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Using Etymology as a Deliberate Vocabulary Learning Approach: A Psycholinguistic Analysis

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Abstract

Whilst formal classrooms are inadequate to teach the needed amount of vocabulary due to time constraints, language learners are encouraged to take the vocabulary learning process outside the classroom domain.

Additionally, vocabulary learning has always been accompanied by the problem of retention. The prominence of the etymological approach as a deliberate vocabulary learning technique is ascribed to two theoretical accounts in which language learners' vocabulary size and lexical retention are advanced, namely, the schema theory and the dual coding theory. Therefore, the etymological approach not only helps learners' retention, but also equips English language learners with a decoding tool in which unknown words can be deciphered and interpreted from their building blocks.

Keywords: Vocabulary, etymology, psycholinguistic, dual coding theory, schema theory, retention

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Introduction

There is no doubt that vocabulary learning is a struggle of many English language learners (Al-Hosni, 2014; Zhang, 2011). This is because understanding a spoken discourse requires learners to know approximately 3000-word families (Rodgers & Webb, 2011), whereas understanding a written discourse requires knowing 8000 to 9000 word families (Nation, 2006). Yet, formal classrooms are inadequate to teach such amount of vocabulary due to time constraints (Webb & Nation, 2017). Therefore, language learners are encouraged to take the vocabulary learning process outside the classroom domain to acquire the needed vocabulary to develop their language proficiency. One of the effective techniques in learning vocabulary is studying the building blocks of a word (Nation, 2001). This technique encourages learners to study the bound morphemes and how they can change the word meaning, hence expanding vocabulary size and knowledge (Ibid). However, studying free morphemes, the stem or root, is under-researched in vocabulary studies (Hosseini et al., 2012). Although a small number of studies have examined the effectiveness of teaching word roots to English language learners (e.g., Soleimani & Azizmohammadi, 2015), using etymology as a deliberate vocabulary learning approach does not seem to have had ample consideration in the field of vocabulary learning research. Most English

words are derived from Latin, Greek and French origins, and studying the origin of a word not only helps better word retention, but also leads to learning other words (Quigley, 2018). Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the potential gains of adopting the etymological approach as a deliberate vocabulary learning technique to enhance learners' receptive vocabulary.

Literature Review

Incidental vs. Deliberate Vocabulary Learning

Incidental vocabulary learning refers to the process of learning new words as the by-product of an activity with the absence of deliberate intention to learn them (Gass, 1999; Hulstijn, 2001; Loewen, 2017). It is achieved indirectly as a result of information provided by context (Nation, 1982) through reading (Schmitt, 2008; Nation, 2015), listening (Elley, 1989; Nation, 2008) as well as viewing (Rodgers & Webb, 2011; Peters & Webb, 2018). This approach is highly effective as it provides learners with contextualised vocabulary learning opportunities (Webb, 2008; Malone, 2018). Ahmad (2012) mentions that it is best for second language learners to adopt this approach because words in contexts can, to a great extent, prevent word attrition. This speculation is supported by Laufer and Hulstijn's (2001) study which concludes that incidentally learned vocabulary are retained in the long-term memory with the learner's ability to use such vocabulary in different contexts. However, incidental vocabulary learning requires long time periods (Groot, 2000), especially in gaining semantic knowledge of the new words (Chen & Truscott, 2010). Although word knowledge can only be attained gradually through repeated encounters in context (Webb, 2017; Uchihara, Webb & Yanagisawa, 2019), Hulstijn, Hollander and Greidanus (1996) assert that even multiple encounters often fail to yield satisfactory impact on vocabulary acquisition from incidental learning.

A direct approach, where a deliberate effort is made to learn vocabulary (Nation, 1982), can augment the shortcomings of incidental vocabulary learning. Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010) reveal that deliberate attention to unknown words leads to higher gains in all aspects of vocabulary knowledge. In addition, deliberate vocabulary learning is time-saving and fairly more effective for long memory retention (Nation, 1982). To deliberately learn vocabulary, learners frequently use wordlists, word cards, studying word parts amongst others (Nation, 1982; Nation, 2001). Studying word parts, such as prefixes, stems and suffixes, is a valuable technique (Nation, 2008) because it is the basis of seeing connections between related words, guessing from context, strengthening from-meaning connection and working out the meaning of some words (Nation, 2001). Therefore, learning vocabulary from word parts is significant to receptive vocabulary because it facilitates incidental techniques, such as guessing from context, to decode the meaning of the unknown words (Wysocki & Jenkins, 1987; Nation, 2009). A great deal of research has proven the effectiveness of learning prefixes and suffixes in developing L2 vocabulary (Anglin,

1993; Nation, 2001; Nation, 2008; Quigley, 2018). Therefore, the direct approach complements the indirect approach to expedite vocabulary development (Nation, 1982).

The Etymological Approach in Vocabulary Learning

Etymology is the study of the origin and history of a word (Quigley, 2018). Since most English words are coined through a combination of Latin, Germanic, Greek and French morphemic elements, such as prefixes, suffixes and roots (Yule, 2017), such approach helps English learners enhance their receptive vocabulary by decoding the elements of an unknown word (Fekri, 2011 in Baleghizadeh & Naeim, 2011; Quigley, 2018), hence attaining the advantages of analysing word parts mentioned earlier. However, this approach is not apt for all learners. This is because it requires knowledge and skills on how affixes can alter words meaning (Baumann, Edwards, Font, Tereshinski, Kameenui, & Olejnik 2002; Zolfagharkhani & Moghadam, 2011) and moving along the word frequency continuum from high-frequency to low-frequency reveals an increased number of Greek and Latin words that profoundly rely on affixes in their derivation (Bellemo, 1999). Therefore, intermediate and advanced learners can exploit this technique to enhance their receptive vocabulary (Pierson, 1989; Zolfagharkhani & Moghadam, 2011).

