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Abstract

This paper outlines an analytical study whose purpose is to examine and critique the appropriateness of lexical choice in current mass market language textbooks for Japanese students. This study proceeds from the author's extensive use of textbooks which contained a large amount of low frequency vocabulary of questionable usefulness. This research project examined the tokens of the *Cover to Cover* textbook series, determining what percentage fell into the high frequency vocabulary realm, what words occurred as loan words in Japanese, and what words could be considered to be known to a majority of incoming university freshmen in Japan.

The results proved that the writer's intuition and experience were sufficient in that a large majority of tokens were high frequency items, but many low frequency vocabulary, loan words, and known words served as keywords, thus diminishing their educational value. Non-high frequency items were then addressed through various treatments to improve upon the overall validity of the texts.

Keywords: token, low frequency vocabulary, high frequency vocabulary, loanwords, known words

INTRODUCTION

Teachers have a wide variety of materials to choose from when deciding which textbook they will use in an ESL course. There is also a wide variety in the quality and appropriateness of available resources for specific learners. Often, textbooks will include vocabulary of questionable usefulness, which begs the question of how such vocabulary choices are made. This study will analyze the vocabulary chosen for a textbook series for its usefulness and appropriateness for Japanese university students.

Nation (2008:8) notes that "in most texts 80% or more of the running words are from the most frequent 2,000 words of English". He further proposes that 3,000 word families be a cutoff point for what to consider high frequency vocabulary (Nation, 2001a:174). The learning burden/benefit ratio becomes inefficient for learning words beyond this cut-off point since the time put into learning low frequency vocabulary is not supported by enough exposure to solidify learning or be worthwhile (Webb & Nation, 2008).

Within Nation's top 3,000 word families, Daulton (2008:83) found 1,356 to correspond to loanwords within Japanese. He also found 177 within Coxhead's *Academic Word List (AWL)* (2008:85). In Rogers (2009:1)¹⁾, 706 loan words and an additional 1,133 *known* words (words that are probably known by those entering university in Japan) were found within the top 3,000 lemma in Kilgarriff's (1995) high frequency list.

These two points, whether vocabulary falls within the low/high frequency realm and whether it occurs as a loan/known word within Japanese, are the two of the most important factors one should consider when selecting/developing a textbook for use by Japanese university students.

This study examined the *Cover to Cover* series in regards to the two above factors using Nation's *RANGE* (n.d.^{*}) program with his 16 word family groups Rogers' (2009)¹⁰, *Known/Loan List*, and Daulton's (2008) loanword lists. The results showed that the author's intuition was good enough for a high percentage of the vocabulary to fall within the high frequency group, but was not enough in regard to keyword selection. Furthermore, loan/known words were found as keywords in all 3 texts despite all authors having connections to Japan. Finally, the results also showed that pictures supporting the articles examined did not efficiently help to gloss low frequency vocabulary, written glosses could be used, and high frequency replacements were possible for many of the low frequency words.

The *Cover to Cover* series by Oxford (2007-2008) is a three level reading textbook series designed to help students become fluent, confident readers. *Cover to Cover 1* is used by the author of this paper in an advanced reading class at Kansai Gaidai University. The students taking this course are of mixed levels, ranging from TOEFL 333-553. *Cover to Cover 2* and *3* are also used at the university by other professors.

One of the main questions that this paper will address is whether the intuition and experience of the authors were sufficient enough for selecting appropriate vocabulary for this textbook series²⁾. Another interesting point is why *Cover to Cover* was chosen to teach this course: All of the articles were quite engaging and enjoyable to read, even for a teacher. One may assume that being restricted to mostly high frequency vocabulary may lead to unnatural and/or mechanical sounding texts, but this paper proves that when we write, we choose these words naturally, and *that*'s why they occur frequently.

