

&lt;論文&gt;

## How to Improve Vocabulary Learning in a Language Classroom: Collection of Action Research Studies 2017

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On September 10, 2016, we invited Paul Nation, Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, to the second Multilingual Workshops. In his talk, Professor Nation shared his expertise on how to improve vocabulary learning in a language classroom. His main thesis is that language learning is vocabulary learning. He promoted a balanced approach to language teaching that he calls “four strands” and “linked skills activities.”

Professor Nation believes that a well-balanced language course should consist of four strands: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. To develop language abilities, learners need to (a) receive and utilize large amounts of quality input through listening and reading (meaning-focused input) (MFI), (b) make use of ample chances to produce output through speaking and writing (meaning-focused output) (MFO), (c) deliberately learn language features such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse organization (language-focused learning) (LFL), and (d) increase fluency in the four skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing (fluency development) (FD). Furthermore, these four strands should be given roughly the same amount of time on task and be integrated to fit together. Language teachers should make a plan to achieve a good balance among the four and, in this sense, planning is the most important job of the language teachers.

Professor Nation also promoted implementing linked skills activities. Learners should be able to repeat language items such as words and multiword units, as well as grammar rules, in at least three different skill areas in a series of activities. For example, learners read a text and make a list of important ideas (reading). They then discuss their ideas with their partners or in groups (speaking) and write a summary of the text, organizing the main ideas (writing). Learners think through individually and negotiate for meaning collaboratively, repeating the same language features during the process. Here again, teachers need to make a thoughtful plan to integrate learning in the different skill areas.

In addition to these two general guidelines, Professor Nation also pointed out that language learning is, in a nutshell, vocabulary learning and that words are learned better in their typical multiword units through receptive and productive use. The first part of his statement is a very strong claim and it is beyond this paper to discuss it, but the second part is difficult to refute, considering nature of language use and nature of language knowledge. Most of the language we use consists of familiar combinations of words, that is, chunks of language. By having chunks of language stored in the long-term memory, both language reception and language production are made more efficient. Multiword units are indeed “building blocks of fluent speech” (Nation, 2013a, p. 484). However, research shows that L2 learners make less use of those chunks than native speakers (Laufer & Waldman, 2011). Multiword units need to be paid more attention to and taught in classrooms across the above-mentioned four. Research shows that multiword units can be learned incidentally, through meeting them in context (e.g., Webb, Newton, & Chang, 2013).

In this paper, three participants individually report an action research study, based on what they learned in the workshops. In the sections that follows, Steve Bretherick explores issue logs and speaking fluency, Ataya Aoki investigates four strands for a tourism class, and Harumi Kimura discusses learning multiword units in fluency development activities.

### **Issue Logs and Speaking Fluency: Steve Bretherick**

Professor Nation views planning a balanced program for learners to follow as being one of the teacher’s most important roles. Therefore, after being exposed to the concept of the four strands, I decided to analyze the balance among class activities in the first semester of a yearlong communication class I was teaching, in order to identify opportunities to improve the plan for the second semester. The resulting new approach arguably improved the classroom dynamics in the second semester, with some of the benefits coming from unanticipated directions.

#### ***Analysis of First Semester***

Professor Nation recommends that teachers assess the balance of classroom activities by examining a reasonable chunk of class activities and homework (Nation, 2013a). Using the class syllabus, lesson plans and worksheets as inputs, I estimated the amount of time spent on task over the last month of the course for each of the four strands.

Table 1 *Time and Task Analysis for Homework (HW) and Classwork (CW), Semester 1*

#	HW/CW	Activity	MFI	MFO	LFL	FD	Total
1	HW	Read Nat Geo article Lewis Pugh Everest Swim	0:15				0:15
2	HW, CW	Make quiz questions, review with partner		0:30			0:30
3	CW	Quiz 4 classmates	0:10	0:10		0:20	0:40
4	HW	Research Lewis Pugh on Internet			0:15		0:15
5	HW	Write ideas for global warming		0:15			0:15
6	CW	Share ideas with classmates (multiple iterations)	0:10	0:10		0:20	0:40
7	HW	Online Workbook (Vocabulary, Grammar)			0:20		0:20
8	HW CW	Listen to Lewis Pugh TED talk (3 times +) & comprehension questions	0:10		1:00		1:10
9	HW CW	Extra Credit HW -TGIF ads on YouTube, review in class	0:25				0:25
10	HW	Lyrics Training - Song Lyric game & reflection	0:10	0:05			0:15
11	HW	Diagram and write assessment of global warming ideas		0:15			0:15
12	CW	Share diagrams and ideas with classmates (multiple)	0:20			0:20	0:40
13	CW	Unit Test			0:20		0:20
14	CW	Hotseat Vocabulary Game - Unit 5			0:20		0:20
15	CW	Hotseat Vocabulary Game - Review of Term 1			0:20		0:20
16	CW	Hangman Tournament - Review of Term 1			0:20		0:20
		Total Time	1:40	1:25	2:55	1:00	7:00*
		Percentage of Total	24%	20%	42%	14%	

Note. \* 4:30 class time; 3:30 homework

I completed this rough assessment retrospectively, and without direct student input. (Professor Nation's workshops, and this analysis exercise, occurred after the first semester had already finished, and before the second semester began. Therefore, there was no opportunity to ask students any questions.) The time spent on task for homework represents my best guess of student time investment, and the classwork times are based on my best recollection, rather than a precise log. Still, collecting time estimates was a useful reflective exercise. I was surprised to find that I had assigned so much homework, but this finding correlated with comments made on student evaluations.

