

Language Analysis Paper:

A shortcut to vocabulary development for young learners through speech textbooks and
graded readers

Junko Yamaguchi

Pedagogical English Grammar

Spring, 2022

Assoc. pro. M

Issue in Context

The context I teach is the regular class of four students in the fifth grade in my private school. The classes are based on four primary materials: songs, phonics, conversation, and intensive reading. After completing the study of pronunciation (phonics), the students work on a speech text to develop the foundation for communication and presentation skills. At the same time, extensive listening and reading in class are conducted to increase their vocabulary. In this study, I will focus on two textbooks; *Speech Adventure for Kids 3* (SAK 3, 2012, p. 26-27), covering conversation, and a graded reader used for intensive reading titled *Building Blocks Library Level 4* (BBL4), 'Octopus Attack!'.

Table 1

Key Characteristics of the Target Teaching Context

Characteristics	Target Teaching Context
Institution	Private English School
Grade	5th grade
English Level	Intermediate
Target Textbook	Speech textbook/Graded reader
Key goal	Develop a foundation for communication and presentation skills

The main purpose of my classroom is to prevent students from disliking English. However, I have had graduates ask me what they can do to avoid losing interest in English because English words start raining down on them as soon as they enter junior high school. In this paper, I would like to analyze an excerpt from the textbooks to explore the reasons for this issue and what I need to address.

Analysis and Interpretation

To avoid demotivating students from learning English due to vocabulary learning from junior high school, I will discuss not only one but two teaching resources that I usually use in my classes. This section reports result in the discovery from a mainly lexical intensive unit of the speech textbook. The unit is titled *My Week: How do you spend your week?* (see Appendix A for a copy of these materials). I chose this excerpt because it has the most phrasal verbs and collocations compared to the others. Another is from graded readers called BBL (refer to Appendix C for a copy of these materials), used for intensive reading. I will provide insight into the level and amount of words through graded reading tools. However, since it is simply a reference to the contents of a few pages of one of the 12 books, the results cannot be generalized to the textbook as a whole. As graded reading tools, I used the following two profilers: one is 1) the Flesch-Kincaid test of readability (Flesch Reading Ease Score, n.d.), which is designed to show how difficult an English text is to understand, and 2) the *New Word Level Checker* for assessing word frequency (Mizumoto, n.d.).

Readability Analysis

The results of the Flesch-Kincaid readability test (Flesch Reading Score, n.d.) show that the grade level is 3.10 in the speech book, and for BBL 0.9, as appears in Table 2. The contents of both materials seem easy enough for students to deal with. The reading level is very easy to read for 8-9 years old, and it is equivalent to 10-11 years (fifth graders) in the Japanese context. As you can see from the table, it shows the grade level of 3.10 and 0.44 (-3.40 is the easiest grade), and its reading level is evaluated as 5th grade and *very easy to read* as shown in the following excerpt:

[1] I get up late on weekends.

[2] I like to stay up late on weekends.

[3] They go out on the river.

[4] She gets up fast.

Sentences [1] and [2] are from SAK, and [3] and [4] are from BBL. Due to the limited vocabulary of English available to young learners, duplicates are often found. [1] and [4] apply the same phrasal verbs. However, sometimes they may slightly differ in their Japanese meaning. For example, for most young learners, ‘*get up*’ means “to arise from bed.” Sentence [4] indicates “to rise to one’s feet” or even stand up. Aside from these subtle differences in comprehension nuances, most words are high-frequency.

Table 2

*Flesch-Kincaid Readability Findings From the Reading Passage ‘Speech Adventure for Kids 3’ and ‘Building Blocks Library 4: Octopus Attack!’**

Readability Test	Readability Score	
	SAK 3	BBL
Reading Ease	93.63	102.39
Grade Level	3.10	0.44
Reading Level	5th grade	5th grade
Reading Note	Very easy to read	Very easy to read

Note. Data is generated from *Flesch Reading Ease Score* (n.d.).

Vocabulary Analysis

Table 2 shows the results from the *New Word Level Checker* analysis (Mizumoto, n.d.). The reason I chose this profiler is based on four vocabulary lists: (1) New JACET 8000, (2) SVL 12000, (3) The New General Service List (NGSL), and (4) the CEFR-J Wordlist. In particular, if you want to estimate the difficulty level for Japanese learners of English, the incorporation of (1) New JACET 8000 will give you more accurate results. As Table 3 displays, vocabulary from the most common five hundred words of English (L1) makes up around 74% of SAK and 84% of BBL. Even though the number of words is almost the same,

L2 shows BBL a slightly less frequency (5) than SKL (6). Regarding L3 and L8, there are no words included in BBL, and SAK has 4 (L3) and 2 (L8). There is only a tiny difference, but it seems that books for close reading are more suited for exposure to frequent words.

