

## REVIEWS

### *Vocabulary, Semantics, and Language Education*

Evelyn Hatch and Cheryl Brown: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Reviewed by Paul Nation, English Language Institute, Victoria University of Wellington

This substantial work on semantics and the teaching and learning of vocabulary fills a gap in the texts available for language teachers. There are texts on semantics for students of linguistics but none which attempt to address the relevance of semantics for language teachers.

There are two major weaknesses in the book. The first is reflected in the title *Vocabulary, Semantics, and Language Education*. The three sections of the title roughly correspond to the major subdivisions of the book - Part I Semantics; Parts II, III and IV Lexicon, Lexical cases and morphology, Vocabulary choice and discourse use; Part V Vocabulary learning and vocabulary teaching. These three sections are not well integrated with each other. Questions such as "What is the significance of core meanings and prototype theory for language teaching and learning?", "How can learners make use of the morphological system to enhance learning?" are hardly touched on. Let us, for example, look at the morphology aspect in more detail. Chapters 11 and 12 deal with morphology and derivations, and inflectional morphology. There is a clear and systematic coverage of the nature of morphology, the types of morphemes, some meanings conveyed by morphemes, and their effect on part of speech. The practice activities, which are a major strength of the book, include some consideration of morphological errors made by second language users. However, neither these chapters nor Chapters 15 and 16 on General vocabulary learning and learner strategies, and Vocabulary pedagogy and teacher strategies pick up on the learning and teaching implications of morphology. Should affixes be deliberately learned? Should a teacher use morphological analysis to teach words? How can a teacher or course designer decide which morphemes should be given attention? How can a teacher monitor a learner's morphological development? How can a teacher intervene? None of these questions are directly addressed and a teacher reading the book would have to do considerable thinking and additional reading to formulate a policy on the treatment of morphology in the teaching and learning of vocabulary. This is unfortunate because there is plenty written about these issues (see, for example, the work of Nagy and his colleagues, much of which is published in the *Reading Research Quarterly*) and Hatch and Brown's book deals clearly with the fundamental knowledge on which to base a teaching and learning strategy. The three sections of the title then, Vocabulary, Semantics, education, exist largely as separate sections rather than as three closely related sections each informing the other.

The second major weakness of the book is partly a result of its ambitious scope. There are some important gaps in its coverage. This may be a little surprising as the book is a substantial one at 468 pages long, and as recently as 16 years ago applied linguists were lamenting the neglect of the study of second language vocabulary acquisition (Meara, 1980; Laufer, 1986). The gaps I see include the following:

1. There is an absence of frequency information about vocabulary. Elsewhere (Nation, 1990) I have argued that a way of taking a principled approach to vocabulary teaching and learning is to see the vocabulary of a language as consisting of high frequency words and low frequency words and to use this distinction as a way of determining teaching and learning strategies.
2. The research on the role of lexical sets and other related items in vocabulary learning is not adequately treated. This growing body of research (Higa, 1963; Tinkham, 1993) shows that teaching words together that are related in form or meaning has negative effects on learning. This research is dismissed in one of the research and application tasks as not involving careful enough measures of vocabulary knowledge. This highlights a weakness in what otherwise is a very great strength of the book - the practice tasks, and research and application tasks. Dealing with a piece of research only in these tasks takes that research out of the mainstream arguments of the book when it may have been better incorporated in them.
3. Vocabulary size and growth is not adequately dealt with. The figures quoted on page 368 based on Webster's Dictionary come from a terrible piece of research (Diller, 1978) and are disproved by at least two other published studies. Vocabulary size studies are important in defining the scope of the vocabulary learning task facing the second language learner.

I have dealt with the criticisms of the book first in the belief that when positives and negatives are mentioned, mentioning the positives last gives them greater emphasis. I really like the book. It is very clearly written and organized. It covers a large area and draws on a very large amount of research from linguistics, applied linguistics, and education. The practice tasks and research and application tasks are rich, varied, and very practical. They help the reader to come to a clear understanding of the material and encourage further research and observation. Books which deal with vocabulary teaching and learning have been typified by their lack of awareness of relevant research (Nation, 1994). Hatch and Brown's book, however, is a treasure trove of discussion and sources and is strongly based on research. Hatch's wide ranging knowledge of linguistics and applied linguistics means that a very broad view is taken of the role of vocabulary. Thus there are chapters on processes in word building, semantics of figurative language, variation in vocabulary choice, and the vocabulary of communication signals and speech acts.

The introduction sets a very practical tone for the book by listing objectives, such as: You should know the major word-building processes used to create new words in different languages.

*Evidence:*

1. Give examples of compounding, affixation, conversion, reduplication, root elaboration, borrowing, shifts, initialization and acronyms, clipping, collocation and idioms, portmanteau and euphemism.
2. Given an example of any of these processes in a language, predict learning ease or difficulty.

You should be able to evaluate teacher techniques and language teaching materials which promote vocabulary acquisition.

*Evidence:*

1. Give examples of teacher techniques and language teaching materials along with an assessment of their likelihood for success in assisting learners to acquire vocabulary.
2. Give a rationale for your evaluation of such techniques and materials.

These objectives are then followed up by example situations that the reader should be able to deal with by the end of the book. For example, You've noticed that science textbooks contain a large number of compounds (e.g. seven-digit numbers, central facility, numerical analysis). At the same time, you note that students almost never produce such compounds in their writing. Should you stress this kind of vocabulary in both reading and writing lessons?

This is an excellent book for teachers of second and foreign languages and could also be used with benefit in an introductory linguistics course not specifically intended for teachers.

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The second of the two main themes of the book is the role of the teacher. The author argues that the teacher should be seen as a facilitator rather than a transmitter of knowledge. This is a theme that is also reflected in the title of the book, 'The Teacher as Facilitator'.

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