English. Example (17) shows the test:

(17): 5. Kirjoita englanniksi.

1. Anteeksi. Missä on elokuvateatteri? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Pidä kiirettä. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Älä unohda rahojasi. \_\_\_\_\_

In test number 6 there is a story of a monkey with eight empty spaces that should be filled with either a single word or a longer structure. There is an additional space for the pupils to write a sentence or more of their own. The test is shown in example (18):

(18): 6. Täydennä kertomus sirkusapina Wonderista.

Wonder is \_\_\_\_ years old.

He is from \_\_\_\_\_.

He can \_\_\_\_\_.

He can't \_\_\_\_\_.

He likes \_\_\_\_\_.

He doesn't like \_\_\_\_\_.

Wonder can speak \_\_\_\_\_.

Wonder is very \_\_\_\_\_.



Kirjoita lisää kuvan perusteella.

\_\_\_\_\_

The instructions of the extra test tell the pupils to make up a dialogue between two persons. The topic is to be found by the pupils themselves.

Example (19) describes the test:

(19): Lisätehtävä. Judy käytti taikanauhaa ja pääsi Australiaan.

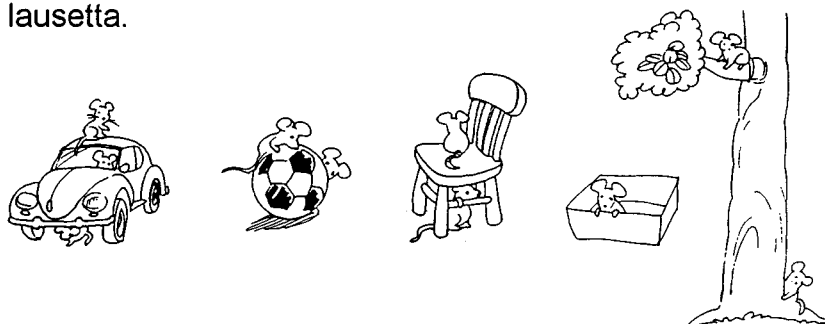
Kenet hän tapasi siellä ja mitä he puhelivat? Kirjoita vuoropuhelu englanniksi kääntöpuolelle tai erilliselle paperille.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

The third exam in the fourth grade, called exam 3/4, is the last one investigated in this study. The exam is made of five tests of which the first one is about connecting the given words with the correct pictures. The maximum scores are 8. The second test is a listening test with 10 maximum scores. The third test is based on illustrated directions and has 10 as maximum scores. Test number 4 gives verbal directions for writing some sentences in English. The maximum scores are 12. The fifth test is again based on illustrations of which the pupils should write either complete sentences or single words. Depending on the pupils' answers the maximum scores of the test are 10 for the sentences or 5 for the single words. The maximum scores of the whole exam 3/4 are 50. Of this exam the last three tests, number 3, 4 and 5 are examined.

In test number 3 of exam 3/4 there are five pictures of which the pupils are supposed to write five sentences. However, there is a possibility of as many as ten different sentences. Even though this test is mostly of prepositions, the vocabulary needed may vary from one sentence to another depending on which picture the pupils write about, and therefore the test is not considered totally a practice of grammar but of vocabulary as well. Example (20) illustrates the test:

(20): 3. Missä kaikkialla hiiriä on? Kirjoita englanniksi viisi lausetta.



There are lots of mice in the picture. Where are they?

One is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

In test number 4 there are verbal instructions of five sentences to be written and a possibility for the pupils to make up a question of their own. Example (21) shows the test:

(21): 4. Ulkomaanmatkalla tapaavat ikäisesi nuoren. Juttelette englanniksi.

Kirjoita omat puheenvuorosi.

1. Kysy, osaako toinen puhua englantia. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Tutustuttuasi ehdota hänelle ravintolaan menoa.

3. Kysy tarjoilijalta, paljonko hampurilainen maksaa.

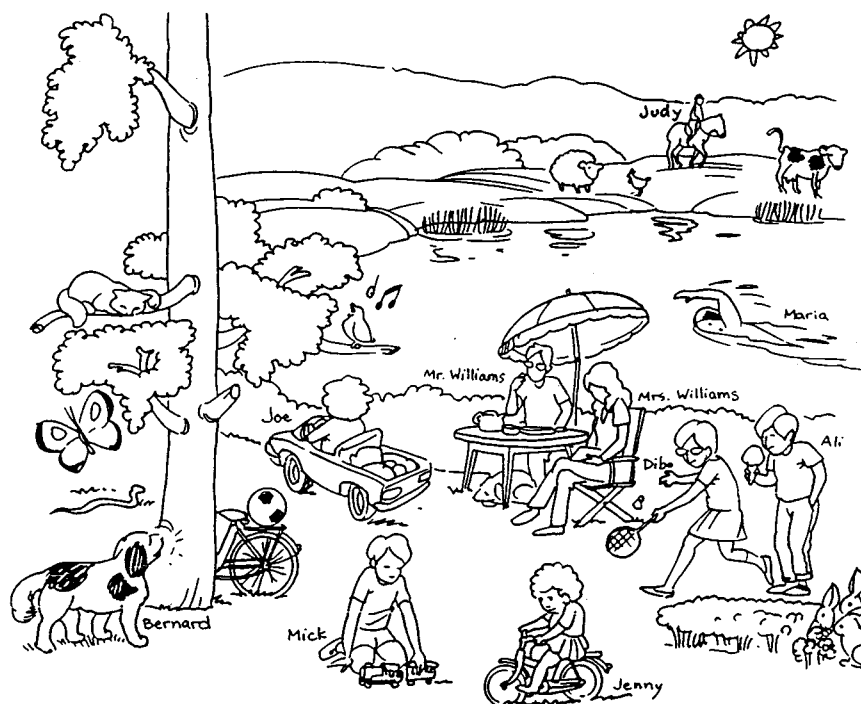
4. Tilaa kaksi hampurilaista ja kaksi maitoa. \_\_\_\_\_