However, it is evident that as mentioned previously, a major goal of this research is to help students to be efficiently exposed to more English vocabulary and create a good input that is going to enable them to understand future input.

Table 3

*Vocabulary Profiler Findings From the Reading Passage My week*and Octopus Attack!***

Word Level	Type	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
	SAK/BBL	SAK/BBL	SAK/BBL	SAK/BBL
L1 (1-500)	54/74	141/179	59.75/79.91	91.95/91.52
L2 (501-1000)	5/2	6/5	2.54/2.23	91.49/93.75
L3(1001-1500)	3/1	4/1	1.69/0.45	96.19/94.2
L8(4001-5000)	1/0	2/0	0.85/0	97.88/97.32
NA	2/3	5/6	2.12/2.68	100.0/100.0

Note. Data is generated from *New Word Level Checker* (Mizumoto, n.d.).

* Reading passage from *Speech Adventure for Kids* (2009) and ***Building Blocks Library 4* (2010)

A closer analysis shows that many of the off-list words are proper nouns (e.g., *octopus*, *campfire*, *Tom*). Such words are necessary to communicate the meanings of the passage. For young learners, such authentic words are related to building up knowledge of word forms. Moreover, the experience becomes a strong essential component of learning spoken grammar for communication. Phrasal verbs such as in the following sentence from SAK (in bold) would be the best for acquiring frequent English expressions.

[5] I **get up** late on weekends.

In this sentence [5], the phrasal verb *get up* could be replaced by the more frequent COCA/BNC word *come back*, *go back* or *show up* that are in on the L1 or L2. Such alterations to the original text can provide them good input for future awareness and reduce the learning burden of other words.

Table 3

Frequency and Distribution of the Most Frequent Phrasal Verbs in COCA and the BNC Listed According to Their Overall Rank Order in COCA (Frequency Number PMW)

PVs	<u>Distribution across the resister in COCA</u>	<u>Rank order</u>	
	Spoken	In COCA	In BNC
go on	316.37	1	1
pick up	108.67	2	3
come back	251.75	3	5
come up	250.51	4	9
go back	190.98	5	4

Note. Data is generated from *New Word Level Checker* (Mizumoto, n.d.).

* Reading passage from *Speech Adventure for Kids* (2009) and ***Building Blocks Library 4* (2010)

Pedagogical Implications

These findings paint a picture that texts for young learners are composed of high-frequency words that are easy to understand. They also indicate that difficulty is not an issue. However, because Japanese learn only 2000 words (elementary, junior high, high school, and university), compared to 30,000 words for native speakers (Brown, 2016), it is urgent to create more efficient exposure to Vocabulary. In particular, students need to be exposed to high-frequency L1 and L2 words from elementary school onwards through various teaching materials, such as New Dolch List (NDL)-based reading and vocabulary apps (Quizlet, Quizizz, Baamboozle, etc.), and online word study tools. I will create high-frequency word flashcards that can be used as part of a routine, even if it is just for a few

minutes each class. It is based on the NDL data. I will also integrate the grammar of spoken English, especially utilizing the more authentic phrasal verbs from Liu's list of the top 40 (in bold), into TPR. Lastly, replacing words in the text of multiple reading books guides students to realize the versatility of phrasal verbs that help them communicate fluently. The more they can do that, the more autonomy the students have.

References

- Browne, C. (2016, January 6). *Power of Words* [Video file]. Retrieved from YouTube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wg4_7ygQ11A
- Flesch Reading Ease Score: Reading and Grade Level Calculator. [computer program].
 Accessed February 22, 2022, at <https://charactercalculator.com/flesch-reading-ease/>
- Liu, D. (2011). The most frequently used English phrasal verbs in American and British English: A Multicorpus examination. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(4), 661-688.
<https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2011.247707>
- Mizumoto, A. (2021). *New Word Level Checker* [Web application]. Accessed February 22, 2022, at <https://nwlc.pythonanywhere.com/>
- Miya, K., & Matsushita, K (2012). *My week. Speech adventure for kids 3*. Mpi Inc.
- McDougall, G. (2010). *Building blocks library level 4*. Mpi Inc.