CORPORA

Corpora are an invaluable resource that teachers should be using for materials development. Large corpora, such as the *British National Corpus* (1994) (*BNC*) 100 million word collection, paired with programs such as *RANGE*, can categorize the majority of words in a text. The definition of what a word family contains varies from study to study, but in general it is "a base word and all its derived and inflected forms that can be understood by a learner without having to learn each form separately" (Bauer & Nation, 1993:1). For example, the word family for the word *watch* would include *watches, watched,* and *watching*, etc. While *RANGE* only uses the spoken section of the *BNC* (10%), Nation (2008:128) points out that the *BNC* currently serves as the best resource available for the purposes of this study since it "is largely a formal, adult written corpus". Nation's (2004:3) top 3,000 word families in the *BNC* provides "slightly better coverage of a variety of texts and corpora" in comparison with other available lists, such as West's (1953) *General Service List (GSL)* and Coxhead's (1998) *AWL*. Furthermore, when the *GSL* and *AWL* are combined, they cover 88% of Nation's top 3,000 word families (Nation, 2004).

Such lists are by no means perfect. For example, the GSL is dated. It sourced its data from the early 20th century (Nation, 2004). The main issue with the AWL is that it has "a narrow focus" (op.cit., 9). It contains very useful academic vocabulary, so its purpose is more for those who plan on studying abroad.

Simply using word lists also does not help to explain how words collocate very well. Webb and Kagimoto (2009:56) cite a number of studies that find collocation as responsible for a "significantly high proportion of learner errors". For example, the collocation *come on* ranks in the top 50 of Shin and Nation's (2008) most frequent collocations in spoken English. While the most common meaning of a high frequency word such as *come* may be well known, how the word collocates may not be well-known, as we see in the 8 different collocations in the Dictionary.com, LLC (2009) dictionary entry for "come on" below:

- 1. to meet or find unexpectantly
- 2. to make progress
- 3. to appear on stage
- 4. to begin; appear
- 5. to hurry

- 6. an attempt at persuasion
- 7. how one presents oneself
- 8. to make a sexual advance

Even the *BNC* itself can be problematic when used by those teaching/studying American English. For example, high frequency vocabulary such as *lift* may very well be within the top 2,000 word families because it also functions as the American English *elevator*, in addition to the meaning of *pick something up*.

METHODOLOGY

This paper examined the articles in parts 1 and 2 of each chapter of the entire *Cover to Cover* series (a total of 144 articles). Only the articles themselves and picture captions were examined (no instructions, pre or post-reading activities, etc.). The total amount of tokens examined was 35,511. Keywords that were chosen to be taught directly with additional activities after each reading were also isolated. The total amount of types of keywords was 401. Each article was scanned and then converted to a text file using OCR software.

Then, the articles were combined into one large file for each textbook and they were run through *RANGE*. Items not found within *RANGE*'s 16 word families were then examined for proper nouns, non-words, and words that the OCR software misread. These items were then either re-categorized or fixed within the original text file, and then the file was run through *RANGE* again until the results were acceptable. Textbooks 1 and 2 were run through *RANGE* using this method 4 times, while textbook 3 took 7 times to get an acceptable result.

Next, a baseword list was created by combining Rogers' $(2009)^{10}$ list of known/loanwords and Daulton's (2008) loanword lists. Items occurring within baseword lists 3 to 16 were then examined using *RANGE* with the loan/known baselist. Once these items were isolated, then the entire text file for all the articles was examined again using a new baselist with the isolated loan/known words to obtain the token/type/word family frequencies.

The keywords and picture captions were also examined with all 16 baselists, and then with the loan/known word baselist.

Any written glosses that occurred within the 4 to 16 word family groups were also recategorized.

Types that did not occur on any of the above lists were manually checked for proper

nouns, loan/known words, non-words, keywords, picture captions, written glosses, and common words that should be re-categorized for various reasons, such as being too modern (*blogging*), or occurring only in American English (*sophomore*).

After this was done, each item occurring in baseword lists 4-16 and items not found on any list were examined for how they could be treated. Proper nouns were excluded, though, since they "have a minimal learning burden and may be easily understood by readers" (Webb & Nation, 2008:6). Items were then categorized by which words should be replaced, picture glossed, icon glossed, written glossed or ignored.

Finally, the results were tallied to compare the percentages of items not occurring in any lists plus the low frequency vocabulary (baselists 4-14, and 16) to the rest of the items for each textbook, and for the series as a whole to determine how its contents relate to high frequency vocabulary and loan/known words.