5. On kuuma. Pyydä lupaa saada aukaista ikkuna.

6. Mitä muuta haluaisit kysyä toveriltasi tai ehdottaa hänelle?

\_\_\_\_\_

The fifth test has a large picture with various things happening in it. The pupils should write at least five sentences describing the picture or, if they are not willing to write whole sentences, they can use single words but get only half of the maximum points. The test is described by example (22):



(22): 5. Kuvassa näet englantilaisia lomavietossa. Kerro kuvasta englanniksi. Kirjoita vähintään viisi lausetta. Jos kirjoitat yksittäisiä sanoja, saat puolet maksimipistemäärästä.

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#### 4.3 Evaluation of the tests

Due to the fact that the tests on which the present study is based are originally taken from the achievement tests given to the pupils as a part of their normal school life, the tests are not planned to measure the learners'

knowledge of vocabulary only but their knowledge of grammar and other language skills, too. This is why the tests do not measure the size of the pupils' vocabulary in the way that is perhaps traditionally understood by vocabulary testing. There are no checklist, multiple-choice, or word-definition matching tests that Nation (1990:79-82) and Read (1993:355-356) note to be currently used in the examination of vocabulary.

The tests under examination in the present study deal with various fields. Some of the tests can be said to concentrate on checking the learners' knowledge of grammar of, for example, the use of a certain preposition in a certain context or the correct way of making questions. In some tests it is necessary to know how to construct a sentence. The ability to understand word formation does not actually play any role in the beginners' level. On the whole, it can be said that most of the tests emphasize the knowledge of vocabulary to some extent, at least. Some comparison of the structure of the exams can be made to the arguments expressed by Valette (1977:223-231). She divided the production tests to three main groups; tests checking vocabulary with the help of pictures, tests checking vocabulary out of context, and tests checking vocabulary in context. The representatives of all the three groups can be found in the five exams investigated in this study. Since the exams are designed for young learners beginning to study a new language they contain rather many tests using illustrations as a way of giving directions.

When thinking primarily about vocabulary testing, these kinds of tests that were examined in this study may not be the best or most suitable way of investigating learners' vocabulary or the size of it. However, although there may be some other ways that are more effective in finding out how many words the learners know, these tests can give a fairly good picture of the quality of their vocabulary knowledge. The tests can show how well

the learners know the words and in what kind of situations they can use them. The tests offer another point of view to the testing of vocabulary. Because the tests are not made specifically for vocabulary testing they do not directly show the learners' vocabulary skills but they provide different kind of information by giving a broader picture of the learners' knowledge of words and their abilities of using the words in several contexts.

#### 4.4 Analysis and results

The vocabulary of the 23 pupils was examined both separately in the third and the fourth grades and summed up after two years' study of English. In the following the pupils' vocabulary knowledge is described by various graphics. In the figures the pupils are arranged according to the size of vocabulary used after the two years' study of the foreign language. Therefore the lines describing the situations in the third and the fourth grades do not always go evenly from the best pupil to the weakest. As was said earlier, the present study concentrated only on productive vocabulary wherefore the number of words known by the pupils may seem relatively low. But in spite of this, remarkable differences may sometimes be found between the pupils. Figure 3 on the next page illustrates the size of each pupil's vocabulary at the three points of time:

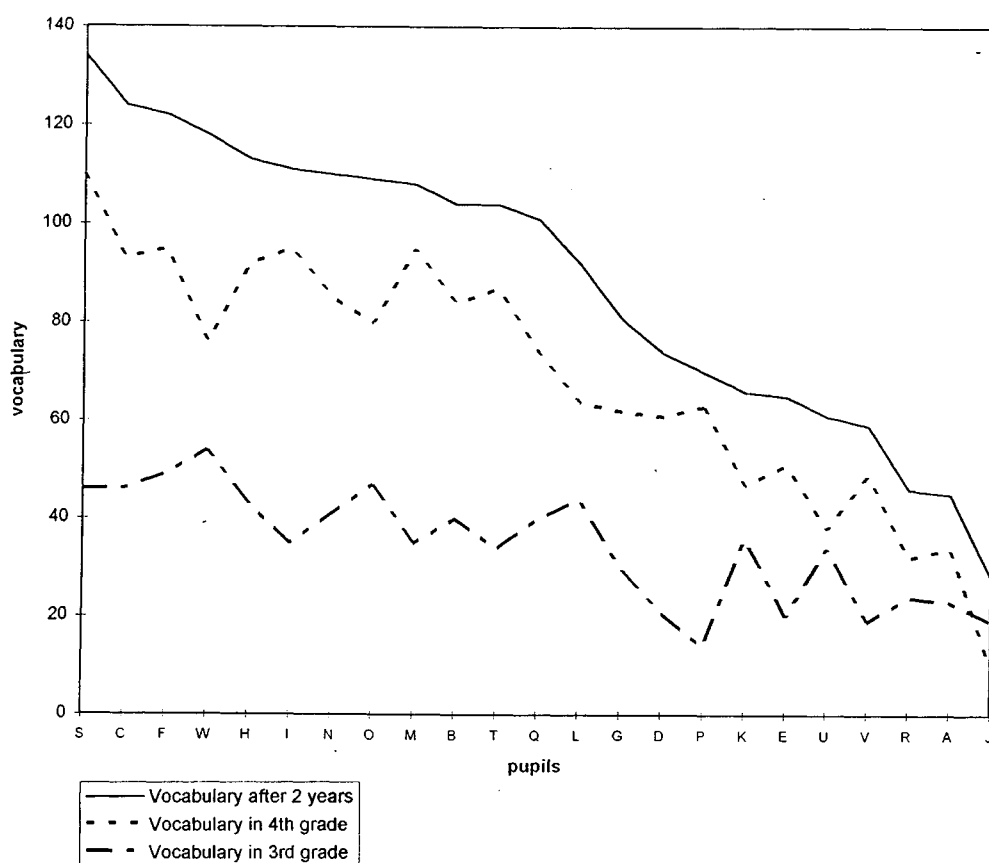


Figure 3. The amount of words used by the pupils.

As can be seen in Figure 3 there are obvious differences in the pupils' vocabulary knowledge already after one year of learning English. The highest number of words, 54, is produced by pupil W whereas the lowest amount, 14, is by pupil P. Most pupils used, however, 30-45 words, the average amount of words being 34.5. The line describing the growth of the vocabulary in the fourth grade shows that the differences between the pupils have become more noticeable. The highest amount of words is now 110 (pupil S) while the lowest is only 10 (pupil J). The average is 68.5 words but most of the pupils can now be placed to as large an area as between 60-95 words. Some interesting comparisons can also be made between the third and the fourth grades. Whereas pupil W had the largest vocabulary in the third grade his vocabulary in the fourth grade is closer to the average. The same thing has happened to pupils O, B, L, K and U;



their vocabulary has not grown in the second year in quite the same way as in the first year. The opposite situation is found by pupils S, I, M, T, G, D, P, E and V. The vocabulary of these pupils has grown much larger than might have been expected after the third grade. The only pupil whose vocabulary size has not grown from the third grade to the fourth grade is pupil J. He knew 19 words in the first year but could produce only 10 in the second year. Most of the words in the fourth grade were new to him and only one came up already in the exams in the previous grade. This may, however, raise some questions about the total amount of his vocabulary knowledge described by the highest line in Figure 3. It cannot be clearly known if pupil J knew all the 28 different words after the two years' study but for some reason did not use the words known by him in the third grade in the exams in the fourth grade, or if he had forgotten at least some words from the third grade and was therefore not able to use them in tests where it would have been possible to use them and they would have suited the context.

The highest line in Figure 3 shows how many different words the pupils knew after studying English for two years. None of the words is counted more than once wherefore the amount of words known in the third and the fourth grades cannot simply be summed up. The largest vocabulary, 134, is possessed by pupil S and the smallest, 28, by pupil J. Otherwise the line can be divided into two fairly even sections; pupils from C to Q possess a vocabulary of 124-101 words whereas pupils from L to V have a vocabulary of 92-59 words. Pupils R and A form a group of their own having a vocabulary of 46 and 45 words. It can be concluded from Figure 3 that even though the differences in vocabulary knowledge between the pupils were not particularly huge after one year's study of English, the amount of words known by them after studying the language one more year differed remarkably from each other. However, it must be remembered that there was one more exam in the fourth grade than in the

third which may to some extent result in bigger differences in the amount of vocabulary in the second year examined.

Another way of looking at the pupils' vocabulary knowledge is to compare the words known by them to the scores given to them from the various tests in the exams. Figure 4 shows the relationship between the vocabulary and the scores from the tests from which the vocabulary has been collected in the third grade:

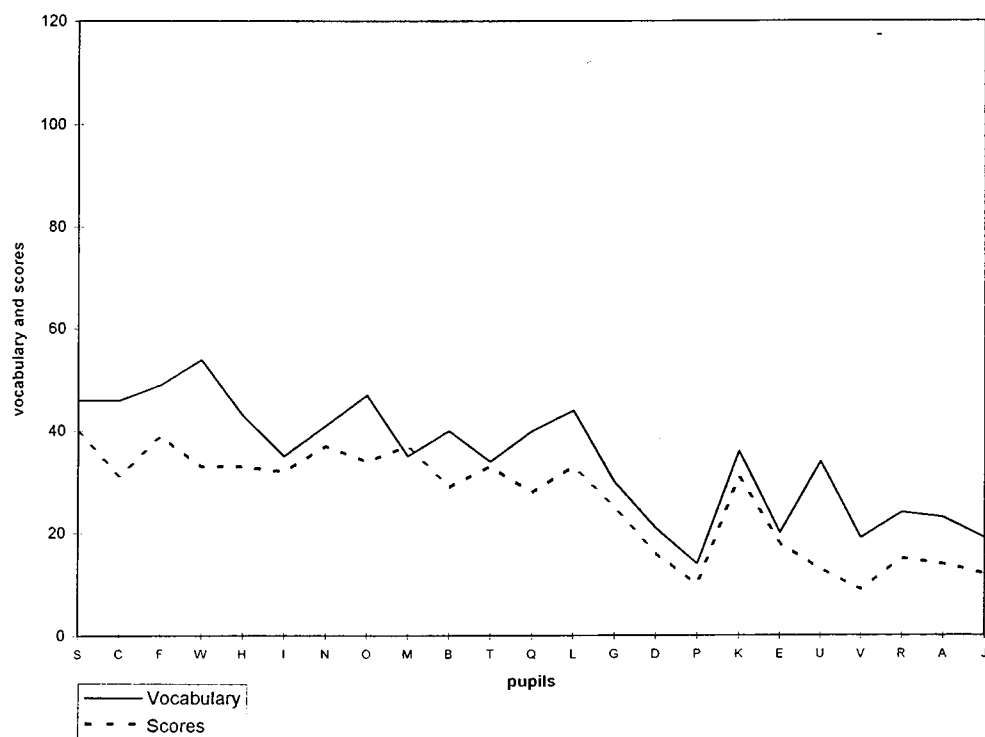


Figure 4. The pupils' vocabulary and scores in the third grade.

It can be noted from Figure 4 that for approximately half of the pupils, that is, pupils S, F, I, N, T, L, G, D, P, K, E, V, R, A and J the scores correspond to their vocabulary knowledge. For some of them, namely for pupils F, L, V, R, A and J the difference between the scores and the vocabulary is more obvious but not as striking as for pupils C, W, H, O, B, Q and U who got lower scores than the size of their vocabulary might indicate. The difference is greatest especially with pupils W and U, whose

scores were fairly low compared to the words familiar to them. Both the pupils produced words that are counted as part of their vocabulary in this study but otherwise they made plenty of mistakes in their sentence construction which affected their scores. They also had problems with spelling which lowered their scores but did not have much effect on the amount of words accepted to be known by them in the present study. By pupils C, H, O, B and Q the mistakes in sentence construction and spelling were also the biggest reason to get low scores from the tests. By all the pupils C, W, H, O, B, Q and U one reason for the large vocabulary in the third grade is that they produced several different words in one extra test in exam 2/3 which, however, gave them no scores because the test was not marked. Pupil M was the only exception in that she got higher scores than knew words. This can be explained by the fact that she used the same words correctly in several occasions.

As can be seen in Figure 5 the relationship between the vocabulary and the scores is less clear in the fourth grade:

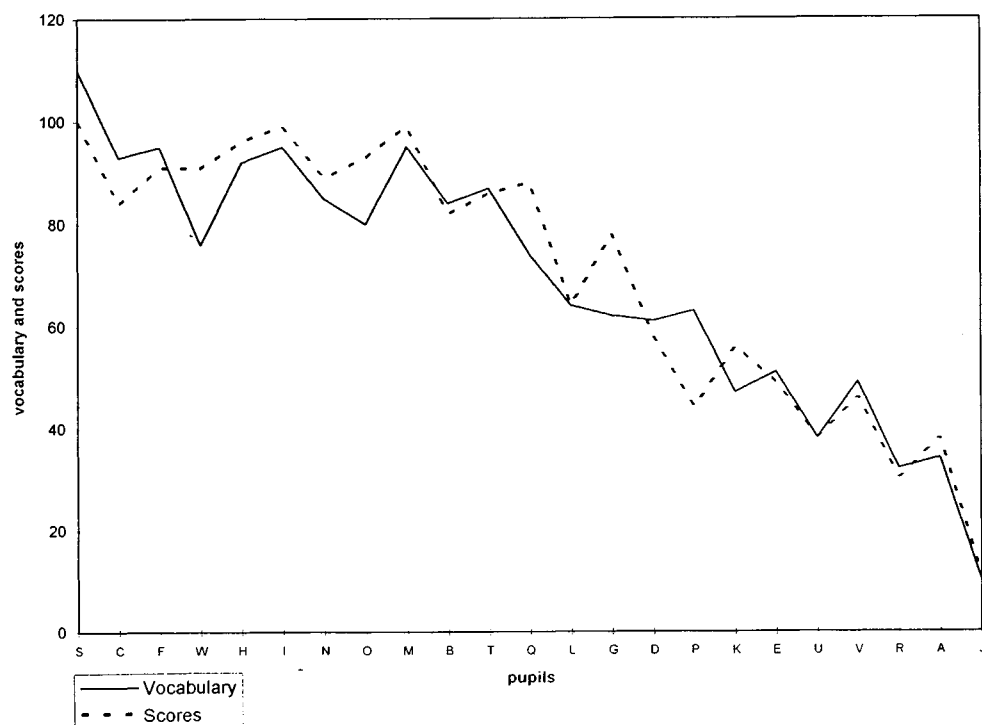


Figure 5. The pupils' vocabulary and scores in the fourth grade.