Further, the distinctions made between the various stands required me to make a number of judgments. For example, part of the definition for the meaning-focused input strand is that the material

should be at the students' level. If the assessment had been planned at the beginning of the semester, it might have been possible to give students a vocabulary exam, assess the vocabulary level of the reading materials and draw a rough conclusion as to whether or not the task required students to perform at their level or slightly above (MFI) or well above their level (LFL). In the absence of such precise measurements, I decided that reading an article in the textbook about the explorer Lewis Pugh was MFI since the authors had simplified the text with the intention of making it more accessible. There was another activity in which students quizzed each other about Lewis Pugh using comprehension questions they had written themselves. I assessed this as partially MFI, partially MFO, and partially FD, (on the grounds that asking the same questions to four different partners provides repetition and, possibly, speed). On the other hand, I assessed a task in which students used a Wikipedia article to look up answers to a set of questions as LFL since this authentic English text was presumably written above the normal proficiency level of these lower-intermediate students, as was the TED talk itself. In planning the exercises, the intent had been to offer students a chance to use English to learn about "real-world" issues (as opposed to "textbook grammar," but reflection based on Professor Nation's four strands reveals these activities to be less "communicative" than intended. And in fact, even with a vocabulary and cloze worksheet to help support comprehension, students' dictionary usage was conspicuous during the class in which the TED talk was covered. The difficulty level forced them to focus on the language, not the meaning.

These assessments may have lacked precision, but they provided a useful framework for thinking about the previous semester's activities and for planning improvements. The picture that emerged from the assessment was that in the first semester I had unintentionally planned an overly large proportion of language focused activities, and disproportionately few fluency activities. When planning the first semester, I had had a vague concept that some of the activities would be "meaningful" to students. However, it turned out that some of the materials were above the students' proficiency level. Therefore, even if students eventually found the content interesting or relevant, the activities became less "communicative" than consciously language-focused (students spent significant amounts of time looking up unfamiliar vocabulary in their dictionaries). Looking back at the semester helped me understand that the difficulty level of the materials in relation to the students' proficiency levels changed the nature of the activity. The relative lack of fluency exercises is easier to explain — before attending Professor Nation's workshops, I was inadequately aware of the importance of repetition and speed work in language learning, and so it played little role in my planning for the first semester.

Based on this analysis, I decided to make two major adjustments to the plan for the second semester:



- (1) Place less reliance on “authentic source” reading materials, with the exception of TED talks that were necessary as prompts to some speaking activities. (Students seemed to enjoy some of these authentic source assignments, but I made them “extra credit” rather than “required” assignments.)
- (2) Add fluency exercises, in particular exercises to develop speaking fluency.

### ***Activity: Issue Logs***

One strategy mentioned by Professor Nation to foster speaking fluency is the use of issue logs in conjunction with 4-3-2 speaking activities. In issue logs, learners gather information about a topic of interest then talk about it with classmates. The expectation is that they gather this information outside of class, for example “from the television news, the Internet, from text books and from talking to people.” (Nation, 2013a) During class, they report this to classmates on a regular basis. After this has continued for some time, they also write a summary of what they have learned about the topic. Students “meet the same words and phrases that are closely related to the topic” and “because they have to regularly gather information, report on the information they have gathered and make both spoken and written presentations of this information, they can reach a high level of fluency within that topic area.” Some topics suggested by Professor Nation include: copyright on the Internet, the future of newspapers, government debt, Harry Potter, the weather, and Thailand.

Because the assessment of the first semester had indicated that students were already doing a significant amount of homework, an attempt was made to limit the writing burden. In this class, students were asked as homework to choose a topic to follow over the course of one textbook unit (approximately 3-4 classes, one per week) and to write 50 words per week. The goal of the homework was not so much to provide a writing exercise as to give students an opportunity to gather their thoughts in preparation for speaking during class. Students were given workbooks which included all of their homework assignments for a unit of the main text we were using; this workbook included a page for their issue log. At the end of the unit, there was a space for the students to write a summary of what they had learned overall about their topic.



## Workbook 7.1 – “Issue logs” - 2

- Pick a topic you like. Something you're really interested in.
- Read and write a little bit about that topic every week.
- Talk a little bit about that topic every week
- Become an expert at that topic
- You'll read faster, write faster and get good at talking about the topic.

**Some topics you might consider:**

- Your favorite actor, athlete or musician
- A country you like (e.g., Thailand?)
- English song lyrics  
(pick a new song each week)
- Video games      • Movies and TV shows
- Travel, fashion, your hobby ...
- ... anything you like

3/18/2017

Issue Log:  
My topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Week 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Week 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Week 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments (teacher used only):  
How do you like working? Is working a good or bad thing?

**Some topics I've used to study Japanese:**

囲碁      AKBの推しメン  
朝ドラ

Figure 2. Orientation slide for Issue Logs

At the beginning of each class, I checked students' workbooks — students who had completed their issue log received credit for that week. As the final activity of each week's class, students were placed in pairs and asked to share issue logs with each other, approximately 3 minutes per student. Then partners were changed carousel-style and the process repeated with less time allotted – about two minutes per student. Then partners were changed again with about 90 seconds per student. In some weeks, I kept time using a stopwatch. Other weeks, I just signaled the students to change when pairs had completed speaking. Even without formal timing, students completed their sharing more quickly in later iterations.

On the last day of a unit, students shared their summaries of what they had learned about their issue, and were encouraged to ask each other questions about their logs, including predictions about future developments: “Will there be another episode in your favorite TV show?” and “What do you think will happen next?” Students then received a new workbook, and were given the option of continuing to follow the same issue or changing to a different topic.

### Results and Observations

There were some initial difficulties in getting the project underway. In the second class of the term — the first class in which the students were expected to have prepared their issue logs — none of the students had selected a topic or written a summary. The concept of issue logs was explained using a slide in the first day of class, and their homework workbook included a space for them to write

their issue logs. But the space to write the issue log for all three weeks of the first unit was on a different page than for their other assignments for class #2. Further, the concept seemed unfamiliar to them — they had written journals for other classes, but had never done a topic-based issue log before, and they did not understand that they needed to choose a topic. The explanation given to them probably needed to be more explicit, and included in the workbook itself rather than just in a slide reviewed in class.

