

**Vocabulary for the Foundations Track
at the Brigham Young University English Language Center**

Project Proposal
Jessica McGovern
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The vocabulary of any language is the substance of which that language is built. People can often communicate meaning with less than perfect grammar, whereas inaccurate use of vocabulary can essentially impede communication (Barcroft, 2004; Folse, 2004). Although vocabulary learning is only “one sub-goal of a range of goals that are important in the language classroom” (Nation, 2001, p. 1), vocabulary is an “area now recognized as of central importance for grammarians, acquisition specialists, language teachers and language learners alike” (Nation, 2001, p. xiii).

Rationale

Given the magnitude (estimates of needed vocabulary range from 2,000 to 20,000 head words) and the complexity (“knowing” a word involves knowledge of its orthography, pronunciation, core and other meanings, antonyms, synonyms, polysemy, word class, word parts, grammatical “behavior,” frequency, range, register constraints, and typical associations) of the vocabulary learning task in the acquisition of a second language, there is just cause to take great care in the planning of a task that can seem overwhelming to the L2 student (see for example, Nation, 2001). The applicant’s background in second language vocabulary learning makes it a logical field for her labor, having written all previous term papers in the program on this subject.

Context

This project will consist of designing the vocabulary curriculum component of the new Foundations Track at the BYU English Language Center.

Methodology

Initial stages of this project will be carried out under the direction of Dr. Norman Evans as he teaches the LING 677 class (Advanced Methodology and Curriculum Development) during Winter Semester 2009. Based on the direction suggested by the comprehensive needs analysis and overall design framed by members of the class, the applicant will then develop the specific elements of the curriculum relating to vocabulary. This will likely involve a survey and analysis of texts currently available, choosing and sequencing course content, and possibly include setting standards or benchmarks for vocabulary learning, and choosing what vocabulary is taught.

The component itself may consist of a specific number of individual lessons, or may be woven throughout the Foundations curriculum. Since reading classes often contain the most tangible vocabulary component, it could possibly become an element of the reading curriculum.

Feasibility of Work and Other People Involved

Other people involved will be the 11 students enrolled in LING 677; some ELC teachers and students (being observed and/or surveyed); Dr. Neil Anderson and members of the ELC Executive Council in some consultations and presentations; and possibly other ELC staff. The majority of the work and any expense of the project will be undertaken by the applicant.

Timeline for completion

This project will be commenced during the winter semester of 2009, with work continuing during the spring and summer terms. Since the applicant will be enrolled in

LING 678 (Materials Development) during the fall semester of 2009, wisdom may dictate waiting until after completing that course to finalize the work.

Coursework

In addition to LING 677, the applicant will be taking LING 672, TESOL Reading and Writing, during this winter semester, which will support the quest to become familiar with how vocabulary is currently taught, and how it might best be improved, as well as how to choose what vocabulary is taught. Prior to this winter semester, the applicant has taught five ELC classes (Reading Level 2, three Grammar Level 2 classes, and one Writing Level 3 class), and is currently teaching a Reading Level 1 class. This means that she has experience with all of the levels involved in this project, and her current involvement will allow for easy access to Foundation level ELC students and a deeper understanding of the context involved. Prior to this winter semester, she has completed the TESOL Graduate Certificate and two additional classes (LING 631 and LING 679) towards the MA, all with a GPA of 4.0.

References

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- Folse, K.S. (2004). *Vocabulary myths: Applying second language research to classroom teaching*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Nation, I.S.P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

**Academic Readers: Bridging the Gap between Social and Academic Language for
English Language Learners**
Project Proposal

Rachel E. Wood

Introduction & Rationale

Graded readers are texts that have been modified for beginning and intermediate ESOL learners. These readers cover the 300-3,000 word range. When children enter elementary school and begin reading in their L1, most already have a 5,000-7,000 word lexicon (Nation & Wang, 1999). Considering this, it does not seem reasonable for graded readers to peak at the 3,000 word level when it takes about 5,000 for learners to be able to comprehend unmodified English texts (Nation & Dweerd, 2001).

