

# STUDENTS' RECOGNITION IN THE DIFFERENCES OF CONTEXTUAL CONTENT WORDS

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the analysis of students' recognition in the differences of contextual content words: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, which data are taken from the work of the second semester students of the FBIB (the Faculty of Language and Cultural Studies) of Unisbank Semarang, in the academic year 2010/2011. The methodology used in this study is a descriptive, it concerns with how *what is* or *what exists* is related to some proceedings that have influenced or affected the present condition or event. The findings showed that the students' recognition in the differences of contextual content words was not sophisticated. The average number of students who could recognize the content words correctly was 58.42%, and the content word which was mostly recognized incorrectly by the students was the VERB, only 43.85%.

**Key words:** *content words, recognition, nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs*

## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the subjects that has to be learnt for students majoring in English language. Compared with other English subjects, the teaching of this subject, however, is the least efficient, but it is a necessary subject for students to be learnt. Paul Nation (2005) says, deliberately teaching vocabulary is one of the least efficient ways of developing learners' vocabulary knowledge but nonetheless it is an important part of a well-balanced vocabulary program.

Vocabulary cannot be taught in a large numbers effectively, we can only present several new words in one meeting. Trying to teach many new words in one meeting will only make the students even more frustrated and they will consequently lose interests of learning the subject. Paul Nation (2005) says, teaching can effectively deal with only a small amount of information about a word at a time. The more complex the information is, the more likely the learners are to misinterpret it.

Though new words should be learnt and memorized one by one, it is not recommended to teach the students new words loosely. The new words should be presented contextually in a clause or a sentence, they should be given in contextual message-focused activities involving the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Paul Nation (2005) says that the positive effects of

vocabulary teaching are that it can provide help when learners feel it is most needed. This is particularly true for vocabulary teaching that occurs in the context of message-focused activities involving listening, speaking, reading and writing, and where the teaching deals with items that learners see as being very relevant for the activity.

As it has been mentioned above that the teaching of vocabulary should be given in a small amount at one meeting, next the step-by-step teaching of vocabulary ranging from the easiest activity up to the most difficult activity need to be considered. Hence, in this study, the writer will focus on the very beginning and the simplest step of the vocabulary learning, namely recognizing types of words. In this case, he will try to find out how the second semester students of the Faculty of Language and Cultural Studies of Unisbank taking the subject of “Vocabulary I,” are able to recognize and differentiate “content words,” namely: noun, verb, adjective and adverb.

Reason for conducting the study is that there is a tendency for students just to judge or understand the meaning of words loosely, based on their previous learning at the high school. Based on the writer’s judgement on the students’ performances in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the students’ tendency to misinterpret the meaning of words is caused by their incorrect recognitions of those types of words in their contexts. They are not sure whether a certain word is a noun, a verb, an adjective or an adverb.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Based on the descriptions in the previous chapter, the writer would like to state the problems as follows: (1) How is the students’ recognition in the differences of contextual content words? (2) Which content word is mostly recognized incorrectly?

## **Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The scope of the study is vocabulary learning. The study is limited to the learning of vocabulary focusing on the written work on content words recognition, done by the second semester students of FBIB (the Faculty of Language and Cultural Studies) Stikubank University (Unisbank) in the academic year 2010/2011. The content words studied are nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

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*Student’s Recognition in the Differences of Contextual content Words*  
Drs. J. Sutomo, M.M

## Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study of this research are: (1) To describe the students' recognition in the differences of contextual content words. (2) To describe the content word which is mostly recognized incorrectly.

## Significance of the Study

The result of this study will provide information about the students' recognition in the differences of contextual content words, so that the learners (the students of the second semester of FBIB Unisbank in the academic year 2010/2011) can evaluate themselves and hopefully they will be motivated to learn more diligently, and more seriously so that they will acquire better understanding of the recognition of contextual content words in the future. For the lecturers, this can be used to make a better plan for the teaching of vocabulary, especially teaching the content words.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Content and Function Words

Words are divided into two categories: Function Words and Content Words. Function words are closed class words (only about 300 in English) while content words are open class words (new words are being added in every language).