As remediation, students were given time in class to choose topics and prepare to write issue logs for the following class. It took several weeks of classes for students to internalize the concept of issue logs — in particular, that this was a speaking activity with a little bit of preparation rather than a writing assignment — but gradually they warmed to the activity. Repeating the same activity every week gave them familiarity with the mechanics, and very little prompting was required to get through the activity. Here are some of the issues students chose to pursue:

My Favorite Country: France

My Favorite Country: Italy

UN Cultural Heritage Sites

Movies I watched last week on Netflix

TV shows I watched last week on Netflix

Yesterday's dinner

Last week's shopping

Some of these topics were less “serious” than others, and I was initially concerned about whether or not they would be “educational” enough. For example, “Yesterday's dinner” would not require reading or listening to English language sources. These concerns turned out to be unfounded. “Yesterday's dinner” actually became a very engaging topic for discussion. The student who chose this topic had a voice that carried well, and the class was in the late afternoon. On several occasions, as she began describing what she had eaten the previous night, conversations in other pairs stopped and students began discussing food. On one occasion, this resulted in a spontaneous large group discussion of the merits of various conveyor belt sushi chains, and with the class offering me a recommendation for a particular chain. On another occasion, an entry about “mille-feuille-nabe” led to some back-and-forth after which I was able to learn that this type of hot pot was so named because it resembled a type of French pastry and the student learned that not all Japanese loan words come from English.

The more conscientious students working on more “serious” topics faced their own particular challenges in successfully navigating the task. These students faithfully researched and wrote about

their topics, but often just wrote what they had read without considering their audience, and in class were prone to just reading their log rather than describing to the partner what they learned. To address this, I added a “read and look up” rule – students were allowed to read from their issue log, but needed to cover the page and to make eye contact before speaking to their partner.

There were several students who came to class without writing their issue logs. In some cases, they scribbled something before class. In other cases, they didn’t finish by the time class started (even though this lowered their homework grade) but would still put something down quickly during other class exercises or just before the issue log discussion period. From the perspective of “displaying obedience,” this was less than ideal. However, from the perspective of getting fluency work they were doing a somewhat uncontrolled speed writing task which is highly aligned to the goal of fluency. Actually, one of these students consistently wrote longer issue logs (averaging 65-70 words) in these limited timeframes, with the content buoyed by her enthusiasm for her favorite music group (Green Day). Paradoxically, students who seemed to be taking a less than serious attitude to the homework may have been as much on task as their more apparently conscientious peers. This suggests that the reliance on homework for student evaluation may be misplaced. Perhaps some form of in-class speed writing based on optional notes might be more aligned with the goals of fostering fluency work.

An unexpected benefit of using issue logs was a perceived improvement in connection both between me and the students, and among students. After a week or so, it was easy for me to remember each students’ topic. This in turn made it easy for me to join a group and start a conversation with a question I knew the student was prepared to answer (“What was for dinner last night?” “What movie did you see this week?”) In addition to planning activities that balance the four strands, Professor Nation proposes that an important role for teachers is getting to know students, their names and their needs – issue logs unexpectedly provided a lever for doing this. I learned that three of the students had attended the same high school and had visited Tokyo Disneyland together; that the student whose favorite country was France had planned a trip there the previous summer but cancelled due to fears of terrorism; that two other students were planning a spring break trip to Korea. The class became more fun to teach.

Students likewise seemed to remember each other’s’ topics from week to week. Interestingly, when they had opportunities to change topics, they often used a topic that another student had been using, as if to say “that looked like fun – I want to try it!” Class cohesion was palpably better in second half of the second semester - cliques that had been apparent in the first semester broke down. It was clear they were listening to each other. As one student wrote about issue logs on the term-end evaluation “I learned the importance of communicating [with] each other and study[ing] English every day.”

In terms of the principle goal of adjusting the balance of class activities, adding issue logs seemed to result in a more balanced mix of activities among Professor Nation's four strands. I revisited the analysis of time on task using the last three classes of the second semester. In this breakdown, each strand accounts for 20–30% of total class time, more closely approximating equality among the four strands.

Table 2 *Time and Task Analysis for Homework (HW) and Classwork (CW), Semester 2*

#	HW/CW	Activity	MFI	MFO	LFL	FD	Total
1	HW, CW	Unit 12 Vocab & Grammar HW			0:20		0:20
2	CW	Listening: Comprehension Question dictation			0:10		0:10
3	CW	Listening: Dialog	0:15				0:15
4	HW	What if you win the lottery?		0:15			0:15
5	CW	Discussion: What if you win the lottery?	0:10	0:10		0:10	0:30
6	CW, HW	Issue Log		0:15		0:20	0:35
7	HW CW	Listen to Michael Norton TED talk & comprehension questions	0:15		0:30		0:45
8	HW	What if Michael Norton gives you money?	0:10				0:10
9	CW	Discussion: What if Michael Norton gives you money?	0:15	0:15		0:15	0:45
10	CW, HW	Issue Log		0:15		0:20	0:35
13	CW	Unit Test			0:20		0:20
14	CW, HW	Issue Log Summary		0:15		0:20	0:35
		Total Time	1:05	1:25	1:20	1:25	5:15*
		Percentage of Total	21%	27%	25%	27%	

Note. \* 3:35 class time; 1:40 homework

The same caveats apply as for the analysis of the first semester: the analysis is subjective, with the distinction between FD vs. MFO particularly subject to interpretation. For example, I decided that time spent preparing issue logs at home should be considered meaning-focused output, while sharing issue logs in class was fluency work, but the line between FD and MFO is very fine, and my assessment assumes that repeated descriptions to different students would build fluency. Still, even if some of the evaluations were changed, the results are congruent with my general sense that introducing issue logs created a class that was less focused on explicit attention to language features and more focused on using language to communicate.

