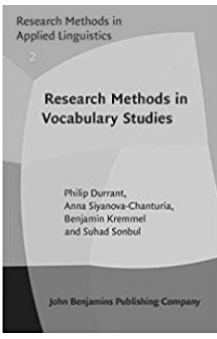


Research Methods in Vocabulary Studies

May 2023 – Volume 27, Number 1

<https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.27105r4>

Research Methods in Vocabulary Studies		
Authors:	Philip Durrant, Anna Siyanova-Chanturia, Benjamin Kremmel, & Suhad Sonbul (2022)	
Publisher:	John Benjamins	
Pages	ISBN-13	Price
Pp. X + 325	978-9027211088 (hardcover)	\$54.00 U.S.



Vocabulary development is a cornerstone in second language acquisition, without which communication is almost impossible. Vocabulary is by nature a dynamic and complex phenomenon. It is dynamic in the sense that it is marked by constant development in learners. It is also complex because it consists of a multitude of components and sub-components. Knowing about the most recent findings in vocabulary, especially from research and learning perspectives, is essential for researchers interested in the vocabulary domain of language as well as for teachers if they wish to function efficiently in their profession. Research that deals with vocabulary from both theoretical and practical angles is, however, limited. Being cognizant of this gap, Philip Durrant, Anna Siyanova-Chanturia, Benjamin Kremmel, and Suhad Sonbul, who are among the leading figures in vocabulary research released “*Research Methods in Vocabulary Studies*” to provide insightful information to readers on theories and research practices of vocabulary.

This book consists of 18 chapters including an introduction, conclusion, and four topical sections. Each section focuses on a specific area of vocabulary research and contains four chapters based on a fixed structure: 1) key theoretical issues, 2) underlying research topics, 3) research tools and methods, and 4) case studies. This set structure allows the reader to better grasp the scope and context of each area of vocabulary research.

Following an introduction defining common terms in vocabulary such as vocabulary breadth/depth, receptive/productive vocabulary, automaticity, and frequency, the first section of the book focuses on corpus linguistics. Chapter two explains the role of corpus linguistics in applied linguistics, explaining how corpus linguistics can address vocabulary issues, including context-specific words, language development, and materials evaluation. Chapter three discusses key theoretical issues of corpus linguistics, especially corpus representativeness by referring to important factors such as balance (different categories and subcategories of vocabulary) and metadata (information concerning contents of corpora). Having argued that corpora data are typically analyzed either quantitatively (in the form of frequency lists) or qualitatively (analyzing word use in contexts mostly via concordance) in chapter four, chapter five highlights some key issues for further research on corpus linguistics.

The second section of the book examines vocabulary from a psycholinguistics angle. In chapter six, the authors elaborate on how psycholinguistics might be used to explore vocabulary-pertinent issues, such as online/offline measurement and processing. Chapter seven delineates fundamental topics, such as sample size, experimental design, and data analysis associated with vocabulary. Three main data collection tools in psycholinguistics, that is, eye movement, reaction time, and event-related brain potentials and also spoken language production methods (such as picture naming) and written language production ones (such as keylogging records) are then discussed in chapter eight. Finally, in chapter nine, previously conducted psycholinguistic studies on phrase frequency and language production are discussed.

In section three, the authors cover vocabulary measurement and assessment. Chapter ten argues that vocabulary measurement should be done meticulously and reliably by carefully defining the construct of lexical competence. Chapter eleven then illuminates key testing issues, namely, reliability, validity, and practicality.. Chapter twelve then considers methods for analyzing test data in the traditions of classical test theory and item response theory. In chapter thirteen, the authors discuss test item formats, cognates, and sampling ratios in vocabulary research and provide a case study to illustrate these topics in practice.

The last section of the book takes a more pedagogical stance by exploring vocabulary teaching and learning. Chapter fourteen foregrounds the complexity of vocabulary to state that no single approach or method can explain the complexity of vocabulary. Chapter fifteen raises common concerns regarding sampling, item selection, and task development, with an emphasis on the point that all the above-mentioned concerns are relative and there is no correct/wrong answer to them. In chapter sixteen, recent advances on experimental, correlational, computational, and case studies are outlined. The chapter helpfully illustrates how each of these designs might be used for researching vocabulary. Chapter seventeen practically elaborates on three new areas of vocabulary research: vocabulary learning from audio/visual modes, explicit vocabulary exercises, and vocabulary development tracking. In part six of the book, consisting of one chapter, the authors highlight the interconnectivity of the previous areas.

The book has both strong and weak points. As with its advantages, it covers four critical areas in vocabulary research: corpus linguistics, psycholinguistics, measurement, and teaching/learning. Further, the book has bridged the past, present, and future of vocabulary in each area successfully by providing a clear elaboration on where different topics of vocabulary started to be researched, what we know about them now, and how they need to be researched in the future. The other merit of the book is that it connects theory to practice very well by referring to previously-published articles that have practically applied the depicted theoretical

concepts and issues. It can help young researchers to better grasp the explained issues in the book and be able to practically use them in their own research studies. Teachers may also benefit from it, as it provides a comprehensive state-of-the-art overview of how vocabulary has been found to be taught and learned better. This can aid them to be more effective in selecting the best possible methods of vocabulary learning for their learners.

Despite the many upsides of the book, it also has some downsides. The most important one is that formulaic language has only sporadically been discussed throughout the book. The authors have explicitly argued in the beginning chapter of the book that vocabulary involves both single word and multi-word units, but no chapter has been devoted to it. They could have dedicated one separate chapter on formulaic language in each of the four main areas of the book so that their book could be more comprehensive, and readers could reach a stronger understanding of this key aspect of vocabulary. To deal with it, readers might broaden their understanding of vocabulary learning/teaching and supplement their readings by studying other books such as the handbook edited by Webb (2019) that has dealt with the issue of both single and multi-word vocabulary in separate chapters in parallel. In fact, unlike Webb (2019), which mostly focuses on teaching and learning-related issues of vocabulary, the present book mostly addresses vocabulary from a research-related perspective and tries to assist readers with conducting sound research studies. Thus, reading these two books in parallel can give readers a more comprehensive picture and understanding of vocabulary.

All taken together, this book is a worthwhile source for vocabulary-related researchers and especially for teachers—both novice and experienced—as they can sharpen their knowledge on vocabulary and make their teaching more effective by modifying their teaching practice in line with the most recent points and findings mentioned in the book. It covers both well-established and new concepts, theories, and findings related to vocabulary research. It adds valuable knowledge, which, in turn, will help readers to undertake their vocabulary research in accordance with the newest findings and methods.

To Cite this Review

Heidari, K. (2023). [Review of the book *Research Methods in Vocabulary Studies* by P. Durrant, A. Siyanova-Chanturia, B. Kremmel, & S. Sonbul]. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 27 (1). <https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.27105r4>

Reference

Webb, S. (2019). *The Routledge handbook of vocabulary studies*. Routledge.

About the reviewer

Kamal Heidari is currently a Ph.D. candidate of applied linguistics at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. His main research interests include vocabulary, psycholinguistics, reading skill, giftedness, and critical thinking. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5807-9941. Email: k_86_tefl@yahoo.com.

Copyright of articles rests with the authors. Please cite TESL-EJ appropriately.