DIRECT TEACHING AND CONTEXTUAL GUESSING

While there is still much contention about how much students can learn from reading incidentally (Nagy, Herman & Anderson, 1985, Horst, Cobb & Meara, 1998, McQuillan & Krashen, 2008, Cobb 2008, Laufer 2003, Webb 2007), both sides present valid arguments that a good balance between direct/indirect teaching of vocabulary and careful selection of which items should be taught directly is the best approach. Hunt and Beglar (2005:23) assert that "the most effective and efficient lexical development will occur in multifaceted curriculums that achieve a pedagogically sound balance between explicit and implicit activities".

In this vein, the readability of a text can be greatly affected by the amount of loan/known words within the supporting context because they present a lesser learning burden. Nation (2001b:23) points out that "different words have different learning burdens for learners with different language backgrounds". The enormous amount of loanwords within Japanese and known words due to schooling/media exposure thus provides an invaluable resource for teachers to use as supporting context, as in Rogers (2009)¹⁾. When loan/known words are used to create "richer contexts" (Webb, 2007:78), text readability and vocabulary acquisition will undoubtedly be improved.

Furthermore, teachers/materials writers should also be aware of these words, since the direct teaching of them with pre or post activities wastes precious classroom time, and the testing of them can produce invalid results. So, not only should these items be given careful

consideration in regard to Japanese learners, teachers in general should consider the specific goals of their learners in regard to whether "only high frequency vocabulary … should be systematically taught." (Nation, 2008:5). Nation himself acknowledges that this is guiding principle of direct teaching, is only one aspect of a vocabulary component, is not an absolute, and that "finding the present vocabulary level of the learners" (op.cit., 157) is just one of the many jobs of teachers when preparing to select vocabulary. Testing students with Nation's (n.d.^b) *Vocabulary Size Test* (VST) is an excellent first step in a vocabulary selection approach. Unfortunately, access to mixed level students was not possible during this study, but testing of the entire range of levels with the VST would be a point of consideration for future research.

RESULTS

Categories	<u>Tokens</u>	% of totals	Types	% of totals	<u>Families</u>
Written glosses in 4-14 baseword lists and in not on any lists section	32	0.09	14	0.20	14
Picture captions in 4-14 baseword lists and in not on any lists section.	26	0.07	9	0.14	9
Proper nouns	518	1.50	254	4.03	247
Loan/known words	528	1.53	252	4.00	251
Ignored items from 2-3000 word families	396	1.150	249	3.95	249
Baseword lists 1 and 2	32962	95.73	5526	87.85	3234
Totals	34430	96.95	6290	90.92	4004
Totals 4-14	1049	95.101	532	93.00	363
Not on any lists	54	4.89	40	6.99	37
Totals	1103	3.10	572	8.26	400
Overall Totals	35511		6918		4404
Keywords within baseword lists 1 and 2	78/401	19.45			
Keywords that are loan/known words	43/401	10.72			
Non-functioning picture captions	61/72	84.72			

Figure 1: Overall totals for entire Cover to Cover series

As we see in the results, a total of 3.1% of tokens and 8.26% of types needed to be addressed since they fall into the low frequency range. Items that fell into the 2-3,000 word family range had been chosen to be ignored because having a well balanced number of words to be guessed by using context is what Nation (2008:64) considers to be "the most important of all vocabulary learning strategies". Students who wish to put the extra effort into studying these words could use some of the various guessing by context strategies or could also simply use a dictionary.

Furthermore, keywords that fall within the 1-2,000 word family range amounted to about 19%. This also presents an issue if one is to take the approach of the top 2,000 word families being the most important group to spend direct teaching time on. The various types of exercises that can be done in pre and post-reading to more deeply expand word knowledge should be done with "words that deserve such attention" (Nation, 2008:63).

Surprisingly, almost 11% of keywords selected were actually loan/known words to Japanese students. This was unexpected since one author is Japanese, one is half Japanese, one has intermediate Japanese ability, and one has taught in Japan.

Overall, 400 word families were left to be modified after careful consideration.