Furthermore, the majority of these readers are simplified fiction that promote basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), which take about 2 years to acquire. Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), on the other hand, takes 5 to 10 years to acquire (Cummins, 2000), yet there are few materials that foster this type of language on the market. Nation and Wang (1999) have called for materials developers to create content-specific readers and to make a distinction between materials meant for BICS and those that foster CALP.

I will develop a new series of graded readers, called academic readers, that will be linguistically engineered to foster academic vocabulary growth in ESOL learners. The series will consist of 7 levels, based on studies that call for graded readers to bridge the gap between the 3,000 and 5,000 vocabulary levels (Nation & Dweerd, 2001). I will produce the first installment of this series, or the first book for each of the 7 levels.

Context & Methodology

My target audience will be high school ESL students and any ESOL student working toward admission to an English-speaking university. Because these readers will focus on academic language, this project assumes that these learners have already been exposed to some English text.

To determine the content area of the first installment, I will survey national and state high school core curriculums for the sciences. I will also review texts used by various school districts to find the topics most commonly emphasized in all districts. I will also analyze these texts to determine which words are most important to comprehending the text and use those words as target words in my readers.

The readers will include facets that current research suggests assist vocabulary acquisition. To encourage readers to guess the meaning of target words from context, 98 percent of the words will be known, and only 2 percent will be unknown target words (Carver, 1994). Target words will be repeated throughout each text at least 10 times (Saragi, Nation & Meister, 1978). These target words will be surrounded by pedagogical contexts written to point to each word's meaning (Gardner, 2007).

Each chapter of the readers will include activities and discussion questions that will help learners to use the target words they have encountered, allowing learners to gain full command of each word (Waring & Nation, 2004). These readers will also include illustrations and glossaries relevant to the target words.

These linguistic features have never been applied to ESOL reading materials before. If readers were designed with the many facets that research suggests helps vocabulary acquisition, they would be much more effective tools for today's ESOL students, and the development of

such a series that promotes academic language may drastically improve the academic performance of ESOL students who have been left behind for decades.

Timeline

May 8, 2009 – Review of curriculums complete; content area/topic defined

November 30, 2009 – written text for readers complete

February 26, 2010 – illustrations and layout complete; edits complete

March 1, 2010 – readers go to press

Feasibility, People Involved, Coursework

I estimate the time I will spend on the project to be 10 to 15 hours per week. Finding an illustrator, or illustrations, will be the greatest cost and may range anywhere from \$700 for the rights to existing pictures to \$3,000 to get original work. Printing the books will cost \$20-30 each depending on how long they are, how much color is used, and what type of paper is used. As an editor and graphic designer, I have extensive experience in publishing and will design my own cover and layout for the books at no cost.

Professors who have expressed enthusiasm for the project include Dr. Gardner and Dr. Eggington. Dr. Gardner will play a key role throughout the creation of this series. I am currently taking Ling 672, TESOL Reading and Writing, from Dr. Gardner, which may be the most valuable to my project, as we will be analyzing academic texts in order to identify and characterize key vocabulary.

References

- Carver, R. P. (1994). Percentage of unknown vocabulary words in text as a function of the relative difficulty of the text: Implications for instruction. *Journal of Reading Behavior, 26*, 413-437.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Gardner, D. (2007). Children's immediate understanding of vocabulary: Contexts and dictionary definitions. *Reading Psychology, 28*, 331-373.
- Nation, P. & Dweerd, J. (2001). A defense of simplification. *Prospect, 16*, 55-67.
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- Waring, R. & Nation, P. (2004). Second language reading and incidental vocabulary learning. *Angles on the English-speaking World, 4*, 97-110.