### ***Future Opportunities for improvement***

First, my analysis of time on task and type of activity could be made more rigorous. It was useful for me to engage in self-reflection even in the highly subjective form used here, but in the future it might be possible to create a questionnaire that asks students, for example, how much time they spent on various homework assignments, how much they needed to use their dictionaries, and whether they felt able to speak faster and more comfortably after several iterations.

There are also several opportunities for better execution of issue logs in the classroom. Better instruction in the first class would help speed the process of getting the activity up and running early in the semester. It is probably desirable to give students time in the first class to start choosing topics by discussing possible topics in pairs or groups. Monitoring these discussions would give the teacher an opportunity to make sure the students understand the task. Better instructions up front might also encourage desired behaviors: “make sure you consider audience in writing your log”, and “explain what you learn in terms that your classmates will understand.” This might help students begin with a mindset that this is a speaking activity with some preparation, rather than a writing activity.

The original intent of the issue logs was to promote “spoken fluency,” but the log-writing activity led some students, especially at first, to treat issue logs as a formal writing exercise. Instead of writing a 50-word paragraph, perhaps the students could be told to think about their topic and possibly take notes but not to write a narrative. Then they could do speed writing in class, and then share the results with classmates, or simply speak from notes. This implies that the evaluation would need to rely less on homework completion, and more on some other factor (perhaps a workbook in which students record their logs and the highlights of their conversations with other students: a summary of reactions from other students, or notes on other students’ logs). The introduction of issue logs to the second half of this class felt like at least a qualified success; but I am eager to try it again with some of the changes.

## **Four Strands for Tourism class: Ataya Aoki**

### ***Introduction***

Professor Nation’s lecture on how to improve vocabulary learning in a language program was both insightful and practical. Nation did not restrict the content to “vocabulary learning”, but gave us an overview of how to plan a well-balanced course and how teaching vocabulary fits into a larger picture. The lecture was based on his concept of the four strands in language learning, as described in the first section of this article.

Professor Nation explained how to plan and improve a language program by using this concept. He

suggested twenty useful teaching techniques, some of which he demonstrated. His talk made me reflect on my teaching, and so I decided to use the four strands and other ideas introduced by Professor Nation to analyze the content of an English for Tourism class which I teach.

### ***English for Tourism Class***

In 2015, Miyagi Gakuin Women's University opened the English for Tourism Class as an elective subject for second year students in the Intercultural Studies Department, in response to the Japanese government's current direction to increase foreign visitors to Japan. At the time of writing this article, 16 students are enrolled in this course. Their reasons for study vary: Some want to travel overseas on their own, while others want to get a job in the tourism industry. The class meets once a week for 90 minutes

As stated in the syllabus, the objective of this course is to familiarize students with English language used in international travel and in the tourism business. The aim is for students to gain an understanding of operations and procedures within the tourism industry, and to learn and practice the language from the viewpoints of both a traveler and a professional in the areas of travel, airline and hotel. After finishing the course, students are expected to be able to arrange overseas trips as individuals and have the basic language skills needed for working in the tourism industry.

The textbook used for the class is *Travel English for Tourism Industry Professionals* (Fujita, 2012). Following the structure of the textbook, the course places emphasis on developing students' listening and speaking fluency, as well as giving attention to reading comprehension. Writing is not taught explicitly. The only writing required is for the students to write dialogues and answers to the questions asked in each unit.

### ***Student's Vocabulary Size***

In his lectures, Professor Nation discussed the importance of measuring the size of a student's vocabulary. In order to plan a sensible language course, we need to know what vocabulary students know, what they do not know, and what they should know to achieve a certain goal. For example, to read novels written for teenagers, to watch movies, and to participate in informal conversations, learners need a receptive knowledge of around 6,000 word families. To read newspapers, novels, or to deal with more complex spoken and written texts, they need to know approximately 8,000 word families (Nation, 2012). Native speakers generally have a working knowledge of 20,000 words. Once we identify the gaps in a student's knowledge, we can plan to a course of instruction by teaching words in the order of those most frequently used.



Nation's (2013a) research divided word families into three main levels: A high-frequency vocabulary of around 2,000 words, a mid-frequency vocabulary of an additional 7,000 words, and a low-frequency vocabulary of at least another 10,000 words. The first 2,000 words cover nearly 80 % of any text.

I did not have an opportunity to measure the vocabulary size of students in my class. However, according to McLean, Hogg, and Kramer (2014) whose study measured the vocabulary size of 3,449 Japanese university students from various universities, first year university students in Japan have a knowledge of 3,715 word families. According to Nation (2013b), learners who have a word family score in the range of 3,000-9,000 are capable mid-frequency readers and able to undertake deliberate learning.

Learners need to encounter words and phrases multiple times before those words and phrases become part of their vocabulary repertoire. Therefore, reading books in which the syntax and lexis are simplified to match the level of the learner (Extensive Reading) is highly recommended. Although this is a sensible idea, English for Tourism, like other courses categorized as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), faces two challenges in this regard. First, graded readers designed specifically for this purpose are largely unavailable. Second, regardless of their vocabulary size, a learner will probably have to deal with authentic texts when travelling. For example, they will need to fill out arrival cards and customs declaration forms, and will need to comprehend inflight and airport announcements. Therefore, teaching vocabulary in the order of its frequency of use is a difficult principle to apply in this course because it doesn't match the real world experience these students will face.