Figure 5 shows that most pupils received scores in accordance with their vocabulary. For approximately half of them, the scores were a little lower than the size of their vocabulary but for the other half the scores were higher than the amount of words known to them. There are bigger differences between the vocabulary and the scores only for pupils W, O, Q, G, P and K. Of these, pupil P was the only one who knew more words than he received scores, while the situation of all the others was quite the opposite. Pupil P made a lot of mistakes both in spelling and in sentence construction in all the three exams in the fourth grade which the teacher seems to have marked more strictly than in the previous grade. Another reason for the difference between pupil P's vocabulary and scores is that he produced several words in one extra test in exam 1/4 but although he received the maximum scores from the test they were not very high. By pupils W, O and Q it is notable that the relationship of the size of their vocabulary and the scores in the fourth grade is quite different from that in the third grade. Whereas they knew fairly many words but got somewhat low scores in the third grade, the amount of their scores now exceeded the amount of words familiar to them. By pupil W this can be explained by the fact that he made considerably fewer mistakes both in spelling and in sentence construction and got therefore higher scores. By pupil O the fewer spelling mistakes in the fourth grade is one possible reason for the higher scores. In addition, pupil Q made many mistakes in spelling and sentence construction in the third grade which lowered her scores but she received high scores with fewer words in the fourth grade. One explanation is that she produced the required minimum amount of words in some tests where other pupils produced more extra words and that she got high scores even though not always the maximum. Also, some of the words pupil Q used came up more than once in the tests but were not counted every time. Pupils G and K repeated to some extent the same words from test to test in the exams in the fourth grade but because they knew how to use the words correctly they got high scores. Furthermore,

their scores were high in tests which controlled mostly the use of prepositions and other grammatical words that were not counted to the vocabulary in this study.

Finally, Figure 6 illustrates the relationship of the total vocabulary and the sum of the scores received from the tests in the two years examined:

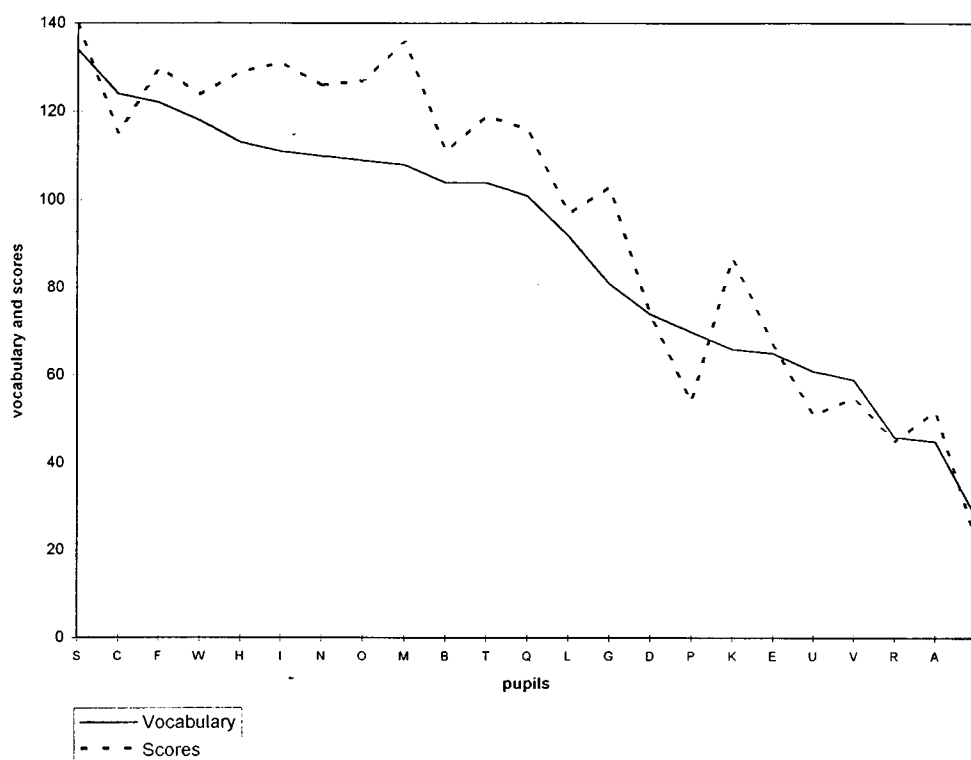


Figure 6. The pupils' vocabulary and scores after two years.

As is shown by Figure 6 most of the pupils got more scores from the various tests than they knew different words but this was not always the case. The scores for pupils C, P, U, V, R and J did not exceed the size of their vocabulary. The difference is largest for pupil P due to his low scores from the tests in the fourth grade. Pupils C, U, V, R and J suffer obviously from the fairly low scores they received in the third grade. However, there are notable differences to the opposite direction for pupils H, I, N, O, M, T, Q, G and K. These pupils received much higher scores than the amount of

words familiar to them might indicate. For example, the scores of pupil M were the second highest of all the pupils but the size of her vocabulary was closer to the average. In her case it could be concluded that she simply managed with fewer words in several different situations. Her performance was also affected by the fact that in the third grade she got very high scores compared to the size of her vocabulary. By pupils H, I, N, O, T, Q, G and K it can be said that their performance was especially affected by the way the words were counted. The differences between their scores and vocabulary were not so big either in the third or in the fourth grade if the grades are examined separately but because the words in Figure 6 were counted only once in all the exams the scores the pupils received seem remarkably higher than the size of their vocabulary. For example, the scores for pupil T were approximately the same as his vocabulary both in the third and the fourth grades but when the amount of different words used by him are summed up, it can be noted that the scores exceed the size of his vocabulary.

