

Schmitt, N., & Schmitt, D. (2020). Vocabulary in language teaching (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press

Mastoor Al Kaboody

Volume 26, Number 1, Winter 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1105775ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37213/cjal.2023.32705>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1920-1818 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Al Kaboody, M. (2023). Review of [Schmitt, N., & Schmitt, D. (2020). Vocabulary in language teaching (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press]. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics / Revue canadienne de linguistique appliquée*, 26(1), 115–117. <https://doi.org/10.37213/cjal.2023.32705>

© Mastoor Al Kaboody, 2023



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Schmitt, N., & Schmitt, D. (2020). *Vocabulary in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Reviewer: Mastoor Al Kaboody, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

Vocabulary is one of the most popular topics in second language (L2) research, with most of the scholarly activities occurring in the past 20 years. Despite the plethora of published studies, few scholars have made the research as accessible to practitioners as Norbert and Dianne Schmitt have. Drawing on years of hands-on experiences and research in the field, the second edition of *Vocabulary in Language Teaching* is again a valuable contribution. The authors provide a comprehensive overview of the topic which enables teachers to make informed choices about what is important in vocabulary teaching and learning. Among the book's prominent themes, connections are drawn between empirical research, theory, the nature of lexical development and the learner's lexical network, classroom practice, and the central role of vocabulary in L2 instruction. These major themes pervade the nine sections, and pedagogical applications are suggested at the end of each chapter.

This volume comprises nine chapters, each contributing to a deeper understanding of vocabulary acquisition, instruction, and assessment. Chapter 1 serves as a general explanation of what is meant by the term *vocabulary*. It addresses the challenge of attempting to fully conceptualize the term and the different ways that "word" can be operationalized as a counting unit in the literature. The authors also discuss research findings as they pertain to determining the number of lexical items that an English language learner would need to be a proficient user of the language.

Chapter 2 presents a historical overview of L2 vocabulary instruction. The discussion ranges from the Romans to the current era, which serves to situate modern day vocabulary instruction by describing what has led it to its current state. The authors, for example, describe methods that have fallen out of favor to emphasize the need for more vocabulary-based instruction in L2 teaching.

In Chapter 3, the authors describe vocabulary knowledge as a series of levels of learning that fall on a continuum. They offer an in-depth discussion of the multidimensionality and complexity of word knowledge. They discuss the components of lexical knowledge as including the spoken form, written form, part of speech, derivative forms, grammatical patterns, collocations, frequency, register, and as a semantic network of associations. Vocabulary acquisition is thus described as long-term process, and extensive recycling is required to master the different stages and facets of word knowledge.

This second edition provides an in-depth argument for the advantages of corpora and corpus-based evidence. Chapter 4 describes how advances in corpus-linguistic methodology have led to the development of novel word-frequency lists, and new information on collocations and formulaic language. The authors argue that intuition-based supposition in vocabulary research in the past are now confirmable through analysis of large and representative text corpora by using widely available and user-friendly corpus-analytical software. Chapter 5 continues this discussion of corpora with a specific focus on wordlists. The authors discuss how vocabulary occurs in different domains of use and performs different functions in texts. High-frequency words, academic words, technical words, and low-frequency words are presented as major categories that play different roles in learners' communicative needs.

The content of Chapter 6, which is also new in this second edition, is dedicated to incidental vocabulary learning. This chapter reinforces the idea that incidental learning via extensive reading may lead to a meaningful amount of learning provided it is done consistently over time. The authors also mention how listening and audiovisual media, including video games, can also lead to incidental vocabulary learning.

While vocabulary gains can accrue from incidental learning, they also often require a different approach that marshals explicit attention to learning specific lexical items. In Chapter 7, Schmitt and Schmitt argue that intentional learning is valuable, especially when it is associated with specific goals, as this leads to greater and faster gains. The authors make a clear distinction between incidental and intentional vocabulary learning, as the former focuses on learning words without the intention of doing so while the latter refers to the explicit focus on vocabulary learning through setting specific goals to teach it.

In Chapter 8, the authors turn their attention to vocabulary in the curriculum. They engage their readers with an in-depth discussion on the importance of integrating vocabulary into the overall curriculum rather than treating it as a stand-alone and separate component. They maintain that as word knowledge is an incremental process, recycling partially known vocabulary in textbooks and classroom activities is an important process to help learners add to previously existing knowledge of L2 words. In addition, the authors stress the importance of building vocabulary into 4-skill activities as a way of introducing new words and enhancing partially known lexical items.

Vocabulary assessment is introduced in Chapter 9. The authors discuss the purpose of assessment (e.g., tests) and move on to propose ways teachers might use and interpret test results. For instance, an analysis of test items could give teachers a better understanding of what inferences can be made about the learners' underlying lexical knowledge. The authors offer a systematic process for the selection and development of a well-designed vocabulary test. The chapter concludes with a framework for evaluating which lexical aspects to focus on in vocabulary tests and for analyzing the general attributes of a test.

The book is written primarily for language teachers and teacher trainees. As such, the central contribution of the book is its clear synthesis of complex literature and the way it grounds its discussion firmly in real word pedagogical concerns. Overall, Schmitt and Schmitt make a convincing case for a reassessment of the role of vocabulary in language teaching. Drawing from L1 and L2 research, the authors provide some useful criteria to help language teachers determine which words to teach, when and how to teach them, and how to best assess vocabulary knowledge. Throughout the nine chapters, the text's style is inviting rather than obscuring; reading the book feels like reading a story. The book is a useful resource for researchers and graduate students as well. Although the authors discuss vocabulary research and its relevance to classroom practice, there is less attention paid to explicit discussion of trends and/or suggestions for areas of further research on L2 vocabulary. Therefore, if used in a graduate-level seminar, Schmitt's (2010) *Researching Vocabulary* would make a good companion book that would curate numerous empirical studies.

In conclusion, this text is a noteworthy contribution to the field as it achieves the goal of guiding language teachers to make well-informed choices in vocabulary instruction and assessment. The book will engage a wide readership of those interested in L2 vocabulary. Any individual who teaches vocabulary or is simply curious to learn more about it will find this text to be a useful guide.

References

Schmitt, N. (2010). *Researching vocabulary: A vocabulary research manual*. Palgrave Macmillan.