### ***Analysis***

My class generally follows the content in the textbook, which has 12 lessons. One lesson takes approximately two class meetings (two weeks) and each class meeting is 90 minutes long. The first half of the lesson (Week 1) covers preview, warm-up activity, listening and dialogue study. The latter half (Week 2) usually covers pair practice, role play, and two topic readings. Classes are conducted in English with Japanese explanation when necessary.

To assess how the learning in my class was distributed based on Nation's concept of the four strands, I totaled the time spent for each type of learning then calculated their proportions. Tables 3 & 4 below illustrate the time spent on each activity and the type of learning by strand in a typical two-week period. Numbers in parentheses are the approximate length of time that English learning was considered to have taken place. Time spent using Japanese (e.g. student discussions in their native language, teacher supplying explanations in Japanese) as well as time spent on general classroom

tasks (e.g., cleaning the whiteboard, distributing handouts) was excluded from this calculation.

Table 3 *Week 1 Time spent on each activity and type of strand in the first half of the lesson*

Activities	Description	Approximate Time spent (Minutes)	
Introduction	I lead into the topic by giving preliminary information. The explanation is in English with some Japanese to aid understanding. [MFI (7)]	10	MFI (7)
Warm-up Activities	Students do a textbook warm-up exercise individually (reading and answering questions). [MFI (1.5), MFO (1.5)]. They discuss answers in groups (often in Japanese). Then I elicit answers by having each group write on the whiteboard or report orally [MFI (2), MFO (2)].	8	MFI (3.5) MFO (3.5)
Teacher's Explanation	I provide model answers to the questions, and provide explanation in simple English. [MFI(5)]	8	MFI (5)
Vocabulary and Expressions	Before listening to the CD, I list the new words & expressions that students will hear to help their comprehension. [LFL (10)]	10	LFL (10)
Listening	Students listen to the dialogue twice and answer the questions in their textbook. If necessary, I play the CD a third time and allow them to read along with the dialogue in the book [MFI (10), MFO (3)]. Next, group members compare their answers with each other (usually in Japanese).	15	MFI (10) MFO (3)
Elicit Answer	Each group writes their answers on the whiteboard or a big piece of paper and puts it up on the board. [MFO(5)]	5	MFO (5)
Dialogue Study	I lead the class in reading through the dialogue together, point out where the answers are in the dialogue, comment on the answers that they put on the whiteboard, and give scores for the correct answers. [LFL (13)]	15	LFL (13)
Pair Practice	Students practice the whole dialogue and key expressions in pairs. [FD (16)]	16	FD (16)
Homework	I give homework (explaining in English).	3	
Total		90	

Table 4 *Week 2 Time spent on each activity and type of strand in the second half of the lesson*

Review	Cloze Listening Test: Students listen to last week's dialogue and fill in missing words. Students mark their own work. [LFL(8)]	8	LFL (8)
Role Play Practice	Students read the scenario and the given information [MFI (3)] Students write a dialogue [MFO (8)], and do a role play with their partner. [FD (7)]	18	MFI (3) MFO (8) FD (7)
Sample Dialogue	I show a sample dialogue on a slide. Students read aloud to themselves [MFI (1.5)] and practice the dialogue with a partner [FD (2.5)]. I gradually remove some words from the dialogue, and students fill in the blanks mentally as they practice the conversation. [FD (7)]	11	MFI (1.5) FD (9.5)
Reading 1	Students do intensive reading of a short passage. [LFL (7)] and answer questions in the textbook. [MFO (5)]. They discuss answers in groups (usually in Japanese). Each group writes their answer on the whiteboard. [MFO (5)] I explain the meaning and reveal the answers, then give points to the correct answers. [LFL (8)]	25	LFL (7) MFO (10) LFL (8)
Reading 2	Same as Reading 1	25	LFL (7) MFO (10) LFL (8)
Homework	I give homework (explaining in English)	3	
Total		90	

Table 5 *Proportion of Four Strands of Learning per one lesson (2 class meetings)*

	Week 1 Minutes	Week 2 minutes	Time spent for each strand of learning per one lesson (minutes)	Percentage (%)	Percentage points more/less than the ideal of 25%
MFI	25.5	4.5	30	18.4%	-6.6 %
MFO	11.5	28	39.5	24.2%	-0.8 %
LFL	23	38	61	37.4%	12.4%
FD	16	16.5	32.5	20%	-5 %
	76	87	163	100%	

Assuming an ideal proportion of 25% for each strand of learning, the figures above show an unequal distribution. MFI and FD are respectively 6.6 and 5 percentage points less than the ideal proportion, and LFL is 12.4% more than the ideal. What are the reasons for this unequal distribution and how can this be improved?

### ***Reflections***

In my English for Travel class, MFI takes place through the reading of several short sentences in a warm up exercise, through reading a scenario in role play practice, and through reading a sample dialogue. MFI also occurs through listening to teacher explanations and to dialogues in a textbook CD. To increase the volume of meaningful input, I could read aloud the passages from Topic Reading sections that students have already studied and understood. Students could listen to what I read with their books closed, then answer questions. This would extend the MFI range by making use of the same material in a different form. In other words, the reading activity could be re-used as a listening activity in order to increase the volume of input.

As for reading, it is more practical to do outside class. While there are no graded readers available for this particular field of English, I can assign students to read online topics related to tourism and travel from sources such as “Simple English Wikipedia” as a substitute for Extensive Reading (ER). Because these topics are not long, I can also assign them to copy a topic by hand to be submitted each week. This will lead to increased FD at the same time.