The results revealed the series' biggest weak point was picture selection. Nearly 85% of the pictures did not support low frequency/not found in any list vocabulary. A better choice of pictures would help to expose students to this type vocabulary that they eventually need to learn, "satisfying the learners while not interrupting the reading too much" (Nation, 2008:63) so they can spend their time more efficiently on higher frequency vocabulary. 56 new words were chosen to be glossed by pictures.

In addition to large pictures, small icons could also be used in the textbook's margins to gloss the meanings of words. In total, 61 words were given this treatment.

In all 3 textbooks, blank space is slightly underutilized and could be taken advantage of by the above mentioned icons, and also by an increase in written glosses. A total of 105 new words were chosen to be addressed in this way.

Finally, words that could be easily replaced with higher frequency items and/or loan/ known words to simplify the text were changed. There were 178 such changes. (See Figure 2 for the actual words treated.)

CONCLUSION

As we see in the treatments of low frequency vocabulary, all items could be addressed in

various ways, never impeding on the overall quality of the articles and without the need for any large changes in the architecture of the textbooks.

We also find that authors should have input regarding picture selection to improve the overall validity of the text.

Teachers/materials writers should also take advantage of resources such as Rogers' (2009)¹⁾ and Daulton's (2008) lists when developing materials for Japanese students to provide readable supporting context, while avoiding wasting precious teaching/learning time and less-ening the chance of invalid test items.

This paper also displays the usefulness of the *RANGE* program and its flexibility in that users can easily create their own lists, as was done with loan/known words in this research. *RANGE* can thus provide useful data for *any* list of words, not only high/low frequency items.

Figure 2: Treatments of low frequency vocabulary for the full Cover to Cover series

I = Icon gloss

P = Picture gloss

W = Written gloss

UPPERCASE = Cover to Cover 1 UPPERCASE BOLD = Cover to Cover 2 UPPERCASE ITALICIZED = Cover to Cover 3

Types within Word Families	I	Р	w	Types within Word Families	<u>Replacement</u>
APES	*			DECADES	tens of years
BELGIUM	*			UNANIMOUSLY	all
BILLIONS	*			MIRACULOUS	amazing
BRIDE	*			OUTSTANDING	amazing
CARRIAGE	*			TURF	area
CATTLE	*			CONDUCT	behavior
CHIMPANZEES	*			HYGIENE	being clean
CROWS	*			COGNITIVE	brain function
CUB	*			RIGOROUS	busy
DAZZLING	*			IMMUNE	can't get hurt
DICE	*			FUNDRAISING	collecting money
DOLPHINS	*			INTRAPERSONAL	communication

DOORBELL	*	GALL	courage
FIREWORKS	*	FORGE	create
FROWNED	*	ELIMINATE	cut out
GOATS	*	HEARTTHROB	cutie
GRINNED	*	WITHSTAND	deal with
GUT	*	LONGINGS	desire
HAIRSTYLES	*	GENES	DNA
HAITIAN	*	ENTHRALLED	excited
HANDCUFFS	*	THRILLED	excited
HORNS	*	EAGERLY	excitedly
INSECTS	*	ERUPT	explode
КІТТҮ	*	STUMBLE	fall
LIMBS	*	LEGEND	famous
MILITANT	*	FANATIC	fan
NOTCH	*	DISPUTE	fight
PRICK	*	CUISINE	food
SHORTS	*	LIBERATION	freedom
SPEAR	*	WORLDWIDE	global
SWERVED	*	ACCOMPANIMENT	go with
SYNONYMS	*	INTUITIONS	guess
TOWED	*	BRAINCHILD	idea
WHISPER	*	INFATUATION	in love with
WORSHIP	*	LINGUISTIC	language
SAUCERS	*	UNDERACHIEVER	lazy
SOAPY	*	MASTERMINDS	leader
TORTOISE	*	GLIMPSE	look
TRASH	*	STARED	look at
CHIN	*	LOTTERY	lotto
CURRENCY	*	NOISIER	louder
DAWN	*	TOURNAMENT	match
DUSK	*	ENCOUNTER	meet
EYELIDS	*	WEALTH	money
GENDER	*	ETHICS	moral
LANCE	*	BOPPING	moving
LICKED	*	INNOCENCE	naïve