The function words consist of prepositions (*of, at, in, without, between, etc.*), pronouns (*he, they, anybody, it, one, etc.*), determiners (*the, a, that, my, more, much, either, neither, etc.*), conjunctions (*and, that, when, while, although, or, etc.*), modal verbs (*can, must, will, should, ought, need, used, etc.*), auxiliary verbs (*be, have, got, do, etc.*), and particles (*no, not, nor, as*).

The content words consist of nouns (*John, room, answer, Selby, etc.*), adjectives (*happy, new, large, grey, etc.*), full verbs (*search, grow, hold, have, etc.*), adverbs (*really, completely, very, also, enough, etc.*), numerals (*one, thousand, first, etc.*), interjections (*eh, ugh, phew, well, etc.*), and yes/no answers (*yes and no as answers*).

( <http://www.speech.psychol.ucl.ac.uk/transcription/intro.html>, accessed Nov.2011)

Based on the fact that one content word can belong to more than one word class, it is necessary to learn the content word in its contextual clauses or sentences. Students should be made aware of the importance of learning the content words in context. Any new word should be learnt in its context and make sure that the students know to which class of words it belongs, whether it belongs to a noun, verb, adjective or adverb class of word.

## NOUNS

Traditional grammarians define a noun as "a person, place, thing, or idea."

*Child* designates a person; therefore, *child* is a noun.

Similarly, *democracy* designates an idea; therefore, *democracy* is a noun.

In addition, nouns can be identified by the presence of signal words such as *the*.

Example: Someone stole the car. (car = noun)

Word order can also provide clues about nouns. For example, in the following sentence, it is clear that the part of speech that will fit into slot #1 and slot #2 must be nouns:

\_\_\_\_(1)\_\_\_\_ touched \_\_\_\_\_(2)\_\_\_\_\_

Often, suffixes will suggest that a word is a noun. For example, *-tion*, *-ness*, *-ment*, or *-er* at the end of a word usually signify that the word is a noun, as in *suggestion*, *happiness*, *involvement*, and *diner*.

Nouns may be made plural, usually with the suffix *-s* or *-es*, as in *books* and *foxes*.

Nouns show ownership with the addition of an apostrophe and, sometimes, an additional *-s*, as in *a book's* pages, twenty *students'* essays.

( <http://www.towson.edu/ows/nouns.htm>, accessed Nov.2011)

## VERBS

Verbs have traditionally been defined as words that show action or state of being. Examples:

Harold drove all the way to Toronto. (*drove* shows action)

Harold seemed happy in Toronto. (*seemed* shows state of being)

Verbs can also sometimes be recognized by their position in a sentence.

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*Student's Recognition in the Differences of Contextual content Words*  
Drs. J. Sutomo, M.M

In the following two sentence frames, only a verb can be put into the empty slot.

NOUN \_\_\_\_\_

(verb)

THERE \_\_\_\_\_ NOUN

(verb)

Often, prefixes and suffixes (affixes) will signify that a word is a verb. For example, the **suffixes** *-ify*, *-ize*, *-ate*, or *-en* usually signify that a word is a verb, as in *typify*, *characterize*, *irrigate*, and *sweeten*. **Prefixes** such as *be-*, *de-*, or *en-* may signify that a word is a verb, as in *bestow*, *dethrone*, and *encourage*.

( <http://www.towson.edu/ows/verbs.htm>, accessed Nov.2011)

## ADJECTIVES

Traditionally, adjectives are defined as words that describe nouns or pronouns.

When they describe nouns or pronouns, adjectives typically answer the following questions: What kind? Which one? How many?

For example, in the phrase: tall man

*Tall* is an adjective describing the noun *man*.

*Tall* answers the question "which man?" or "what kind of man?"

Similarly, in the phrase: easy assignment

*Easy* is an adjective describing the noun *assignment*.