LFL – which has the highest proportion of time spent – occurs in two areas of the lesson. First, in ‘Dialogue study’, new vocabulary is explained prior to ‘Listening’ and answers to comprehension questions are revealed after listening to the dialogue. Second, in ‘Topic readings 1 and 2’ a great amount of time is devoted to explanation and translation of the texts. To improve this area, I need to cut down on the time spent on explanation by, for example, assigning students to read the texts and prepare for the lesson before coming to class. Time in class can be spent checking student comprehension, doing activities that generate student output, or developing their language fluency.

Nation (1996) suggests ‘reader generated questions’ as one technique for repurposing an LFL activity as MFO. Students devise questions based on the texts they have just studied and put those questions to other students in class. To do this, they will have to read the studied texts several times (providing FD) and write or say the questions then give the answers (providing MFO). The FD strand, which is a somewhat under-represented in terms of time spent learning, can be improved by introducing a variety of pair-practice styles and by making students change their partners often, instead of just practicing with the same partner. Students will get additional practice by drilling on the same materials with different people.

Nation insightfully remarks that essentially, vocabulary learning depends on the number of meetings with each word and the quality of attention at each meeting. The more meetings, the more likely learning is to occur (Nation, 2015). Many studies agree that concepts are learned best when they are encountered in a variety of contexts and expressed in a variety of ways. However, I find that many

textbooks do not repeat the new words introduced in a lesson with sufficient frequency to create multiple encounters of the same language items within the lesson. To solve the problem, perhaps ‘linked skills activities’ as suggested by Professor Nation can be applied.

Linked skills involve working with the related content using different skills, for example reading a passage, then listening to the passage, and then writing about the passage. As they focus on the same material multiple times, students repeat what they have learned using different skills. Through this process of repetition, the language items take on greater meaning and language acquisition takes place. The four skills include listening, speaking, reading, and writing, three of which should occur in each lesson.

The structure of linked skills activities can serve as a guide in creating a lesson balancing the MFI, MFO, LFL and FD strands. When the textbook does not provide linked activities, then it is the teacher’s job to create them. For my lesson, I have proposed some as shown in the chart.

Table 6 *Linked skills activities for a class of English for Tourism*

	First activity	Second activity	Third activity	Fourth activity
1	<b>Read</b> Read the passage.	<b>Listen</b> Listen to the questions and answer teachers’ questions.	<b>Write</b> Write the answers to the teacher’s questions. Create questions & answers from the passage. Summarize the text.	<b>Speak</b> Read the questions and share the answers with a partner. Present a summary of the text to a partner.
2	<b>Listen</b> Listen to a dialogue several times.	<b>Write</b> Write what you remember about the conversation. If it is too difficult, listen again and fill in the blanks. Or look at a Japanese version of a dialogue and write a dialogue in English.	<b>Read</b> Read the dialogue aloud. Give dictation of the dialogue to your partner.	<b>Speak</b> Role-play the dialogue. Apply the dialogue in different situation using different information.
3	<b>Write</b> Think of a dialogue for a certain situation in Japanese. Then write the same content in English.	<b>Read</b> Read a sample dialogue and study unfamiliar words/expressions. Read aloud a sample dialogue to yourselves. Read a dialogue aloud for your partner to write (dictation).	<b>Listen</b> Listen to the dialogue and answer the questions.	<b>Speak</b> Role-play the dialogue. Apply the dialogue in a different situation using different information.

### ***Conclusion***

Calculating the proportion of Nation's four strands has helped me gain a broader perspective on the class I have been teaching. In the past, I have followed the textbook's activities and instruction without much alteration, and could not help feeling that the content of the textbook was controlling the learning activity. Although I sometimes introduced additional activities to aid learning in my lessons, I was not able to determine whether the course was well-balanced until I measured time spent on activities in class and compared that distribution with the ideal proportion of the four strands. It is sensible for every teacher to regularly monitor these four strands of learning in their classes. Knowledge of a wide range of techniques can help a teacher make changes to a textbook-governed activity and create a balance among the strands. In my own case, applying the principle of the four strands has helped me answer the questions: Is my course well-balanced? If not, how can I improve it?

### **Learning Multiword Units: Harumi Kimura**

#### ***What I learned in the workshops***

Multiword units, also known as formulaic language, prefabricated language, collocation, lexical bundles, phrasal expressions, and routine formulas, among others, play a significant role in our language use. They make language processing efficient and effective because they help ease the cognitive load of language processing for both reception and production (e.g., Nation 2013a, 2013b). In general, vocabulary items have a tendency to occur in multiword units, rather than in isolation (Schmitt, 2012). If language learning is vocabulary learning as Professor Nation put it, then language learning is, at least partly, learning how language items come together and function to serve our everyday communicative needs.

Functions of multiword units vary, but most importantly, from the point of view of SLA, they help facilitate fluency by shortening the processing route of speech by bypassing the need for putting components together (Wood, 2006). Fluency activities are most likely to develop collocational knowledge, because of the spontaneous need to restructure meaning to increase fluency. As spoken activities have greater repetition of collocations, such types of activities would be most favorable (Nation, 2016, seminar talk). However, Professor Nation added, large quantities of input would be needed for learning to occur.

#### ***Gaps in the literature***

Practically speaking, it is difficult if not impossible to achieve large quantities of input in EFL environments. Webb, et al. (2013) have found that learners need as many as 15 encounters for learn-

ing collocation through extensive reading and listening. Thus, classroom teachers may want to look for some compensatory techniques to motivate learners to learn and use multiword units. One approach to creating conditions for learning is self-transcription (e.g., Lynch, 2001, 2007). Learners transcribe their own speech production for individual or collaborative reflection, and in some cases, for task repetition as well. Lynch demonstrated that this post-task intervention made learners notice gaps in their knowledge and/or analyze their speech performance so that they could correct errors and make improvements in subsequent speech production. As far as I know, however, past studies on self-transcription have been conducted mostly to examine focus on form (e.g., Mennium, 2003) and have investigated L2 development in terms of fluency, accuracy, and complexity (e.g., Stillwell, Curabba, Alexander, Kidd, Kim, Stone, and Wyle, 2010); thus, little attention has been paid to learning lexical items, including multiword units.