Etymology has two considerable impacts on vocabulary learning. First, it aids in analysing word parts leading to inferring the meaning of a word from its form. A study by Zolfagharkhani and Moghadam (2011) reveal that teaching vocabulary through the etymological approach has significant higher word knowledge gains than traditional vocabulary teaching methods (i.e., definitions, synonyms and antonyms) ($P\text{-value} = 0.029 > \alpha = .05$). The participants in the preceding study mentioned that by using this approach, they can understand thousands of unknown English words as they can break the building blocks of the word to reach its meaning (Ibid). Second, using etymology in teaching vocabulary has remarkable results in promoting word retention (Pierson; 1989; Soleimani & Azizmohammadi, 2015). This is because learning about etymology is learning about the origin and history of a word (Yule, 2017), and this enables learners to associate the target words with existing knowledge in the mind (Pierson, 1989). Thus, the word will be easily retainable if it has a story behind it (Baleghizadeh & Naeim, 2011). Another factor that helps learners' retention is the number of exposures to the target lexical items. Research suggests that multiple exposures to target items is crucial for maximizing word knowledge (Nation, 2008; Malone, 2018). Therefore, the two advantages of using etymology are supported by Nation's (2009, p. 100) conclusion that "paying attention to word parts helps learners to make full use of the word families they know, and also contributes to remembering new complex words". Therefore, the etymological approach can be a shortcut to vocabulary learning (Davoudi & Yousefi, 2009) where learners are equipped with a proxy to decipher most English vocabulary (Quigley, 2018).

Theoretical Grounds

The relation between etymology and word retention in the aforementioned studies can be attributed to two theoretical underpinnings, namely the schema theory and the dual coding theory (DCT). The former states that in language comprehension, people activate relevant schemata¹ to help them interpret new information quickly and effectively (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). In reading and listening, relevant schemata is activated in relation to the topic in order to help understand the topic (Ibid). Nassaji (2007) states that, in many cases, failure to store a word effectively in the brain by connecting it to existing knowledge leads to failure to remember the meaning of that word in later encounters. The etymological approach tends to narrate a story about the word origin with a list of older versions and other derivatives of the word. This creates more word associations in the learner's mind, hence easier activation of the schemata when needed (Baleghizadeh & Naeim, 2011). Therefore, the etymological approach helps lexical retention in language learners through making several associations of the word in learners' schemata. However, some learners may lack the required existing knowledge with which the new word could associate, especially for abstract language (Sadoski, 2005). For instance, if learners are using the etymological approach to learn the word '*demagogue*' and they have never encountered such concept nor have stored relevant knowledge about it, there will be no schema to activate. In other words, the schema theory requires learners to have similar stories to the new word in order to be stored accordingly and becomes accessible for later activation.

Although stories that are relatable to existing knowledge are of great benefit to account for the schema theory, the absence of such stories does not make the etymological approach futile. For instance, in explaining the etymological roots of '*demagogue*' (demos = people + agogos = leading) with the different versions used across the history of the English language (Appendix 1), this may evoke a sort of feeling or reaction in the learner towards the word and/or create a mental image or an emotional reaction that represents the word in the learner's mind (Baleghizadeh & Naeim, 2011). This reaction is defined by the DCT as a nonverbal association to the word to which the brain can relate to retain the meaning of the word (Boers, 2001; Sadoski, 2005). Therefore, the etymological approach can either activate a relevant schema in the learner's mind (accounting for the schema theory) or create a nonverbal reaction towards the target word (accounting for DCT).

Methodology

This section will demonstrate how learners can use etymology to deliberately learn vocabulary to achieve both benefits of the etymological approach, namely better retention through learning about the history and origin of the word as well as studying the word parts which can potentially result in learning other related words. Each target word will be defined in a contextual story in

¹ "Schemata serves as a reference store from which a person can retrieve relevant existing knowledge and into which new information is assimilated" (Richards & Schmidt, 2002: 469).

which the meaning of the word is inferable from the conclusion of the story. The contextual story will include an event that concludes with a denotation to the target item. The reason for this method is twofold. Aside from the story of the origin of the word, the contextual story could be relatable to existing knowledge in which the schema of the learner will be activated. Second, in case the learner does not have a relevant story for the target word to account for the schema theory, the contextual story will stimulate a non-verbal reaction or feeling in the learners towards the target words to account for the DCT. The story of the word origin will help activate the relevant schemata and introduce other related words. Even if the contextual story suffices to activate the learner's schema, the story of the word origin will create an additional pathway for recall through storing the etymological information as a mental image (Boers, Demecheleer & Eyckmans, 2004). Next, the learner will read about the history and/or the origin of each target word. Finally, the target items will be analysed based on their parts and relate those parts to other potential target words to maximise the overall lexical gains.

Target Items

As mentioned earlier, this approach targets intermediate and advanced learners' receptive skills. Therefore, low-frequency words were chosen to minimise the likelihood of learners' familiarity with the target words. The target words and activities were adopted from Lewis (2006). The reason for choosing this book is because it includes a narration about each word history and explains how learning one root can lead to learning other new words. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was used to check the target words frequency (Appendix 2). The result is shown in the table below:

Word	Frequency	Per million
Disparaging	540	0.93
Equivocating	49	0.08
Proscribe	74	0.13
Obviate	207	0.36
Placate	523	0.91

Table 1: The frequency of the target words in COCA

As can be seen in Table 1, all target items are considered as low-frequency except for 'disparage' and 'placate' which are considered as mid-frequency. However, the table above shows that 'disparage' and 'placate' occur in 0.91 in a million. Hence, the chosen words are suitable for intermediate and advanced learners because the chances of the learner's familiarisation with the target words are scarce.

