〈研究ノート〉

Towards a Rational Corpus-Based Approach to Vocabulary Acquisition in Preparation for the TOEIC Test Reading Section

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Introduction

Whereas the listening section of the TOEIC listening test includes conversations on where to go for dinner or what happened last weekend, the reading section focusses entirely on business, careers and finance. This is to the student's advantage in that the type of vocabulary appearing in each test can be predicted relatively easily. Thus aware, the student is faced with the task of finding sources of suitable vocabulary input and assimilating it.

This short paper is an attempt to address the question of how best to go about that task.

A common complaint among students taking the TOEIC test is the lack of time available for the reading section. One way to increase reading speed would be to make students more familiar with common collocations and chunks, so that they become less reliant on the painstaking process of reading word-by-word. As Lewis says:

"Firstly, words are not normally used alone and it makes sense to learn them in a strong, frequent, or otherwise typical pattern of actual use. Secondly, it is more efficient to learn the whole and break it into parts, than to learn the parts and have to learn the whole as an extra arbitrary item." (p.37, 7-11)

Method

Initially, an ELT-approved practice test (Trew) was used as a vocabulary source. The analysis was carried out in four stages.

1) All non-content words were ignored.

2) All content words were recorded, under the headings of nouns, verbs and adjectives. Adverbs were converted into adjectives for the sake of simplicity.

3) Words deemed too general (e.g. "size", "problem") or too specific (e.g. "parchment", "garbage") were discarded, leaving only those with some clear relevance to the TOEIC/test.

4) Concordance text analysis software was used to establish word frequency among the remaining 174 words.

5) The words were divided into groups in order to establish some order on what would otherwise be a somewhat intimidating, amorphous list.

6) The words were entered into the British Corpus online search engine to produce collocations.

Results

Nouns clearly related to business (number of appearances indicated where over one)

Company 19	Product 16	Service 14	Marketing 10	Industry 7
Brand 7	Warehouse 6	Store 6	Showroom 6	Order 6
Market 6	Shipping 5	Advertisement 5	Shift 4	Desk 4
Business 4	Advertising 4	Training 3	Sales 3	Office 3
Manufacturer 3	Management 3	Job 3	Carrier 3	Work
Shipper	Shipment	Merchandise	Meeting	Contract
Consultation	Board	Unit		

Nouns less directly related to business

Event 8	Program 6	Conference 6	Design 5	Schedule 4
Publication 4	Position 4	Policy 4	Plan 4	Performance 4
Orientation 4	Department 4	Storage 3	Recyclable 3	Quality 3
Project 3	Pick-up 3	Mail 3	Growth 3	Form 3
Division 3	Development 3	Vacation	Organization	Convention
Construction	Brochure			

Nouns related directly to finance

Payment 9	Price 5	Subscription 4	Invoice 4	Sales 3
Receipt 3	Billing 3	Salary	Revenue	Rate
Investment	Fee	Credit card	Budget	Account
Donation				

Nouns related directly to job-searching

Application	Recommendation	Opening	Requirement	Qualification
Background				

Words directly related to computing

Program 6	Website 4	e-mail 4	Data 4	Computer 4
Technology 3	Upgrade	System	Software	Database
Gigabyte				

People related to business

Manager 7	Director 6	Applicant 4	Professional 3	President 3
Subscriber	Staff	Researcher	Representative	Investor
Executive	Employee	Employer	Designer	Client
Chief	CEO	Customer		

Places

Theater 11	Hotel 11	City 10	Center 7	Street 5
State 5	Region 5	Hospital 4	Apartment 4	Address 4
Restaurant 3	Parking 3	Home 3	Building 3	Avenue 3
Town	Room	Location	House	Garden
Facility				

Transport

Train 13	Ticket 8	Shuttle bus 6	Travel 5	Trip 4
Railway 4	Fare 4	Transportation 3	Distance 3	Airport 3
Taxi	Route	Ferry	Airline	

Verbs related to business

Receive 9	Provide 8	Order 6	Offer 6	Deliver 6
Purchase 5	Work 3	Submit 3	Ship 3	Enclose 3
Advertise 3	Return (vt)	Release	Perform	Package
Operate	Evaluate	Build	Analyse	

Adjectives related to business

Available 6	Online 4	Free 4	Due 4	Offline
Official	Financial	Expensive	Discount	

Analysis

Examples of collocations for some of the items. Words of interest to students are in italics.

… bought *sole rights* to the PRODUCT in the UK….

… *purchasing*, PRODUCT *development, marketing and leasing services*….

… where the PRODUCT, including *sponsors*, would get maximum *exposure*….

… *revenue* from a tax on a PRODUCT. Now this *exemption* is threatened….

… Depending on the type of PRODUCT. Consult your *warranty* card….

… from the housing *corporation* to do 24 CATEGORY one sheltered flats.

… is the beautiful CATEGORY in the paper, *allocations* from the contingency….

… an *indexical* CATEGORY, *flexible* enough to include….

… the *procedures adopted* for each CATEGORY of incident….

… it falls in the CATEGORY of a *low-income*, highly *indebted* country….

… a base SALARY normally which is set at a *competitive* level….

This is a *continuing appointment*, not *fixed-term*. SALARY will be in the *range*….

… an excellent SALARY and *benefits package*….

… the *renewal* of *external funding*. SALARY is *based on* the *schedule*….

… an attractive SALARY, *commensurate* with experience….

Thus a mere fifteen "hits" on the corpus site yields twenty-seven words or phrases which should be of interest to any student preparing for the TOEIC test.

Conclusion

A corpus can be easily exploited in order to increase vocabulary of a required type. Provided that the words searched for are appropriate, and the searcher is able to pick out relevant collocations, this is a simple and effective method of vocabulary acquisition.

References

Lewis, M. (1993) *Implementing the Lexical Approach*. London: Thomson Heinle
Trew, G. (2007) *Tactics for* TOEIC. New York: Oxford
The British National Corpus online: (www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk)
The Concordance software (www.concordancesoftware.co.uk)