PADDLE	*		NEEDINESS	needs
PHYSICS	*		FORBIDDEN	not allowed
RAINWATER	*		DIM	not bright
SEAWATER	*		VULNERABLE	not safe
SIDEWALK	*		QUOTIENT	number
SIPPING	*		STATISTICS	numbers
SUNRISE	*		ALOUD	out loud
SUNSET	*		OVERWHELMED	over worked
SURGICAL	*		BUNDLE	package
THIRST	*		TIMERS	players
TRAY	*		PORTRAY	show
WRINKLES	*		SINGULAR	single
LAUGHTER	*		REPERTOIRE	skill set
SARONGS	*		PEBBLE	small rock
JAIL		*	EXTRAORDINARY	special
METEOR		*	PASTIME	sport
RAVENS		*	QUIT	stop
STATUE		*	SHOPLIFTING	take things
STING		*	SKINNY	thin
TERMITES		*	CREATURE	thing
AROMAS		*	OVERSTRESS	too much stress
FAME		*	PETTING	touching
HURRICANE		*	RITUAL	tradition
MEDITATE		*	INTELLIGENCES	ways of thinking
MILLIONAIRES		*	FLOCKED	went together
MINEWORKER		*	UNRULY	wild
MUDPACKS		*	WORKPLACE	work
NEAT		*	SCOLD	yell at
OBSESSED		*	JUVENILE	young person
OPPONENT		*	INFANTS	babies
PARTICIPANTS		*	LEGEND	famous
SCREAMS		*	WORLDWIDE	global
ATHLETES		*	DEPRIVATION	lack
DEFEATED		*	SHAH	leader
FAME		*	LOTTERY	lotto

HOUSEWORK	*	FAKE	not real
MOSQUE	*	DISORDER	problem
PRIEST	*	SCAMS	trick
PSYCHIC	*	SKEPTICAL	unbelievable
TALKATIVE	*	SECONDHAND	used
WHISPERED	*	SPACECRAFT	ufo
WORKPLACE	*	HOAXES	trick
YAWNING	*	ACCOMPLISHED	achieve
BLACKBOARD	*	ASTOUNDING	amazing
BRIDE	*	WILDLIFE	animals
GROOM	*	INQUIRED	asked
MEDALS	*	ETIQUETTE	behavior
OASIS	*	MASCULINITY	being macho
OCEAN	*	INTEGRATION	blend
PLANETS	*	SYMPATHIZE	care
RAINWATER	*	CAUTIOUS	careful
ARCHITECTS	*	FREIGHT	cargo
ATTIC	*	TRANSITION	change
BELGIUM	*	OUTFIT	clothes
BIOLOGIST	*	UNDERGRADUATE	college student
BLUSHED	*	INTERPERSONAL	communication
CAPE	*	PERSISTS	continues
CAPSIZE	*	ONGOING	continuing
CLERGY	*	SCULPTS	create
CONFRONTATION	*	SCRUTINIZE	criticize
CONSOLE	*	CAVEAT	danger
СИСКОО	*	ASPIRING	desiring
DORMITORY	*	INTRICATE	detailed
ERASE	*	THRIVING	doing well
GRID	*	SLURPED	drank
GROOMING	*	RESPECTIVE	each
OBSESSED	*	STIMULATE	excite
PAGEANT	*	WORKOUT	exercise
PHILOSOPHERS	*	PRESTIGIOUS	famous
SLOPPY	*	AMENABLE	fixable