However, the differences between the pupils did not exist only in the amount of words known by them but also in the quality of words familiar to them. The language used by pupils S, B, C, F, H, I, M, N, O, Q, T and W, for example, was more descriptive and colourful than that used by other learners in the group of examinees in this study because these pupils utilized various nouns, verbs and adjectives in several occasions and did not content themselves to the basic words known by most of the learners. Nouns that occurred rather rarely in the tests were used by these pupils and included, for example, *badminton, basket, blouse, computer, duck, frog, jungle, ladder, library, mustard, pear, plaster, reporter, salad, shoulder, and trouble*. Verbs like *bully, dance, scare, shine, visit, and wake up*, as well as adjectives like *angry, awful, difficult, horrible, light, and terrible* were also words that did not often come up in the tests but were used by the pupils possessing a fairly large vocabulary. On the contrary,

words that were frequently used by most of the learners included nouns like *bike, car, cat, dog, home, name, pig, rabbit* and *year*, verbs like *be, do, give, go, like* and *spell*, and adjectives like *good* and *old*. The area to which the vocabulary in the tests was restricted included such subjects as animals, clothes, colours, food and drinks, furniture, and parts of the body, for example. Things close to the learners' lives and environment, such as their family and hobbies, were also inquired.

The differences between the pupils' vocabularies became most apparent in tests that requested the ability to fill in the given texts with appropriate words or asked the pupils to produce texts on their own. Of course, it can be claimed that being able to construct complete and correct sentences demands some knowledge of grammar but it cannot be done without some knowledge of vocabulary, either. The tests in which most of the learners performed well were the ones asking the learners to write down single words in the form of lists. Therefore, there was a clear difference between the pupils who knew words mostly out of context and pupils who knew words in context, too. Except the weakest pupils A, J and R whose vocabularies were very restricted including only words like *bike, cat, dog, football, horse, mother, be, give, go, live, play, wait, good, and old*, for example, the learners seemed to possess such vocabularies that enabled them to manage in simple everyday situations.

If the pupils' vocabulary is more closely examined, it can be said that one of the pupils who succeeded very well in all the five exams was pupil S. In the first exam in the third grade she got the maximum scores from all the tests that had to do with production and her scores from the second exam were the highest possible as well. In all, the vocabulary of pupil S changed considerably from one test to another in exam 1/3. She hardly used the same nouns more than once, and the use of verbs and adjectives varied to some extent as well. She was very good at producing

whole sentences on the basis of both pictures and verbal instructions. She also succeeded well in the fill-in test. There were a few spelling mistakes, which however did not affect the intelligibility of her answers. Pupil S's performance in exam 2/3 did not much differ from the first exam of the third grade. Naturally, her vocabulary grew larger and more varied, and she learned new ways of expressing herself in various tests. She had some difficulties in the translations of both single words as well as whole sentences but for the most part she got the expressions correct. Furthermore, she produced several different words in lists in one of the extra tests, and also knew how to continue the incomplete sentences when given some illustrated directions. In this exam pupil S's production in the test in which she should have told about herself became more colourful and longer than her answers in the first exam. The two sentences written by the pupil completely on her own were new expressions for her.

When exam 1/4 is examined as a whole it can be said that pupil S's vocabulary covered all the tests. She knew many different words, especially nouns, that had not come up in the earlier exams in the third grade. Her knowledge of adjectives had grown as well. The amount of verbs was very limited in the tests but whenever possible pupil S used different expressions. On the whole, pupil S did well in exam 2/4. Her vocabulary had grown to include especially new adjectives, but also some nouns and verbs, and expressions of time had not appeared earlier, either. She had some problems with the new words but could always make herself understood. It is notable that she could use the names of languages in one of the tests correctly; for most pupils this seems to have caused problems since they spelled the names of languages in the same way as the names of countries.

The total vocabulary of pupil S in exam 3/4 had again grown from the



previous exams. In this exam all the production was to be presented in the form of sentences, which was well managed by pupil S. None of her sentences were incomplete but contained variable vocabulary. When all the exams are looked at it can be said that the vocabulary of pupil S was very varied. The pupil knew most of the English equivalents of the single words and was able to list several different words belonging to different groups when needed. In the fill-in tests she often gave more than one word as an answer. When her longer productions are examined it can be observed that she had hardly any problems with the sentences. The translations both in the third and the fourth grade contained few mistakes. The productions based on the illustrated or verbal directions were fairly long and colourful. She also succeeded in the texts written on her own using words that did not necessarily appear anywhere else. Her vocabulary grew evenly from one exam to another and was one of the largest in the group of pupils investigated in this study.

There were some other pupils in the group of the examinees of this study who resembled pupil S in several ways. This group of pupils possessing a vocabulary similar to that of pupil S included pupils B, C, F, H, I, M, N, O, Q, T and W. There were, of course, some differences. The other pupils similar to pupil S did not use exactly the same words in exactly the same tests but for the most part their vocabulary did not much differ from that of pupil S. Their performance in all the exams was much like pupil S's; they used, for instance, a lot more different adjectives, nouns and verbs than the rest of the learners.

