**Flashcards for the First 500 Words of the Academic Vocabulary List**

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Pedagogical Thesis Prospectus

**Working Abstract**

The Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) was produced by a rationale for word inclusion designed to address concerns raised in the methodology used to generate Coxhead’s AWL (Gardner & Davies 2014). As such, the AVL offers a comprehensive view of high frequency academic vocabulary that could greatly benefit ELLs if implemented into ELL curricula (Gardner & Davies 2014). However, because of the newness of the list, there are few learning materials currently utilizing the AVL. The major objective of this thesis project was to create flashcards for the first 500 words of the AVL to increase the list’s accessibility for ELLs and teachers worldwide. These flashcards were made accessible through Quizlet.com’s online interface. This paper describes the two types of flashcards that were developed: AVL Word – Learner Definition cards and AVL Word – L1 Gloss cards, with the latter available in seven languages. It further describes an evaluation of their usefulness by ESL professionals working at a U.S. intensive English program.

**Statement of the Problem**

More learning materials need to be created for the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL). To this end, I propose to create flashcards for the first 500 words of the AVL to be made available on Quizlet.com.

**Significance of the Problem**

From the outset of any attempt to understand the nature of English language learning, one almost necessarily gives pause at the enormity of the task of acquiring competence with the English lexicon. This pressure is keenly felt by the increasing numbers of ELLs endeavoring to undertake academic studies in English. It is estimated that the average high school senior knows about 80,000 words (Anderson & Nagy, 1996). Efforts to grapple with such a large number beg this question: Which of these words are the most frequent and thus likely the most important for academically-aspiring ELLs to know?

Researchers have attempted to provide answers to this question in the form of vocabulary lists comprised of words with high frequency in academic texts. Among such lists is Coxhead’s Academic Word List (AWL), which represents the top 570 word families in an approximately 3.5 million word corpus (Coxhead, 2000). While this widely-adopted list has provided valuable guidance in the identification of highly frequent academic words, Gardner and Davies (2014) have more recently presented a new list, known as the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL). Their list offers improvement from the AWL in several significant ways. Through advances made electronic corpora, a much larger corpus was used to create the AVL than was available at the time of the AWL’s conception (Gardner & Davies, 2014). Additionally, Gardner and Davies chose to use lemmas rather than word families in determining word frequency. The AVL also stands independently from any other previously created lists, unlike the AWL, which was built on top of the General Service List (GSL) (Coxhead, 2000; Gardner & Davies, 2014).

Because the AVL is relatively new on the English language learning and teaching scene, there remains great need for its utilization in materials creation. Increasing the number and availability of such materials would likely make the adaptation of the list into curricular and classroom considerations more feasible for programs with limited time and resources. Nation & Webb (2011) stated that one of the most obvious reasons for current widespread use of the AWL is that it is “readily available in a variety of formats” (p. 534). The new AVL flashcard resource will be freely available via the Internet to users worldwide, and could be utilized for individual or classroom study in a variety of interactive ways as provided by Quizlet’s online interface. It is hoped that this tool will provide ELLs with a valuable resource that will enable them to learn many important words needed to succeed in academic settings.