Activities for Learners

Activity 1

From this activity, the learner will infer the meaning of the target words from the story and activate the schemata to which each word conveys. Presumably, partial knowledge of the words should be gained from the activity (Lewis, 2006). To further expand the words knowledge, the learner can use online dictionaries to look for the words' pronunciation and other related meanings and usages. Each word is contextualised in a short story in order to either help the learner connect the word to an association in mind or create a reaction towards it. Therefore, the target words are as demonstrated in the following presentation:

1. Ready to go back thirty or more years? Consider some post-World War II American political history: Harry Truman couldn't win the 1948 election. The pollsters said so, the Republicans heartily agreed, even the Democrats, some in high places, believed it. Mr. Truman himself was perhaps the only voter in the country who was not entirely convinced. Came the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November—well, if you were one of those who stayed up most of the night listening to the returns, and then kept your ear to the radio most of the next day, you recall how you reacted to the unique Truman triumph. It was no mean accomplishment, though many people. Pure accident said others. If one out of twelve voters in a few key states had changed his ballot, Harry could have gone back to selling ties, one Republican apologist pointed out. It wasn't anything Truman did, said another; it was what Dewey didn't do. No credit to Truman, said a third; it was the farmers—or labour—or the Republicans who hadn't bothered to vote—or the ingenious miscounting of ballots. No credit to Truman, insisted a fourth; it was Wallace's candidacy—it was the Democrats—it was Republican overconfidence—it was sunspots—it was the Communists—it was the civil service workers who didn't want to lose their cushy jobs—it was really Roosevelt who won the election. Anyway, Harry didn't accomplish a thing—he was just a victim of good fortune. What were the apologists for Dewey's failure doing?
 - They were **disparaging** Truman's achievement.
2. Willing to look at some more history of the late 1940s? Of course, Dewey did campaign, in his own way, for the presidency. As the Republican aspirant, he had to take a stand on the controversial Taft-Hartley Act. Was he for it? He was for that part of it which was good. Naturally, he was against any of the provisions which were bad. Was he for it? The answer was yes —and also no. Take whichever answer you wanted most to hear. What was Dewey doing?
 - He was **equivocating**.
3. What does the doctor say to you if you have low blood sugar? "No candy, no pastries, no chocolate marshmallow cookies, no ice cream!", your morale dropping lower and lower as each favourite goody is placed on the forbidden list. What, in one word, is the doctor doing?
 - The doctor is **proscribing** harmful items in your diet.
4. You are warm, friendly, enthusiastic, outgoing, easy to please; you are quick to show appreciation, yet accept, without judgment or criticism, the human weaknesses of others. You are a fascinating talker, an even better listener. You believe in, and practice, honest self-disclosure; you feel comfortable with yourself and therefore with everyone else; and you have a passionate interest in experiencing, in living, in relating to people. Need you have any fears about making friends?
 - Obviously not. Your characteristics and temperament **obviate** such fears.
5. Unwittingly you have done something that has aroused anger and resentment in your best friend. You had no desire to hurt him, yet he makes it obvious that he feels pretty bitter about the whole situation. (Perhaps you failed to invite him to a gathering he wanted to come to; or you neglected to consult him before **making a decision** on a matter in which he felt he should have some say.) His friendship is valuable to you and you wish to restore yourself in his good graces. What do you do?
 - You try to **placate** him.

Figure 1: Contextual stories referring to the target words

Activity 2

The result of the preceding activity can be expanded to more than 5 new words. The next step incorporates analysing the word parts of each word. Each word analysis requires the learner to read about the word origin and learn the related word members. Stories about English word origins and related word members can be found either in books (i.e., Lewis, 2006; Forsyth, 2011; Sharma, 2018) or in the Online Etymology Dictionary*. If the learner analyses each target item, the outcome of will be as demonstrated below.

Analysis of ‘Disparage’

Analysing the word ‘disparaging’ resulted in introducing 12 new words (Appendix 3). The below figure summarises the new vocabulary outcome of the analysis activity.

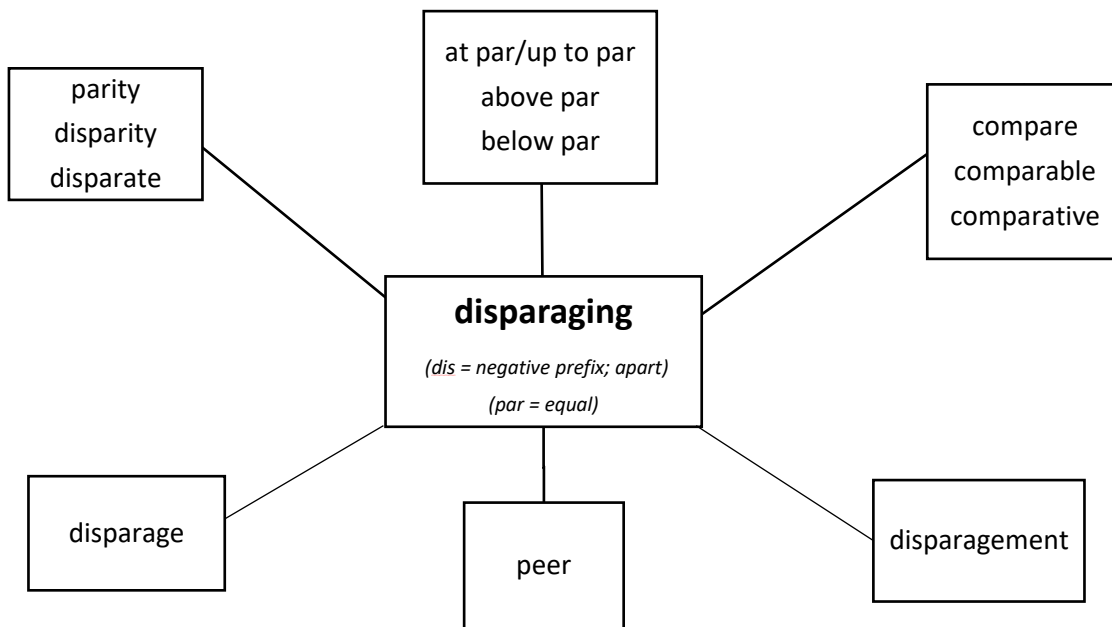


Figure 2: The result of analysing 'Disparage'

* <https://www.etymonline.com/>

Analysis of 'Proscribe'

Analysing 'proscribe' resulted in 6 new words (Appendix 4):