Pupil P was one of the pupils who had more problems with the exams. In all, it seems that pupil P knew how to produce actively thirteen different nouns and one adjective in the two exams after the third grade and one year's study of English. Three of the nouns and the adjective came up more than once in the exams. The production of sentences was

problematic to pupil P; he could write only three sentences out of nineteen possible, and none of the three were completely correct. Pupil P's strongest point seemed to be separate words in lists or translations. His scores from the tests in the third grade were fairly low and he had left one test completely unanswered. He also used his mother tongue Finnish when he found out that he was not able to manage solely in English. Example (23) shows that he could not produce whole sentences when needed but listed two things as separate words in test 5 in exam 1/3:

(23): 5. (P) Kerro lisää itsestäsi englanniksi. Kirjoita kokonaisia lauseita. Kerro, mitä pelaat tai soitat, montako siskoa tai veljeä sinulla on, mikä on lempivärisi, kuka on paras kaverisi, mistä pidät tai mistä et pidä jne. (Mainitse ainakin neljä asiaa.)  
**1. sister 1. Bardor**  
**lempiväri red**

If pupil P's production is compared to that of pupil S in the same test, it is interesting to note how different the vocabulary of the two pupils is already in the first exam in the third grade. Example (24) illustrates pupil S's answers:

(24): 5. (S) Kerro lisää itsestäsi englanniksi. Kirjoita kokonaisia lauseita. Kerro, mitä pelaat tai soitat, montako siskoa tai veljeä sinulla on, mikä on lempivärisi, kuka on paras kaverisi, mistä pidät tai mistä et pidä jne. (Mainitse ainakin neljä asiaa.)  
**I like red blue and purple.**  
**My best frens is C.**  
**I havent Sister and Broter.**  
**I'an from Finland.**

Although example (24) shows that pupil S makes some mistakes in spelling, her sentences are nevertheless easy to comprehend. In this test pupil S wrote four sentences which was the asked minimum. All the sentences were grammatically correct and varied a lot from each other

both by structure and vocabulary. Pupil S used as many as four different nouns, three verbs and four adjectives in the sentences.

When pupil P's performance in exam 1/4 is examined, it can be said that even though his vocabulary had grown with some new words he still had problems with sentence construction. He also produced words that were mostly understandable in English but did not necessarily suit the context of the test. Example (25) illustrates his performance in test 2 in exam 1/4:

- (25): 2. (P) Täydennä kertomus. Lisää lauseisiin sopivat sanat.  
 This is Kate Pilkington. She is **ren** years old.  
 She has got **green** hair and **plack** eyes.  
 She has got a brother and two **\*take**.  
 Her mother is **plack(?)**.  
 Her father is **\*ren**.  
 She likes **\*it**.  
 She doesn't like **\*a heit**.  
 She collects \_\_\_\_\_.  
 Now she is wearing **\*gun**.  
 Keksitkö vielä jotain kerrottavaa Katesta? **Hair is red.**



As can be seen in example (25), this time pupil P's own sentence, though very short, seems fairly good. Otherwise his answers are not always acceptable. If pupil P's answers are again compared to those of pupil S, the differences between the two pupils become clearer. Pupil S filled in the sentences with words that suited to the context and when possible she almost always used more than one word. The usage of descriptive adjectives is notable in the last fill-in sentence. In this case the pupil's own production is fairly short but she uses words that are new to her as is shown in example (26):

(26): 2. (S) Täydennä kertomus. Lisää lauseisiin sopivat sanat.

This is Kate Pilkington. She is **ten** years old.

She has got **brown** hair and **blue** eyes.

She has got a brother and two **sisters**.

Her mother is **reporter**.

Her father is **policeman**.

She likes **roses, carrot, cat, horses and butterfly**.

She doesn't like **dance, snake, milk and lollipops**.

She collects **a stamps**.

Now she is wearing **blue sweater and red trousers**.

Keksitkö vielä jotain kerrottavaa Katesta? **She play piano**.



As a comparison to pupil S, who was able to produce fairly correct sentences right from the first exam in the third grade, pupil P had continuous problems with sentence construction in most of the exams. As a matter of fact, he could construct proper sentences only in the last exam in the fourth grade because the two sentences to be translated from Finnish to English in exam 2/4 were still incomplete. Otherwise his vocabulary in exam 2/4 was very poor and it seems that he had totally misunderstood one test because he had answered it in Finnish. He also made plenty spelling mistakes which made it more difficult always to understand his aims. In exam 3/4 pupil P's vocabulary had grown to some extent. Although he continued to have problems with spelling, the mistakes were not so severe as in the previous exams. In one of the tests he managed to translate the sentences from Finnish to English fairly well, and he even tried to answer the other tests of the exam with sentences as well. He still preferred single words when possible but this was the first time he voluntarily tried to build up sentences on his own.

On the basis of the five exams from the third and the fourth grades it can be concluded that pupil P's vocabulary grew with some adjectives, nouns and verbs from the third grade to the fourth but he still had problems with any other tests but those of listing single words. If pupil P's performance in the exams is compared to that of pupil S, it is notable that their

knowledge of vocabulary differs greatly from each other. Pupil P managed better with single words in lists or as translations but when he should have given the opposites to the given words or filled in the sentences with a missing word he began to have problems. In the third grade he was not able to produce sentences in any kind of tests but became better at it in the last exams in the fourth grade. Pupil S, on her part, produced both single words and whole sentences throughout the exams. Her productions were also longer and more colourful than those of pupil P and she rarely repeated the same words in one test. It can be said that her knowledge of vocabulary covered a larger area than the knowledge of pupil P.