ABSORB	*	ACQUAINTANCES	friend
ANCESTORS	*	COMPANION	friend
APTITUDE	*	YIELDED	gave
ARISE	*	ACQUIRED	get
BETRAYED	*	ERADICATE	get rid of
BRAG	*	ATTAINING	getting
CHANT	*	WORLDWIDE	global
CLAY	*	IMPERATIVE	goal
CONFRONTED	*	STRENUOUS	hard
CREWS	*	SHUNNED	ignored
CRITICIZE	*	FORESIGHT	imagination
DEFIANT	*	ENHANCED	improved
DYNASTY	*	SPOKESMAN	leader
FATE	*	MODERATELY	lightly
FIANCE	*	CREATURES	living things
HEADQUARTERS	*	CONSISTED	made up of
KINESTHETIC	*	HEADQUARTERS	main office
LOYALTY	*	MALICIOUSLY	meanly
NOMADIC	*	ENCOUNTER	meeting
PATENT	*	PRACTITIONER	member
PHRASE	*	WEALTH	money
PREDICT	*	FIDGETS	move around
REINFORCEMENT	*	APPREHENSIVE	nervous
RELUCTANT	*	TENACIOUS	never giving up
SPATIAL	*	DIM	not bright
SPORTSMANSHIP	*	FASTING	not eating
SULFUR	*	INJUSTICE	not fair
THEMES	*	DISSATISFACTION	not happy
BRONZE	*	SUPERFICIAL	not important
CHORES	*	TEDIOUS	not important
DISPROVE	*	FAKE	not real
EAGERLY	*	NUMERAL	number
ESP	*	STATISTICS	numbers
EXPLORATION	*	DISORDER	problem
GRAVITY	*	ORDEAL	problem

HOTLINES	*	MISHAPS	problems
IMPAIRED	*	PLEDGED	promise
IMPATIENT	*	PUBLICIZE	put in the news
INTERACTIONS	*	RAPIDLY	quickly
LIFESTYLES	*	RECOUNTS	remembers
MARITAL	*	PROSPEROUS	rich
NURTURE	*	PRIMITIVE	simple
OUTGOING	*	QUIT	stop
PARTICIPATE	*	CEASE	stop
QUIT	*	FORESTALL	stop
RAGING	*	ANXIETY	stress
RATIONAL	*	TRAUMATIC	terrible
SOCIABLE	*	DURATION	time
SPOKESPERSON	*	EXHAUSTION	tired
SUPERSTITION	*	DECEPTION	trick
VIEWPOINTS	*	HOAX	trick
AMBASSADOR	*	MAINSTREAM	typical
ANYTIME	*	SPACECRAFT	ufo
ASHORE	*	ASTRONOMICAL	unbelievable
BLINKING	*	DIVERSE	varied
CHARITABLE	*	PERSPECTIVE	view
CHRONIC	*	PRECAUTION	warning
CLUMSILY	*	INCIDENT	what happened
COMEBACK	*	BLUSTERY	windy
COMMUTE	*	TELLER	worker
COMPATIBLE	*	COLUMNIST	worker
COMPELLED			
CONTRADICT	*		
CORPS	*		
COURTESY	*		
DECAY	*		
DECLINED	*		
DEHYDRATION	*		
DEPARTURE	*		
DESCENT	*		

DESTINATION	
DIAGNOSED	*
DIPLOMATS	*
DISRUPTIVE	*
DISTRACTED	*
DODGED	*
DRIZZLED	*
ENTREPRENEURS	*
EVALUATION	*
EXEMPT	*
FRILLS	*
GEOLOGICAL	*
GUILDS	*
HAIL	*
IMMIGRATION	*
IMPATIENCE	*
IMPORTANCE	*
IMPULSIVENESS	*
INSTINCT	*
MATERNITY	*
MERCY	*
OUTGOING	*
PATHOLOGICAL	*
PRESENCE	*
PSYCHIATRIST	*
RINGERS	*
SARCASM	*
SLUSH	*
STAGGERED	*
STAMMERING	*
STRAITS	*
STRANDS	*
UPRIGHT	*
WASHOUT	*
WEBBED	*

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NOTES

- 1 Rogers, J. (2009, September 20th). *The Known/Loan Method*. Presented at the 1st annual Kansai Gaidai Faculty Development Committee Meeting.
- 2 The main author, Professor Day of the University of Hawaii, was contacted to determine how vocabulary was selected for the series. Day explains that intuition was used in the selection of vocabulary. Then the articles were then reread to find any difficult vocabulary, again using intuition. After that, readability formulas with Word were used, setting word length targets and readability levels, and finally the co-author would go over the text.

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