

# A Study on Evaluation of Vocabulary knowledge and Size of Junior High School, Senior High School and University Students from the perspective of CEFR-J

Norifumi Ueda<sup>1</sup>, Eiichiro Tsutsui<sup>2</sup>, Kazuharu Owada<sup>3</sup>, Wachi Kota<sup>4</sup>, and Michiko Nakano<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Komazawa University, <sup>2</sup>University of Kitakyushu, <sup>3</sup>Tokyo College of Music, <sup>4</sup>Shiba Junior and Senior High School, and <sup>5</sup>Waseda University

ueda@komazawa-u.ac.jp, e-tsutsui@kitakyu-u.ac.jp, qwq03702@nifty.com, nakanom@waseda.jp

## Abstract

This case study examines (1) how many words Japanese learners of English at each level of CEFR know and (2) how different their knowledge on phrasal verbs is between the Japanese learners at different English proficiency levels. We conducted two experiments: One is to evaluate the width of vocabulary knowledge of Japanese learners of English at the different English proficiency levels, and the other, to examine the knowledge of phrasal verbs in the different CEFR levels between Japanese learners of English at different proficiency levels of English. The participants in the experiments are students of junior and senior high school, and undergraduate and graduate university students. The range of the proficiency levels of English of the participants were from A1 to B2 in CEFR.

## Keywords

L2 vocabulary acquisition, CEFR-J, Phrasal verbs

## Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge plays an important roles in reading, speaking, listening and writing. For example, Stæhr's study (2008) shows the correlation between vocabulary size scores and listening, reading and writing scores are quite high. Today, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was introduced in English Education in Japan and can-do descriptors are used as the norms for teaching at each English proficiency level. Vocabulary size for each proficiency level has been examined and some vocabulary lists like English Vocabulary

Profile and CEFR-J Wordlist were proposed. Negishi, Tono and Fujita (2012) also proposed the list of the phrasal verbs for each CEFR levels. These lists show which meanings of English words and phrases are known by learners at each level of CEFR.

## 1 Depth and Breadth of Vocabulary knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge consists of 'depth' and 'breadth' of knowledge. The 'depth' of vocabulary knowledge means 'the quality of the learner's vocabulary knowledge' and 'breadth' of knowledge, 'the size of a learner's vocabulary' In the depth of vocabulary knowledge, knowledge on synonyms, collocations, and word associations is included

## 2 Vocabulary Test for the Depth and Breadth of Vocabulary Knowledge

Read (1993). Some vocabulary tests like Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation, 1990) and Lex 30 (Meara & Fitzpatrick, 2000) were developed to evaluate the depth and the breadth of vocabulary knowledge. Yes-No Test developed by Meara (1996) is to measure receptive vocabulary knowledge by asking whether the target words L2 learners know (Yes) or not (No). Mochida and Harrington (2006) reported the Yes-No test is a valid test to estimate the L2 learner's width of vocabulary knowledge.

### 3 Test of Phrasal Verbs in CEFR

English Vocabulary Profile contains phrasal verbs in each CEFR level: four phrasal verbs in A1, twenty-seven phrasal verbs in A2, 145 phrasal verbs in B1 and 263 phrasal verbs in B2. Negishi, Tono, and Fujita (2012) studied the CEFR levels of phrasal verbs. They created test items with 100 phrasal verbs categorized into each CEFR level in English Vocabulary Profile. The results showed that the average difficulties in each CEFR level were ordered according to the level predictions, but the difficulties overlapped in each CEFR level. The question format used by Negishi et al. is as follows:

<Example>

He (w.....)< > his mug and put it back on the shelf. 洗う

(Negishi et al. 2014,p.3)

In the test item, the initial letter and L1 translation of the target phrasal verb were given.

### 4 A Case Study

In this case study, we created a test to examine the L2 learner's knowledge of phrasal verbs in each CEFR level. Research Questions

In this case study, we examine (1) what affixations are difficult for L2 learners of English, and (2) whether L2 proficiency levels affect understanding English words with affixations.

#### 4.1 Materials

Twenty-nine test items were created based on the phrasal verbs used in the study of Negishi et al. (2012). In the developed test items, three phrasal in A1, seven phrasal verbs in A2, and nineteen phrasal verbs in B1. sixteen test items were made with the same format as Negishi et al. (2012), whereas thirteen test items contained L1 translation but not the initial letter of the target phrasal verbs. The participants were asked to fill in the blanks with appropriate English phrasal verbs considering L1 translations as the ques.

#### 4.2 Participants

Participants were thirty-four junior high,

twenty-nine senior high, eleven university students with different English proficiency levels in Japan. The average age of junior high school students is 14.1 years old; that of high school students, 17 years old; and that of university students, 19.7 years old. Their proficiency levels vary from A1 to B2.

### 4.3 Results

The results show that almost all the participants tend to answer phrasal verbs in A1 correctly. As for the test items only with L1 translation, some participants gave the target answers, but others provided possible phrasal verbs. This tendency can be seen even in the test items with both L1 translation and the initial letter. The answer rate for phrasal verbs even in A1 were not high, because the participants at higher proficiency level (B1 or B2) could give answers other than the target. The test items could not induce the target phrasal verbs.

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