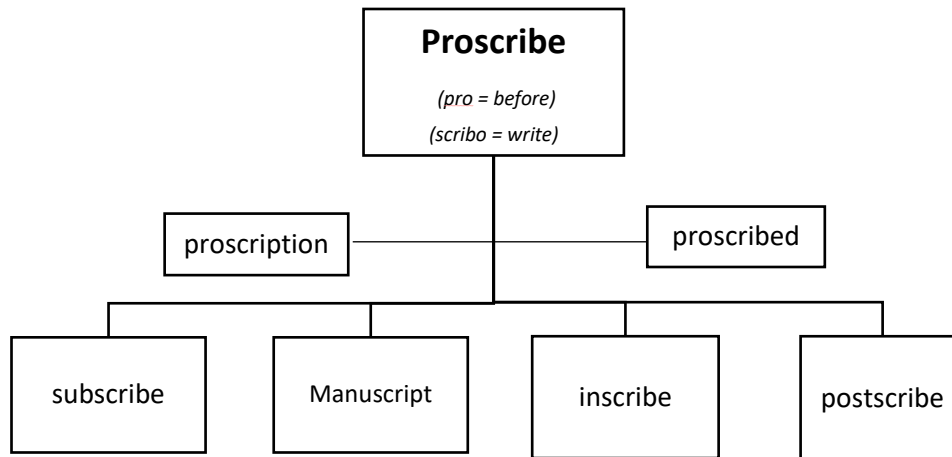


Figure 3: The result of analysing 'Proscribe'

Analysis of 'Obviate'

Analysing the word parts of 'obviate' resulted in 5 new words (Appendix 5):

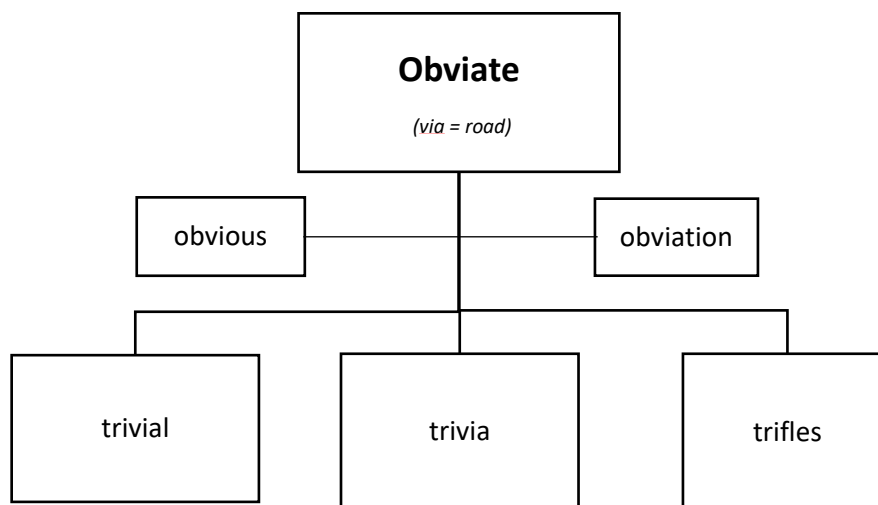


Figure 4: The result of analysing 'Obviate'

Analysis of 'Placate'

The analysis of 'placate' resulted in 9 words (Appendix 6):

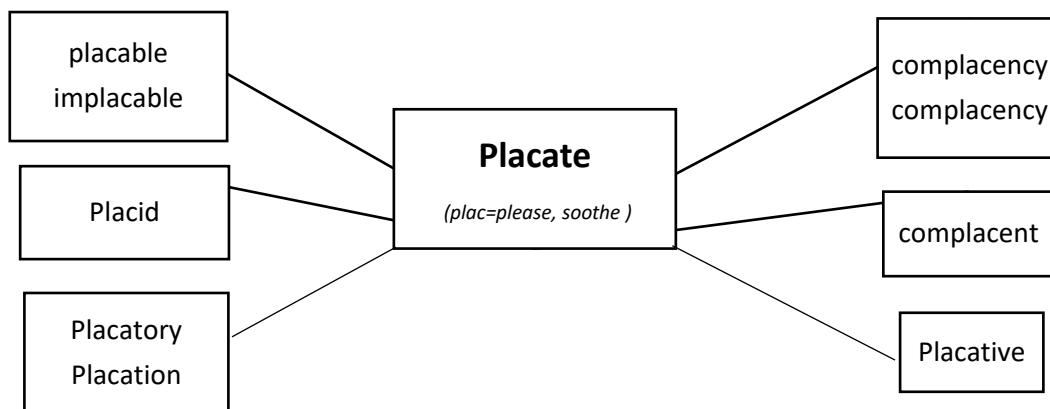


Figure 5: The result of analysing 'Placate'

Analysing 'Equivocate'

The analysis of 'equivocate' resulted in more than 30 words (Appendix 7).