*Easy* answers the question, "what kind of assignment?"

Adjectives are usually placed before the nouns they describe, as in the examples, *tall man* and *easy assignment*, above.

Thus, one may identify an adjective by using the following word-order test:

The \_\_\_\_\_(adjective)\_\_\_\_\_NOUN caught the bus.

Adjectives may also follow the noun they describe.

Example: Smitherman, *cold* and *achy*, went straight to bed.

(<http://www.towson.edu/ows/adjectives.htm>, accessed Nov.2011)

## ADVERBS

Adverbs are traditionally defined as words that describe verbs.

Adverbs answer any of the following questions about verbs:

**how? when? where? why?**

The following examples illustrate adverbs modifying verbs:

Herman **easily** lifted the barbell.

How did he lift the barbell? Easily. (*easily* is an adverb)

We use the new software program **tomorrow**.

When will we use it? Tomorrow. (*tomorrow* is an adverb)

She hid the key **nearby**.

Where did she hide the key? Nearby. (*nearby* is an adverb)

Adverbs are the most moveable of all parts of speech; therefore, it is sometimes difficult to identify an adverb on the basis of its position in a sentence.

For example, the adverb *slowly* will fit into three places in the sentence ***He climbed the ladder:***

He climbed the ladder slowly.

Slowly he climbed the ladder.

He slowly climbed the ladder.

Most adverbs end in **-ly**. In fact, most adverbs are formed by adding **-ly** to adjectives:

nice (*adjective*) + -ly = nicely (*adverb*)

drowsy (*adjective*) + -ly = drowsily (*adverb*)

Like adjectives of more than one syllable, adverbs usually become comparative and superlative by using *more* and *most*.

(<http://www.towson.edu/ows/adverbs.htm>, accessed Nov.2011)

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a descriptive research. A descriptive research concerns with how *what is* or *what exists* is related to some proceedings that have influenced or affected the present condition or event. Descriptive research is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on; effects that are being evident, or trends that are developing (Best 1981:93)

## Data collection

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*Student's Recognition in the Differences of Contextual content Words*  
Drs. J. Sutomo, M.M

The sources of the data are the second semester students of the Faculty of Language and Cultural Studies Unisbank Semarang attending the lecture on the subject of “Vocabulary I.” The data are taken from the students’ written work. The only instrument used is test paper. There are twenty sentences written in various tenses. In each sentence, one of the content word (noun, verb, adjective or adverb) is written in bold letters, and the students are instructed to classify which word class the word belongs to.

## Data Analysis

To answer the first research question, that is “How is the students’ recognition in the differences of contextual content words?”, the writers find out the frequency of the students’ incorrect recognition of contextual content word. By subtracting the total number of sentences with the number of the content words unrecognized by each student, the number of the content words recognized was found out, therefore the first research question was answered.

To answer the second research question, that is “Which content word is mostly recognized incorrectly?,” the writers find out the frequency of contextual content words recognized in sentences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In analyzing the data, the writers focus on the students’ recognition of contextual content words: noun, verb, adjective, and adverb. Here, the writers present some students’ recognition of contextual content words as follows:

### Student 01

**Correct answers : 14 ; Wrong answers: 6, they are:**

1. Number 5: His face *mirrors* his thoughts. (N) → (V)
2. Number 6: I marvel at your ability to go to bed **late** and get up early. (Adj.) → (Adv.)
3. Number 7: The *late* President granted the newspapermen’s interview. (N) → (Adj.)
4. Number 8: They will *cable* us when they arrive. (N) → (V)

5. Number 11: The clothes lay in a heap in front of the *washing* machine. (Adv.)  
→ (Adj.)
6. Number 12: The people will *panic* if they hear the frightening news. (N) →(V)