Appendix A

Excerpt From Textbook (Speech Adventure for Kids 3)

Unit 4 **My Week** 私の1週間
How do you spend your week?
1週間をどうなふうに過ごしている？

Key Sentences

CD 01 1 Listen and practice.
CD 27 2 Listen and circle.
CD 28 3 Repeat the key sentences.

Ryo Daisuke

I do school chores on Wednesdays.
I like to use a computer on weekends.
I like Friday best because I can relax in the evening.

1 About Yourself

1 Use the Phrase Box.
2 Listen and answer. Then write and talk in pairs.

Q1 What do you usually do on Wednesdays?
A1 I _____

Q2 What do you like to do on weekends?
A2 I like to _____

Q3 What day do you like best?
A3 I like _____ best because
I can _____

Q1 水曜日にいつも何をしますか？
Q2 週末には何をするのが好きですか？
Q3 何曜日が一番好きですか？

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday

★こんなQ and Aもしてみよう★
Do you ... ?
Yes, I do. / No, I don't.

26

Phrase Box

Vocabulary 1

CD 29 1 Listen and repeat the words.
CD 30 2 Listen and substitute the words.

I ... on Wednesdays.
I like to ... on weekends.

- do school chores
- take ballet lessons
- go to swimming school
- read comics
- exchange e-mails
- use a computer
- take a nap
- get up late
- stay up late
- relax

おまけコーナー
play games, do my homework

Vocabulary 2

CD 31 Listen and repeat.

I like to use a computer ...

- on Wednesdays
- on weekends
- every day
- every Sunday morning
- in the evening
- in my free time

おまけコーナー
in the morning, in the afternoon
午前中 午後

27

Appendix B

Textbook Excerpt for Analysis (Speech Adventure for Kids 3, p. 26, 27. 183 words)

My Week How do you spend your week?

Listen and practice. Listen and circle. Repeat the key sentences.

I do school chores on Wednesdays.

I like to use a computer on weekends. I like Friday best because I can relax in the evening

Use the Phrase Box.

Listen and answer. Then write and talk in pairs.

Q1 What do you usually do on Wednesdays? I _____

Q2 What do you like to do on weekends? I like to _____

Q3 What day do you like best? I like _____ best because I can _____

Phrase Box

Vocabulary 1

I... on Wednesdays.

I like to ... on weekends.

1. do school chores, 2. take ballet lessons, 3. go to swimming school, 4. read comics,

5. exchange e-mails, 6. use a computer, 7. take a nap, 8. get up late, 9. stay up late

10. relax

play games, do my homework

Vocabulary2

Listen and repeat

I like to use a computer

1 . on Wednesdays, 2. on weekends, 3. every day, 4. every Sunday morning, 5. in the evening

6. in my free time

in the morning, in the afternoon

Appendix C

Excerpt From Textbook (Building Blocks Library Level 4)



There is a lot to do at Camp Pine because it is near the river and near the sea.

"I want to go on a boat on the river," says Jay.
"I want to see something scary," says Tom.



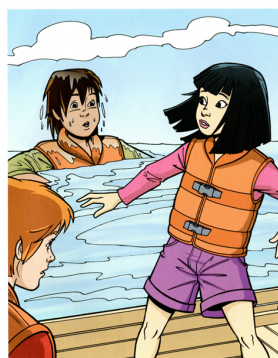
"I NEVER want to see something scary, like an octopus," says Amy.
"That's not scary!" says Tom.



"You won't see an octopus in the river, only in the sea," says Ben.
"Good!" says Amy.



Amy sees it. She gets up fast.
"Look out!" shouts Tom.



Amy is okay, but Tom falls in the water.

Appendix D

Textbook Excerpt for Analysis (Building Blocks Library 4, p. 3-16. 179 words)

There is a lot to do at Camp Pine because it is near the river and near the sea. "I want to go on a boat on the river," says Jay. "I want to see something scary," says Tom. "I NEVER want to see something scary, like an octopus," says Amy. "That's not scary!" says Tom. "You won't see an octopus in the river, only in the sea," says Ben. "Good!" says Amy. "But look, Camp Pine is near the sea," says Jay. They have a great day. At night they sit around the campfire. They all sing. It's fun. The next day, they go to the river. "Push!" says Pete. They go out on the river. The water is cold, but they have fun. Tom has a stone. What is he making? Tom puts the stone on the seat near Amy. Amy sees it. She gets up fast. "Look out!" shouts Tom. Amy is okay, but Tom falls in the water. "Help me! It's so cold," says Tom. "Take my hands," says Amy. Tom takes them.