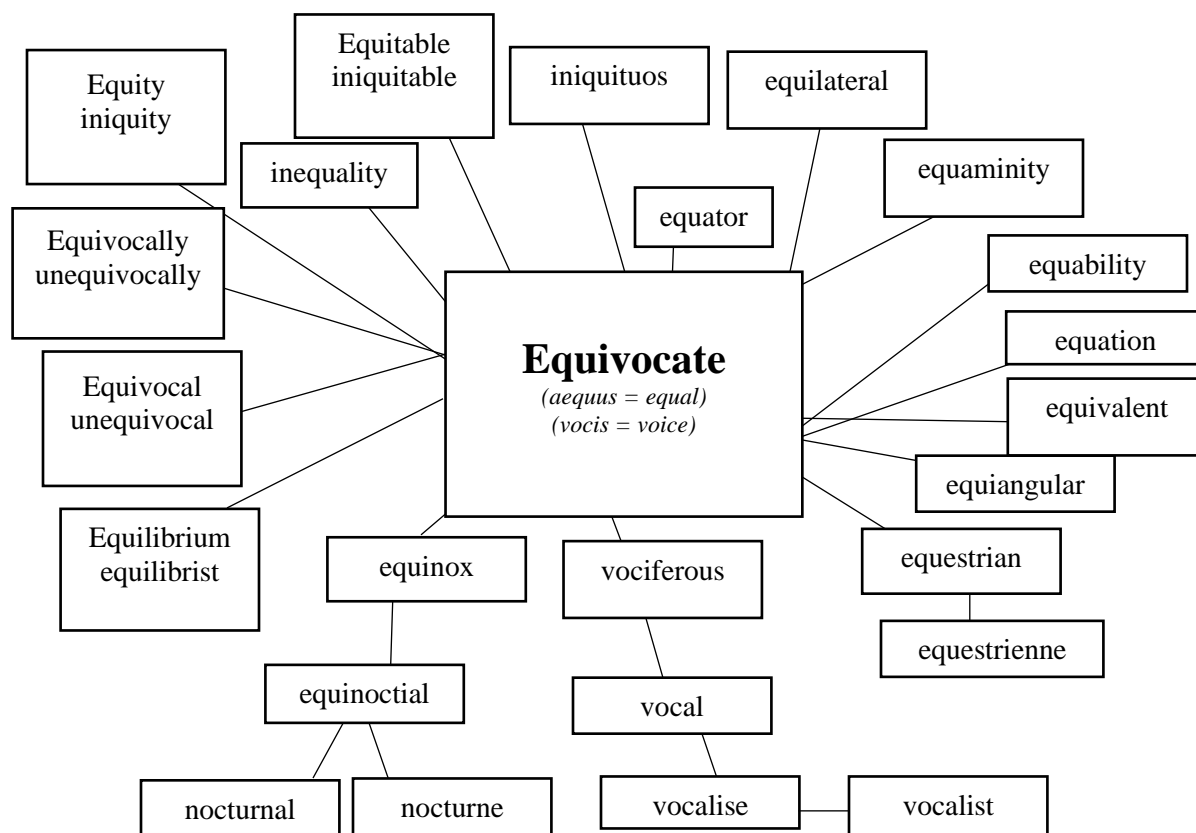


Figure 6: The result of analysing 'Equivocate'

Discussion

Unequivocally, the etymological approach can have two benefits in vocabulary learning. First, it can consolidate basic word knowledge (i.e. meaning) in the learner's schema through the story behind the origin, history and coinage process. Some words have interesting stories behind them. The analysis of the word 'proscribe', for instance, explains how the word was used in the past and how it came to its current meaning today (Appendix 4). These stories about the history of the word lead to better retention in language learners (e.g., Soleimani & Azizmohammadi, 2015). Even if the schema of the word is not present in the learner's mind, a non-verbal reaction towards the word will be evoked according to the DCT, hence easier to retain (Sadoski, 2005).

It could be argued that the first activity that involved introducing the target words in short stories can replace the etymological approach in accounting for the learner's schema. As mentioned earlier, the etymological approach provides an extra pathway to recall the meaning (Boers, 2001; Boers et al., 2004) because learners construct a better mental representation of the word if the history and root are explicitly explained than defining, explaining as well as giving examples of the word (Baleghizadeh & Naeim, 2011). Moreover, the story of the word origin and how one root is established to coin several other words conglomerate a sense of "perceptions, memories, and emotions [that are] held together by associations to serve symbolic functions in thought" (Sadoski, 2005, p. 229). Additionally, Fekri (2011) mentions that learning the origin of the word helps in faster lexical retention of related word members. This is because psycholinguistic research asserts that the brain stores words either separately (words stored with no connection to other words) or by grouping words according to semantic and orthographic similarities (words are stored with connection to other words) (Corson, 1997 in Schmitt, 2010; Yamazaki & Yamazaki, 2006). The former occurs in rote learning, which is highly prone to attrition due to lack of relevance of the information being learned (Soleimani & Azizmohammadi, 2015). The latter, however, does not only relate to existing knowledge, but also stores the words that share similar roots in the same category, hence faster access and retention (Zolfagharkhani & Moghadam, 2011). For example, if the learner is aware that the Greek root 'equus' means 'equal', the brain will store most of the 30 words in Figure 6 in the same category. This makes the words access easier to the learner than storing each word separately based on different schemata. Moreover, the story about the word origin includes a narration of previous versions and other derivatives of the word (Lewis, 2006). Since "the more associations the brain makes for a word, the easier it will be to store and retain it" (Zolfagharkhani & Moghadam, 2011, p. 113), the etymological approach provides the learner with more than a story to associate it in the brain. Therefore, it can enhance word retention.

The second advantage of this approach is related to analysing the origin or root of the word. As can be seen in the previous section, analysing word roots exposes the learner to a number of new related words. Analysing word roots has several benefits. First, it increases the number of exposures to the root and its meaning. As mentioned earlier, research suggests that multiple

exposure to target items is crucial for maximizing word knowledge (Nation, 2008; Malone, 2018). Second, the word ‘equivocate’ has the potential to expose the learner to more than 30 new words (Appendix 7). Therefore, it can expand the vocabulary size of the learner. Third, this approach will develop word consciousness in the learner that may help in later exposures to other words from similar root (Quigley, 2018). For example, after being acquainted with the meaning of the root (equus=equal), the word ‘equidistant’ should not be a difficult word to infer from its building blocks, since ‘distant’ is a very high-frequency word. Finally, Carter (1998) mentions that deliberate learning is a prerequisite to incidental learning. Research has established that the etymological approach leads learners to become autonomous in vocabulary learning by enabling them to decode a great deal of new words they may encounter (Boers, 2001; Hosseini et al, 2012; Soleimani & Azizmohammadi, 2015). Therefore, one of the reasons of requiring deliberate learning before incidental learning can be finding the proxy of decrypting English vocabulary (Quigley, 2018), which is etymology, to enhance word guessing (MacDonald, 2015).