Other pupils whose language behaviour resembled the behaviour of pupil P to a certain extent include pupils L, G, D, K, E, U and V. Pupils L, G, K and U differed from pupil P in the sense that their ability to form sentences was slightly better in the third grade, and in some cases they were able to complete the fill-in tests better than pupil P in the fourth grade but otherwise they had same kind of problems with vocabulary as pupil P. Pupils R, A and J were the ones who had plenty of difficulties in all the exams. Their vocabulary knowledge restricted itself to very few words which they used over and over again mostly as single words and not in the form of sentences. However, they did not try to offer the same words as solutions to every test but left many tests unanswered. This may imply that they knew the meaning of some words at least. Pupil J was the only pupil who did not make any development from the third grade to the fourth but the size of his vocabulary actually became smaller.

Because the present study concentrated more on what kind of words the pupils had learned and how many words they knew instead of how they had learned the words much attention was not paid to the methods of teaching and learning the words. However, some conclusions could be drawn on the basis of the exams. There were many tests in the exams that

utilized pictures as a way of giving instructions of how to answer the tests. This may imply that pictures, or other means of non-verbal presentation, played an important role in the process of teaching and learning the new words for the group of examinees in this study. Also, some exercise in translation must have occurred in the language lessons since there were some tests checking this ability either in the form of single words or complete sentences. In addition to this way of using verbal presentation in the conveyance of the meaning of new words, another way has probably been that of using antonymy. The means of antonymy may not have been much used in the lessons since there was only one test of this area in the exams. Moreover, the pupils have most likely learned isolated words in lists; at least the textbooks they used in the English language lessons presented the new words in the form of lists giving both the English and Finnish equivalents.

Finally, it seems that the use of pictures, for example, has helped the weaker pupils to learn some words better. Their performance in tests including illustrated instructions is somewhat better than in tests giving mere verbal directions. Because it is easier for the learners in this stage to connect a certain word to a certain object, most of the words taught to the learners appear to concern concrete objects rather than abstract things.

Because the primary stress in teaching foreign languages in Finnish schools is no longer on grammar, the knowledge of it does not play such an important role in the beginners' level than it may have played earlier. The ability to recognize and produce words has gained more attention. The importance of vocabulary knowledge becomes obvious when the tests under examination in this study are looked at. With basic knowledge of grammar and a larger knowledge of vocabulary the learners are able to express various things, construct short sentences, and make themselves understood. Although the directions to the tests are in the pupils' mother

tongue it is apparent that the pupils can understand what, for example, the tests concern that ask them to complete certain sentences or fill in the missing words in the foreign language. Most learners are, at least in some cases, able to produce some words correctly in certain contexts.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above figures and the analysis of the pupils' vocabulary knowledge it can be concluded that there can be great differences in the amount of words known by the learners of a new language. The differences do not take much time to develop, as they can become obvious already after one year of studying the language. Some learners can continue to have further difficulties with vocabulary whereas other learners may show essential development in their language behaviour. All the learners do not know the same words because some of them can use only the basic words and some are able to give more colourful descriptions in various kind of tests. The learners' vocabulary knowledge can also be divided into different kinds of knowledge. For some learners knowing a word means that they can produce the word separately out of context only, other learners are able to produce single words in a given context, and still other learners know how to form whole sentences on their own. The exams on the basis of which the present study was carried out included to some extent tests which checked vocabulary out of context but mostly tests with vocabulary in context. It was in the latter kind of tests that the differences between the pupils became clearer and more obvious.

Because the learning of unfamiliar foreign language words can be very different between the learners of the language, it sets great demands to

the teacher. The role of the teacher in the learning process and the different methods he uses is emphasized especially by the weaker pupils who may need more help in their studies.

The method of using achievement tests as a basis of counting the size of vocabulary as is done in the present study may not be the most effective way to check the learners' vocabulary knowledge. In addition, because this study concentrated on the productive vocabulary many words known to the learners were not taken into account. This causes the problem that the learners' vocabulary seems to be relatively small wherefore the results may not be comparable to studies which examine the receptive vocabulary as well. Another problem in investigating the vocabulary on the basis of achievement tests is that the scores given to the learners in the tests and the size of their vocabulary do not necessarily correspond. The scores may be affected not only by the words familiar to the learners but in some tests also by the learners ability to construct sentences. Therefore the scores and the vocabulary cannot be compared to tests that measure solely the size of vocabulary. However, the advantage of examining vocabulary from achievement tests is that this kind of testing can give more information of what kind of knowledge the learners have of words. The tests also show at what level the learners are and what the weaker points in their vocabulary knowledge are that need more attention in the future.

Naturally, it would be interesting to find out how the vocabulary knowledge of the pupils examined in the present study has changed in the later grades. It could be worth studying whether the differences between the learners have remained the same, or whether they have grown bigger or smaller. The questions of what the vocabulary knowledge the learners possess is like, and whether their vocabulary has developed in any way would also need an answer.



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