Past studies on self-transcription often, if not always, involve task repetition, which has been found effective in bringing about structural and lexical gains. For example, Bygate (1996) found positive changes in learner language in repeating the same story. In his study, learners used more correct inflected verb forms and more lexical verbs as opposed to copula verbs, thus demonstrating both morphosyntactic and lexical improvement. Lynch and Maclean (2001) also investigated immediate task repetition and found that learners improved in grammar, pronunciation, and accurate use of vocabulary and concluded that learners were able to monitor their language when repeating the same task. However, learning collocation through task repetition has not been specifically investigated.

A study is needed to determine if self-transcription in conjunction with task repetition leads to gains in terms of multiword units. Based on the studies reviewed in the above discussion, I hypothesize that (a) story retelling tasks are effective in learning multiword units, and (b) self-transcription promotes and facilitates the learning process. As far as I know, no attempt has been made to investigate the combination of self-transcription and task repetition in a narrative task for learning/teaching multiword units. I conducted a small-scale pilot study to explore (a) a design for an empirical study to investigate the effects of learning multiword units by means of the combination of self-transcription and task repetition in a fluency development task; and (b) a classroom procedure for better learning/teaching of multiword units with both self-transcription and task repetition to investigate the potential.

### **Activity**

Eight female university students ( $M_{\text{age}} = 21.3$  years, age range: 19–22) voluntarily joined a retelling task based on a picture storybook. The story is titled *Tadpole's Promise* (Willis & Ross, 2003). It is a picture book consisting of 388 words and 15 drawings besides a cover page. Ten multiword units

were identified based on five criteria (See Woods, 2006, for details): *shiny black* (5), *break one's promise* (4), *I couldn't help it* (2), *keep one's promise* (1), *break one's heart* (1), *each other* (1), *fall in love* (1), *gaze into* (1), *give somebody a chance* (1), and *look for* (1) in the order of frequency. Times of appearance are in parentheses.

The 40-minute classroom procedure was as follows:

- (1) Students listen to the story read aloud by a teacher, leaving out the surprising ending of the story.
- (2) Students, in groups, make a guess about how the story ends and share their thoughts.
- (3) Students listen to the story read aloud a second time, this time through the end.
- (4) Students are given a two-minute planning time for retelling the story.
- (5) Students pair off to tell and listen to the retelling, two minutes each. They record their retelling performance on a digital voice recorder.
- (6) Students transcribe their storytelling.
- (7) After transcribing, students listen to the story again. They can take notes for expressions, if they want.
- (8) Students tell and listen to the retelling in a pair a second time. They change the order of telling and listening. They record their retelling performance.
- (9) Students transcribe their second retelling.

Please note that no word or multiword unit was explicitly taught. All words and multiword units were embedded in the story being read and learners watched page after page, turned by the reader, just as read aloud usually proceeds. However, while listening to the second read aloud, students took notes.

### **Results and Observation**

Table 7 demonstrates the word counts of learners' storytelling and their use of multiword units. Seven out of eight learners spoke more and half the students used more multiword units the second time than the first time. It appears as though overall, task repetition with self-transcription has the potential to be an effective classroom practice for incidental learning of multiword units.



Table 7 *Word Counts and Use of Multiword Units in the Two Storytelling Performances*

Learner	Word count 1	Word count 2	Use of multiword units 1: types (token)	Use of multiword units 2: types (token)
1	87	118	3(3)	5(6)
2	66	79	3(3)	4(4)
3	69	89	2(2)	4(4)
4	67	64	2(3)	2(2)
5	55	62	3(4)	2(2)
6	43	45	1(1)	1(1)
7	15	40	0(0)	0(0)

Among the most frequent multiword units, *fall in love* was the most common, used by seven learners, followed by *break one's promise* and *shiny black* used by five. On the other hand, *keep one's promise* and *I couldn't help it* were never used. The results were likely influenced by a variety of factors. First, the ten multiword units were of different frequency and difficulty. Second, some units were essential to the storyline, while others were not as important. Third, some units were more phonologically salient than others. Thus, I can only speculate why some were used more frequently than others.

Although *fall in love* and *break one's promise* were quite different in frequency of occurrence in the story—once and four times respectively—they were used by five of the learners probably because these words were essential in narrating the story. It was surprising that although *shiny black* was not crucial for telling the development of the story, five learners used it. The caterpillar lovingly called her sweetheart “a shiny black pearl.” Although learners could have called him the tadpole, five learners used *shiny black* (pearl) in their storytelling; thus, frequent encounters might have helped learning the phrase for actual use.

Learners did not use, or avoided using, *keep one's promise*. The phrase was used in the story in a negative sentence, “The tadpole did not keep his promise,” and only once. It is apparent that learners used *break one's promise*, which was used four times in the story instead of using *keep one's promise* in the negative as in the story. In the case of *I couldn't help it*, the reason might be (a) the phrase is difficult with *help* not being used for its core meaning, (b) it is not essential for the purpose of narrating the story, or (c) it is not phonologically salient with phrases connected in speech.

It is intriguing that those learners who could produce more words in the storytelling tended to increase their use of target multiword units. The data is too small to do any statistically sound comparisons, but learners might need some threshold level of language skills or L2 learning strategies to learn multiword units incidentally or while engaging in a fluency activity. Thus, explicit teaching might be a “way to go” for less skillful or experienced learners to gain and consolidate knowledge of

multiword units. This is just a speculation again, but the possibility needs to be explored in empirical studies.