Conclusion

The prominence of the etymological approach as a deliberate vocabulary learning technique is ascribed to two theoretical underpinnings in which language learners’ vocabulary size and lexical retention are advanced. Learning vocabulary through etymology does not only have a mnemonic effect by creating a mental image of the target words (Boers, Eyckmans & Stengers, 2007) but also expands learners’ receptive vocabulary through reading about other related words. The vocabulary acquired through analysing the target words will be easily retained when stimulated in later occasions because they will be stored in the same lexical category in the brain, hence faster access (Zolfagharkhani & Moghadam, 2011). Additionally, such approach raises word consciousness wherein language learners become autonomous in vocabulary learning by decoding the meaning from the building blocks of a word (Hosseini et al, 2012; Quigley, 2018). Therefore, intermediate and advanced English learners can expand their receptive vocabulary by analysing their existing vocabulary to add more related words to some lexical categories. Moreover, they can use the etymological approach to learn new vocabulary for easier and faster retention, which will potentially expose them to other related words. Finally, the etymological knowledge will provide them with a decoding tool in which unknown words can be deciphered and interpreted from their building blocks. However, empirical research to confirm the aforementioned outcome of using etymology as a deliberate vocabulary learning technique is needed.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

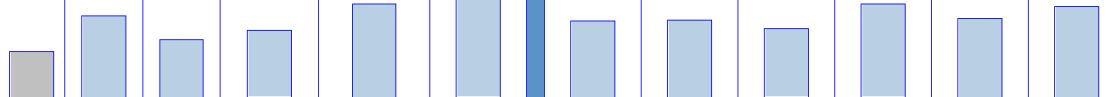
Analysing the word parts of 'demagogue':

Like *pedagogue*, *demagogue* (DEM'-ə-gog) has also deteriorated in meaning. By derivation a *leader* (*agogos*) of the *people* (*demos*), a *demagogue* today is actually one who attempts, in essence, to *mislead* the people, a politician who fomenting discontent among the masses, rousing them to fever pitch by wild oratory, in an attempt to be voted into office.


Once elected, *demagogues* use political power to further their own personal ambitions or fortunes.

Many "leaders" of the past and present, in countries around the world, have been accused of *demagoguery* (dem-ə-GOG'-ə-ree). Adjective: *demagogic* (dem-ə-GOJ'-ik).

Appendix 2


SECTION	ALL	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2009	2010-2014	2015-2017
FREQ	540	111	75	91	123	140	93	93	82	111	95	66
WORDS (M)	577	116.7	111.8	117.4	113.0	111.4	104.0	103.4	102.9	102.0	102.9	62.3
PER MIL	0.93	0.95	0.67	0.78	1.09	1.26	0.89	0.90	0.80	1.09	0.92	1.06
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE												

Frequency of ‘Disparaging’:

SECTION	ALL	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2009	2010-2014	2015-2017
FREQ	49	16	7	10	6	10	10	7	8	4	5	15
WORDS (M)	577	116.7	111.8	117.4	113.0	111.4	104.0	103.4	102.9	102.0	102.9	62.3
PER MIL	0.08	0.14	0.06	0.09	0.05	0.09	0.10	0.07	0.08	0.04	0.05	0.24
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE												

Frequency of ‘Equivocating’:

Frequency of ‘Proscribe’:

SECTION	ALL	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2009	2010-2014	2015-2017
FREQ	74	3	2	12	4	53	18	7	11	16	7	15
WORDS (M)	577	116.7	111.8	117.4	113.0	111.4	104.0	103.4	102.9	102.0	102.9	62.3
PER MIL	0.13	0.03	0.02	0.10	0.04	0.48	0.17	0.07	0.11	0.16	0.07	0.24
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE												

SECTION	ALL	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2009	2010-2014	2015-2017
FREQ	207	16	9	45	11	126	51	46	34	39	18	19
WORDS (M)	577	116.7	111.8	117.4	113.0	111.4	104.0	103.4	102.9	102.0	102.9	62.3
PER MIL	0.36	0.14	0.08	0.38	0.10	1.13	0.49	0.44	0.33	0.38	0.17	0.30
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE												

Frequency of ‘Obviate’:

Frequency of ‘Placate’:

SECTION	ALL	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2009	2010-2014	2015-2017
FREQ	523	68	123	112	103	117	133	104	96	67	76	47
WORDS (M)	577	116.7	111.8	117.4	113.0	111.4	104.0	103.4	102.9	102.0	102.9	62.3
PER MIL	0.91	0.58	1.10	0.95	0.91	1.05	1.28	1.01	0.93	0.66	0.74	0.75
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE												

Appendix 3

Analysing the origin and word parts of 'Disparaging':

If you play golf, you know that each course or hole has a certain *par*, the number of strokes allowed according to the results achieved by expert players. Your own accomplishment on the course will be *at par*, *above par*, or *below par*:

Similarly, some days you may feel up to *par*, other days below *par*:

Par is from a Latin word meaning *equal*. You may try, when you play golf, to *equal* the expert score; and some days you may, or may not, feel *equal* to your usual self.

When we speak of *parity* payments to farmers, we refer to payments that show an *equality* to earnings for some agreed-upon year.

So when you *disparage*, you lower someone's *par*, or feeling of *equality*, (*dis-* as you know, may be a negative prefix). The noun is *disparagement* (dis-PAIR'-əj-mənt), the adjective *disparaging* (dis-PAIR'-əj-ing), as in "Why do you always make *disparaging* remarks about me?"

Parity (PAIR'-ə-tee) as a noun means *equality*; *disparity* (dis-PAIR'-ə-tee) means a lack of *equality*, or a difference. We may speak, for example, of the *disparity* between someone's promise and performance; or of the *disparity* between the rate of vocabulary growth of a child and of an adult. The adjective *disparate* (DIS'-pə-rət) indicates *essential* or *complete* difference or inequality, as in "Our philosophies are so *disparate* that we can never come to any agreement on action."

The word *compare* and all its forms (*comparable*, *comparative*, etc.) derive from *par*, equal. Two things are *compared* when they have certain *equal* or similar qualities, (*con-*, *com-*, *together*, *with*).