Going Places
Project Proposal

Susannah O. MacKay

Introduction and Rationale for the Project. *Going Places* is a series of manuals developed to provide materials for the many community ESL programs for adults in the United States. These materials seek to meet three specific needs in this context. First, because of the prohibitive costs of existing materials, the limited funds of community programs require more affordable alternatives. Second, because most teachers and volunteers in community ESL programs do not have formal TESOL preparation, materials are needed which provide instruction for their development and training. Finally, existing materials most often focus on survival skills, without expanding to areas of professional and personal development—a demonstrated need for the targeted audience of these materials.

To fulfill these three areas of concern, *Going Places* includes two components: a teacher manual and a student manual. These are accompanied by audio supplements and visual materials corresponding with the lessons. The teacher manual was developed, first, to correspond with the lessons and activities of the student manual, and second, to include instructional principles, suggestions, and ideas throughout the manual to aid in the teacher's improvement. By integrating recommendations with specific lesson activities, teachers will more effectively be able to develop their skills. The second component of *Going Places* is the student manual, designed to include basic survival skills as a bridge into more focused areas of professional and personal development such as management, leadership, and financial instruction. These content areas, while developed with an integrated skills approach, will pay particular attention reading and writing so as to build off of students' listening and speaking ability. Thus, the two components answer to the above stated needs

for teachers and students, and by waiving copyright and designing the materials for easy reproduction, *Going Places* answers to the need of affordable materials as well.

Context. *Going Places* will be completed and piloted in Atlanta, Georgia, specifically for the seven stakes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in that region. Because of an especially high influx of speakers of other languages into these stakes, each has sought to provide ESL instruction to meet the temporal and welfare needs of the individuals in their stewardship. Unfortunately, both students and teachers have seen low success rates due to the lack of teacher preparation and training, the prohibitive costs of investing in materials, and a mismatch between available resources and student needs. While the intentions were good, the teachers did not possess any knowledge of how to design their programs, nor could they access affordable materials which specifically answered to the needs of literacy and professional development for their students. This situation is not unlike others, whether within or out of the Church. Thus, *Going Places* will fill a gap in the existing materials by filling these three needs. Further, with small additions and supplemental material, it can be adapted to other contexts as well.

Methodology. *Going Places* will consist of both printed and recorded materials, requiring only word processing, computer graphics, and recording equipment for its production. These resources are readily accessible and affordable through personal computers and the BYU Recording Studio in the JKHB. In addition to equipment, the input of project advisors will be invaluable to the development of *Going Places*, as well as the involvement of the targeted audience for these materials. I have already gathered information from faculty here, and I have spoken with the coordinators and teachers of each of the ESL programs in the various Atlanta stakes in order to best tailor these materials to their needs. Faculty have shown support, and the individuals in Atlanta have expressed their desires to implement these materials once completed as well.

Timeline and Feasibility of Completion. The work of developing *Going Places* will begin during the Spring term of 2002, and with a vigorous timeline for development, will be completed by

the end of the year. Costs for the initial development of *Going Places* will be very low, and piloting the program will not constitute a significant investment either. As discussed in my Statement of Intent, I commit to covering the expenses of long-distance conference calls, shipping, faxing, and even flying to Utah to correspond with my advisors. Email, a relatively low-cost alternative, will also prove essential.

Coursework. I have planned my coursework carefully in order to prepare for this project—and for being away from this campus. I have already taken Advanced Materials Development (LING 678), a core requirement for the project option, and this semester, I am enrolled in TESOL Reading & Writing and the Grammar Usage class. These three classes will facilitate my development of the lesson activities focused on these areas. Additionally, I have coordinated an internship for later this semester with Melvin Thorne in the Humanities Publications Center to gain editing and design experience, and further, I have already identified several professional opportunities in which I can earn academic credit towards the completion of the program.

Conclusion. With all the foregoing considerations, I have carefully outlined and planned the development of *Going Places*. Its completion, while necessary for my finishing the Masters in this department, will more importantly provide much-needed tools with which to serve the needs of the individuals in the Atlanta area and abroad.