It is worth mentioning that although this study is about learners' use of the ten target multiword units, six out of seven learners talked more in the second telling than the first, in more detail, in a more sophisticated language, and/or with better strategic storytelling. Additionally, some learners used multiword units that were not in the original story, such as *change into* and *grow up*. It is beyond this paper to analyze the students' storytelling further or examine the ways the content and language in the storytelling have improved or have not improved, but even the learner who produced the least amount of language (Learner 8) produced more than twice the amount in the second telling. It is also notable that the learner who reduced the number of words and the use of multiword units in the second telling (Learner 4), crafted her story with directed speech such as "Please don't change!" and "I still love you" in her second telling. It appears as though the learner acted out the story with the use of directed speech, which is more time-consuming than narrating the story. It is safe to say that the learner elaborated her storytelling performance, although word counts alone could not demonstrate the elaboration. Learner language should be investigated both in terms of specific aspects as well as holistically for better understanding of individual differences in language development.

### ***Suggestions for Future Empirical Studies***

To investigate the incidental learning of multiword units in an empirical study, I would form two groups according to overall English proficiency and examine the differences on the use of multiword units. To investigate a possible threshold for incidental vocabulary learning, I would also like to examine the notes participants take between the two storytelling versions to explore the relation between their notes and the second storytelling. This information would be informative in investigating learners' attention, intake, and output. It would be indispensable to give pre-, post-, and delayed post-tests to examine the previous knowledge and the actual long-term gains. Learners' production is better investigated in terms of idea units, for example, to examine the link between the content richness and the use of multiword units. Furthermore, think-aloud protocol would be informative in exploring what was going on in the learner's mind in the retelling activity. Semi-structured interviews would also help to explore why the learner was able to use certain multiword units, but did not use others. In the abovementioned study, I put all of the multiword units together, but there are different types of units depending on the criterion to use—i.e., in terms of form, meaning, function, and storage (Nation, 2013a). In a full empirical study, it might be better to start with defining and classifying the units, because we may learn different types of multiword units in different ways.

### *Ideas for Classroom Activities*

This study investigated the incidental learning of multiword units in a fluency development activity—i.e., task repetition. However, there is no harm in explicitly teaching multiword units in addition to single lexical items. Teachers may want to prepare a word list of expressions to teach in advance. I would use two different lists: one for single lexical items and the other for multiword units. The following is how to use a list for lexical items (See Table 8 for the list of multiword units).

1. Learners fill in a **Do you know?** and a **Meaning you know** sections before they listen to the story. In the **Do you know?** section, they draw a circle if they know the word and write the meaning in their L1 in the next **Meaning you know** section. If they are not sure but have a vague idea, they put a triangle in the **Do you know?** section and write the guessed meaning in the **Meaning you know** section. If they do not know the item, they put a cross.
2. After they have listened to the story, they fill in the next **Did you hear?** and **Meaning you guessed** sections. Learners would be able to draw more circles and write more meanings.
3. Learners learn the meaning and write it in the last column, **Meaning you learned**.

The other list of multiword units (Table 8) should be provided at some other point, possibly after the first transcribing, so that learners can see gaps in their language repertoire and use some of them in their second storytelling. This list could be used just like the word list. If given together with the word list, it may cause information overload; thus, I would prefer to give the two in different steps.

Considering that multiword units play a significant role in using and learning languages, teachers need to explore both explicit and implicit ways of teaching them, taking a systematic approach so that learners can get the best return for their efforts.

Table 8 *Example List of Multiword Units*

Multiword units	Do you know?	Meaning you know	Did you hear?	Meaning you guessed	Meaning you learned
gaze into					
each other					
fall in love					
shiny black					
keep one's promise					
break one's promise					
I can't help it					
give somebody a chance					
break one's heart					
look for					

## Final Remarks

One of the requirements of action research is a theory on which to base reflection, experimental action and further reflection (Pine, 2008). It is a tribute to the breadth of Professor Nation's thought that such a wide diversity of studies could be inspired by his three-hour seminar in September 2016. On the one hand, Professor Nation's concept of "the four strands" provides the basis for large-scale thinking about the balance of activities in a successful classroom. Professor Nation began his presentation with a description of this theory and it spurred Ataya Aoki and Steve Bretherick to re-evaluate their classroom planning. But Professor Nation's work is also highly concrete and detailed—his presentation of the four strands is illustrated by 20 specific, concisely described classroom activities (issue logs are one of these 20). Nowhere is the depth of his thinking more apparent than in his treatment of the teaching of vocabulary, where he is both a leading researcher and an expert practitioner. His thought-provoking discussion led to Harumi Kimura's examination of how to think about, and how to teach multi-word units in Japanese classroom contexts.

Action research is recursive in nature. Teachers plan action based on reflections, observe their actions, and identify further opportunities for improvement—which in turn become the basis for further research. The research never really ends and any documentation of the research is by definition an interim report. Each of the three reports in this article concludes with proposals for future action. A great teacher makes a continuing impact on his or her students, and this case is no different. The inspiration from Professor Nation's visit will continue to affect the authors' classroom practice for many years to come.

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## **How to Improve Vocabulary Learning in a Language Classroom: Collection of Action Research Studies 2017**

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### **Abstract**

This is a collection of action research studies for the purpose of improving vocabulary learning in a language classroom. Miyagi Gakuin Women's University invited Paul Nation, Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, to the second Multilingual Workshops on September 10, 2016. He promoted his ideas about a balanced approach toward vocabulary learning. Three of the participants individually conducted action research in their teaching in the second semester in 2016 and report here how they have implemented Professor Nation's ideas and how they will further improve their teaching based on their classroom-based data. Steve Bretherick explores the use of issue logs and developing speaking fluency, Ataya Aoki investigates four strands in an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) class and linked skills activities, and Harumi Kimura discusses learning multiword units incidentally in fluency development activities.