### Student 03

**Correct answers : 12 ; Wrong answers: 8, they are:**

1. Number 4: I despair of solving that *complicated* problem. (V) →(Adj.)
2. Number 5: His face *mirrors* his thoughts. (Adv.) →(V)
3. Number 7: The *late* President granted the newspapermen's interview.  
(N)→(Adj.)
4. Number 8: They will *cabble* us when they arrive. (N) →(V)
5. Number 11: The clothes lay in a heap in front of the *washing* machine.  
(Adv.)→(Adj.)
6. Number 12: The people will *panic* if they hear the frightening news. (N) →(V)
7. Number 16: The criminal *assaulted* his victim. (Adv.)→(V)
8. Number 19: The movie star was *mobbed* by his fans. (Adv.)→(V)

### Student 05

**Correct answers : 9 ; Wrong answers: 11, they are:**

1. Number 3: He looked at the food and he *disliked* it. (Adj.)→(V)
2. Number 5: His face *mirrors* his thoughts. (N)→(V)
3. Number 6: I marvel at your ability to go to bed *late* and get up  
early. (Adj.)→(Adv.)
4. Number 7: The *late* President granted the newspapermen's interview.  
(N)→(Adj.)
5. Number 8: They will *cabble* us when they arrive. (N)→(V)
6. Number 9: I estimate that the total cost will be *about* twenty dollars.  
(Adj.)→(Adv.)
7. Number 11: The clothes lay in a heap in front of the *washing* machine.  
(V)→(Adj.)
8. Number 12: The people will *panic* if they hear the frightening news. (N) →(V)
9. Number 15: The king was arrayed in rich clothes *carefully*. (Adj.)→(Adv.)



10. Number 17: The soft sand cushioned his fall *smoothly*. (Adj.)→(Adv.)

11. Number 19: The movie star was *mobbed* by his fans. (Adv.)→(V)

## Findings

The students' recognition in the differences of contextual content words is as followed:

The average number of students' recognition of the contextual content words is 11.68. There are 8 students under the average, and 11 students over the average. Based on the percentage of correct recognition, the average is 58.42%.

The students recognition of contextual content words is as follows:

### (1) Noun

The total number of recognition of 4 NOUNs in 4 sentences is 68, so the average number of students' recognition is  $68/4 = 17$ . It is  $17/19 \times 100\% = 89.47\%$

### (2) Verb

The total number of recognition of 6 VERBs in 6 sentences is 50, so the average number of students' recognition is  $50/6 = 8.33$ . It is  $8.33/19 \times 100\% = 43.85\%$

### (3) Adjective

The total number of recognition of 5 ADJECTIVEs in 5 sentences is 47, so the average number of students' recognition is  $47/5 = 9.40$ . It is  $9.40/19 \times 100\% = 49.47\%$

### (4) Adverb

The total number of recognition of 5 ADVERBs in 5 sentences is 57, so the average number of students' recognition is  $57/5 = 11.40$ . It is  $11.40/19 \times 100\% = 60\%$

Based on the above description, it is concluded that the content word which is mostly recognized incorrectly is a verb, the average number of students who can recognize the VERB correctly is 43.85%.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

### Conclusion.

The students' recognition in the differences of contextual content words is as followed:

The average number of students' recognition of the contextual content words is 11.68. There are 8 students under the average, and 11 students over the average. Based on the percentage of correct recognition, the average is 58.42%.

The content word which is mostly recognized incorrectly by the students is a verb, the average number of students who can recognize the VERB correctly is only 43.85%.

### **Suggestion.**

Based on the above conclusion, the reseachers put forward some suggestions as follows:

1. It is necessary for the lecturers who teach vocabulary to apply suitable methods of teaching for the students learning the subject, as to motivate them to like English and therefore to be more diligent and more intensive in learning the vocabulary, especially the content words.
2. In teaching the content words, however, it is necessary to put them in contextual phrases, clauses or sentences, so that the content words will not be learnt loosely without any context.
3. In learning the vocabulary, especially the content words, it is necessary for the learners/students to pay more attention to the contextual relation of the words being studied so as not to recognize the words incorrectly.

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