Pair and *peer* are also from *par*: Things (shoes, socks, gloves, etc.) in *pairs* are *equal* or similar; your *peers* are those *equal* to you, as in age, position, rank, or ability. Hence the expression "to be judged by a jury of one's peers."

(British *peers*, however, such is the contradiction of language, were *nobles*.)

Appendix 4

Analysing the origin and word parts of 'Proscribe':

Proscribe, to forbid, is commonly used for medical, religious, or legal prohibitions.

A doctor *proscribes* a food, drug, or activity that might prove harmful to the patient. The church *proscribes*, or announces a *proscription* (prō-SKRIP'-shən) against, such activities as may harm its parishioners. The law *proscribes* behavior detrimental to the public welfare.

Generally, one might concede, *proscribed* activities are the most pleasant ones—as Alexander Woolcott once remarked, if something is pleasurable, it's sure to be either immoral, illegal, or fattening.

The derivation is the prefix *pro-*, before, plus *scribo*, *scriptus*, to write. In ancient Roman times, a man's name was written on a public bulletin board if he had committed some crime for which his property or life was to be forfeited; Roman citizens in good standing would thereby know to avoid him. In a similar sense, the doctor writes down those foods or activities that are likely to commit crimes against the patient's health—in that way the patient knows to avoid them.

Scribo, *scriptus* is the building block of scores of common English words: *scribe*, *scribble*, *prescribe*, *describe*, *subscribe*, *script*, *the Scriptures*, *manuscript*, *typescript*, etc. *Describe* uses the prefix *de-*, down—to *describe* is, etymologically, "to write down" about. *Manuscript*, combining *manus*, hand (as in *manual* labor), with *scriptus*, is something handwritten—the word was coined before the invention of the typewriter. *The Scriptures* are holy writings. To *subscribe* (as to a magazine) is to write one's name *under* an order or contract (*sub-*, under, as in *subway*, *subsurface*, etc.); to *subscribe* to a philosophy or a principle is figuratively to write one's name *under* the statement of such philosophy or principle.

To *inscribe* is to write *in* or *into* (a book, for example, or metal or stone). A *postscript* is something written after (Latin *post*, after) the main part is finished.

Appendix 5

Analysing the origin and word parts of ‘Obviate’:

You are familiar with the word *via*, by way of, which is from the Latin word for *road*. (The *Via Appia* was one of the famous highways of ancient Roman times.) When something is *obvious*, etymologically it is right there in the middle of the road where no one can fail to see it—hence, easily seen, not hidden, conspicuous. And if you meet an obstacle in the road and dispose of it forthwith, you are doing what *obviate* says. Thus, if you review your work daily in some college subject, frenzied “cramming” at the end of the semester will be *obviated*. A large and steady income *obviates* fears of financial insecurity; leaving for work early will *obviate* worry about being late. *To obviate*, then, is to make unnecessary, to do away with, to prevent by taking effective measures or steps against (an occurrence, a feeling, a requirement, etc.). The noun is *obviation* (ob'-vee-AY'-shən).

Surprisingly, *via*, road, is the root in the English word *trivial* (*tri*, *three*). Where three roads intersect, you are likely to find busy traffic, lots of people, in short a fairly public place, so you are not going to talk of important or confidential matters, lest you be overheard. You will, instead, talk of *trivial* (TRIV'-ee-əl) things—whatever is unimportant, without great significance; you will confine your conversation to *trivialities* (triv'-ee-AL'-ē-teez) or to *trivia* (also a plural noun, pronounced TRIV'-ee-ē), insignificant *trifles*.

Appendix 6

Analysing the origin and word parts of 'Placate':

Placate is built on the root *plac-* which derives from two related Latin verbs meaning, 1) *to please*, and 2) *to appease, soothe, or pacify*.

If you succeed in *placating* an angry colleague, you turn that person's hostile attitude into one that is friendly or favorable. The noun is *placation* (play-KAY'-shən), the adjective either *placative* (PLAK'-ə-tiv or PLAY'-kə-tiv) or *placatory* (PLAK'-ə-taw-ree or PLAY'-kə-taw-ree). A more *placatory* attitude to those you have offended may help you regain their friendship; when husband and wife, or lovers, quarrel, one of them finally makes a *placative* gesture if the war no longer fulfills his or her neurotic needs—one of them eventually will wake up some bright morning in a *placatory* mood.

But then, such is life, the other one may at that point be *implacable* (im-PLAK'-ə-bəl or im-PLAY'-kə-bəl)—*im-* is a respelling of *in-*, *not*, before the letter *p*. One who *can* be soothed, whose hostility *can* be changed to friendliness, is *placable* (PLAK'-ə-bəl or PLAY'-kə-bəl).

Implacable has taken on the added meaning of *unyielding to entreaty or pity*; hence, *harsh, relentless*, as "The governor was *implacable* in his refusal to grant clemency."

The noun form of *implacable* is *implacability* (im-plak'-ə-BIL'-ə-tee or im-play'-kə-BIL'-ə-tee). Can you write (and pronounce) the noun derived from *placable*? _____.

If you are *placid* (PLAS'-id), you are calm, easygoing, serene, undisturbed—etymologically, you are pleased with things as they are. Waters of a lake or sea, or the emotional atmosphere of a place, can also be *placid*. The noun is *placidity* (plə-SID'-ə-tee).

If you are *complacent* (kəm-PLAY-sənt), you are pleased with yourself (*com-*, from *con-*, with, together); you may, in fact, such is one common connotation of the word, be smug, *too* pleased with your position or narrow accomplishments, too easily self-satisfied, and the hour of reckoning may be closer than you realize. (Humans, as you know, are delighted to be critical of the contentment of others.)

The noun is *complacence* (kəm-PLAY'-səns) or *complacency* (kəm-PLAY'-sən-see).

Appendix 7

Analysing the origin and word parts of ‘Equivocating’:

Equivocate is built on another Latin word meaning *equal*—*aequus* (the spelling in English is always *equ-*)—plus *vox, vocis, voice*.