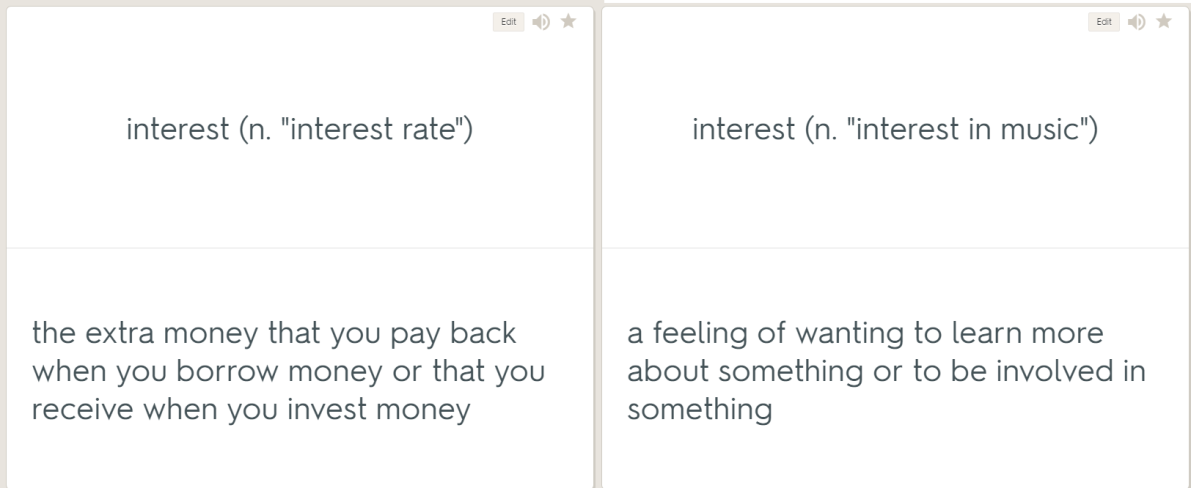
**Previous Related Research**

The literature review will contextualize the need for academic vocabulary and also elucidate why Quizlet is an effective learning tool to address this need. Areas to be addressed include the development of academic word lists (Campion and Elley, 1971; Praninskas, 1972; Coxhead, 2000; Gardner & Davies, 2014), a comparison of the AWL and the AVL (Gardner & Davies, 2014), arguments against the concept of general academic vocabulary (Hyland & Tse, 2007) and a response to them, incidental vs. deliberate vocabulary learning (Elgort, 2011; Mondria, 2003, Nation, 2013), vocabulary learning with word cards (Elgort, 2011; Elgort & Piasecki, 2014; Kuo & Ho, 2012; Nakata, 2008), bilingual vs. monolingual learning mode (Elgort & Piasecki, 2014; Yoshii, 2006) and vocabulary assisted vocabulary learning (Nakata, 2011). A description of the functionality of Quizlet with reference to previous studies evaluating its effectiveness will also be included (Imrie, 2014).

**Overview of Methodology**

Two general types of cards will be created: AVL Word – Learner Definition cards and AVL Word – L1 Gloss cards. All cards will be grouped into 25-word sets for manageable reference and review.

The AVL Word – Learner Definition flashcards will contain the AVL word on one side of a card with a simplified (learner) definition on the other. The definitions provided on the AVL Word – Learner Definition flashcards will be sourced from the Merriam Webster Learner Dictionary (permission already received). AVL words with more than one definition commonly used in academic settings will be represented in the flashcards with multiple cards, with one flashcard per definition. The AVL-word side of such cards will include a collocate reference to suggest to users the definition specific to that card. As an example, *Figure 1* shows a screenshots of two Quizlet flashcards for the AVL-word “interest,” with the front sides of the card displayed above the back sides of the card.

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*Figure 1.* Two Quizlet flashcards for the AVL-word “interest.”

The AVL Word – L1 Gloss flashcards will contain the AVL word on one side of the cards with the L1 translation (gloss) on the other. Languages selected to be the target L1s in the development of the AVL Word – L1 Gloss cards will be chosen because they meet specified criteria regarding national and international language interests. The languages that have been chosen are: Chinese (Mandarin), Korean, Arabic, Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese (Brazilian), and Russian. Initially, computer-generated translation through Google Translate will be used to supply potential glosses for each word in all of these languages. These glosses will be revised by qualified bilingual speakers who have been recommended by Brigham Young University language faculty. Three reviewers will participate independently in the review of the flashcards for each language to allow for a consensus-rule determination of the glosses in ambiguous cases.

Once all of the flashcards have been completed and the AVL Word – L1 Gloss flashcards have been revised according to the recommendations of the bilingual reviewers, the flashcards will be evaluated as a teaching and learning tool by current TESOL professionals. These evaluators will likely be graduate students and others currently working at the English Language Center of Brigham Young University, which has a curriculum that actively utilizes the AVL. Through a survey, the evaluators will be asked to supply their views regarding how helpful they feel that the AVL Word – Learner Definition flashcards and the AVL Word – L1 Gloss flashcards will be to learners they have taught. They will also be asked what recommendations they have for improving the tool, how likely they would be to suggest this tool to students or other teachers, and what, if anything, would keep them from recommending the tool. The results of these surveys will be analyzed and discussed by the researcher. Limitations of the tool, including suggestions for its future improvement, will also be discussed.

**Timeline**

October 25, 2016 – First draft of Chapter 2 submitted to thesis chair (and subsequently to the committee).

November 8, 2016 – First draft of Chapter 1 submitted to thesis chair (and subsequently to the committee).

November 22, 2016 – All L1 glosses completed and sent to qualified reviewers for revision.

December 6, 2016 – Review of L1 glosses complete.

December 13, 2016 – Second draft of Chapter 3 submitted to thesis chair (and subsequently to the committee).

December 16, 2016 – All flashcard sets finished and made available to the committee.

January 3, 2017 – Review of finished product by TESOL professionals initiated.

January 10, 2017 – Review of product by TESOL professionals complete.

January 13, 2017 – Chapters 4 and 5 submitted to thesis chair (and subsequently to the committee).

**Potential Journals to Target**

Journals to which I will consider submitting a manuscript include the Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, the International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, System, Journal of Writing Research, and Journal of English for Academic Purposes.

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