When you *equivocate* (ə-KWIV'-ə-kayt'), you seem to be saying both *yes* and *no* with *equal voice*. An *equivocal* (ə-KWIV'-ə-kəl) answer, therefore, is by design vague, indefinite, and susceptible of contradictory interpretations, quite the opposite of an *unequivocal* (un'-ə-KWIV'-ə-kəl) response, which says *Yes!* or *No!*, and no kidding. Professional politicians are masters of *equivocation* (ə-kwiv'-ə-KAY'-shən)—they are, on most vital issues, mugwumps; they sit on a fence with their *mugs* on one side and their *wumps* on the other. You will often hear candidates for office say, publicly, that they *unequivocally* promise, if elected, to...; and then they start *equivocating* for all they are worth, like people who say, “Let me be perfectly *frank* with you”—and then promptly and glibly lie through their teeth.

The root *aequus*, spelled *equ-* in English words, is a building block of:

1. *equity* (EK'-wə-tee)—justice, fairness; i.e., equal treatment. (By extension, stocks in the financial markets are *equities*, and the value of your home or other property over and above the amount of the mortgage you owe is your *equity* in it.) The adjective is *equitable* (EK'-wə-tə-bəl).

2. *inequity* (in-EK'-wə-tee)—injustice, unfairness (*equity* plus the negative prefix *in-*). Adjective: *inequitable* (in-EK'-wə-tə-bəl).

3. *iniquity* (in-IK'-wə-tee)—by one of those delightful surprises and caprices characteristic of language, the change of a single letter (*e* to *i*), extends the meaning of a word far beyond its derivation and original denotation. Injustice and unfairness are sinful and wicked, especially if you naïvely believe that life is fair. So a “den of *iniquity*” is a place where vice flourishes; an *iniquity* is a sin or vice, or an egregiously immoral act; and *iniquity* is wickedness, sinfulness. Adjective: *iniquitous* (in-IK'-wə-təs).

4. *equinox* (EE'-kwə-noks')—etymologically, “equal night,” a combination of *aequus* and *nox, noctis, night*. The *equinox*, when day and night are of equal length, occurs twice a year: about March 21, and again about September 21 or 22. (The adjective is *equinoctial*—ee'-kwə-NOK'-shəl.) *Nocturnal* (nok-TURN'-əl), derived from *nox, noctis*, describes people, animals, or plants that are *active or flourish at night rather than during daylight hours*. Cats and owls are *nocturnal*, as is the moonflower, whose blossoms open at night; not to mention “night people,” whose biorhythms are such that they function better after the sun goes down, and who like to stay up late and sleep well into midmorning. A *nocturne* (NOK'-turn) is a musical composition of dreamy character (i.e., night music), or a painting of a night scene.

5. *equanimity* (ee'-kwə-NIM'-ə-tee or ek'-wə-NIM'-ə-tee)—etymologically *aequus* plus *animus*, *mind*, hence “equal mind.” Maintain your *equanimity*, your evenness of temper, your composure, your coolness or calmness, when everyone around you is getting excited or hysterical, and you will probably be considered an admirable person, though one might wonder what price you pay for such emotional control.

6. *Equability* (ee'-kwə-BIL'-ə-tee or ek'-wə-BIL'-ə-tee)—a close synonym of *equanimity*. A person of *equable* (EE'-kwə-bəl or EK'-wə-bəl) *temperament is characteristically calm, serene, unflappable, even-tempered.*

7. *equilibrium* (ee'-kwə-LIB'-ree-əm)—by derivation *aequus* plus *libra*, *balance*, *weight*, *pound*, hence “equal balance.” *Libra* (LĪ'-brə) is the seventh sign of the zodiac, represented by a pair of scales. Now you know, in case the question has been bothering you, why the abbreviation for the word *pound* is *lb.* and why the symbol for the British *pound*, the monetary unit, is £. *Equilibrium* is a state of *physical balance*, especially between opposing forces. When you are very drunk you may have difficulty keeping your *equilibrium*—the force of gravity is stronger than your ability to stay upright. An *equilibrist* (ə-KWIL'-ə-brist), as you might guess, is a professional tightrope walker—a performer successfully defying the law of gravity (when sober) by *balancing* on a thin overhead wire.

The *equator* divides the earth into *equal* halves, and words like *equation*, *equivalent*, *equidistant*, *equiangular*, and *equilateral* (from Latin *latus*, *lateris*, *side*) are self-explanatory.

not to be confused with horses

Equestrian (ə-KWES'-tree-ən) is someone on a horse (as *pedestrian* is someone on foot); an *equestrienne* (ə-kwes'-tree-EN') is a woman on a horse (if you *must* make the distinction); and *equine* (EE'-kwīn) is *like a horse*, as in appearance or characteristics, or descriptive of horses.

Equestrian is also an adjective referring to horseback riding, as an *equestrian statue*; and *equine* is also a noun, i.e., a horse.

So the *equ-* in these words, from Latin *equus*, *horse*, is not to be confused with the *equ-* in the words of the previous section—that *equ-* is from *aequus*, *equal*.

Equivocal, you will recall, combines *aequus* with *vox*, *vocis*, voice; and *vox*, *vocis* combines with *fero*, to bear or carry, to form *vociferous* (vō-SIF'-Ər-Əs), etymologically "carrying (much) voice," hence loud, noisy, clamorous, as *vociferous* demands (not at all quiet or subtle), or the *vociferous* play of young children ("Please! Try to be quiet so Dad can get his work done!"), though unfortunately TV addiction has abnormally eliminated child noises, at least during the program breaks between commercials.

If you are *vocal* (VŌ'-kəl), you express yourself readily and freely by voice; *vocal* sounds are voiced; *vocal* music is sung; and you know what your *vocal* cords are for.

To *vocalize* (VŌ'-kəl-līz') is to give voice to ("Vocalize your anger, don't hold it in!"), or to sing the *vocals* (or voice parts) of music.

A *vocalist* (VŌ'-kəl-līst) is a singer. And *Magnavox* (*vox* plus *magnus*, large) is the trade name for a brand of radios and TV sets.

