

# Analyzing 'Difficult Vocabulary' for Japanese Learners of English: Evaluating Materials Using the SVL as a Practical and Widely Accessible Vocabulary List.

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## Abstract

This paper investigates how English learners appropriately select a vocabulary builder through analyzing several English-based builders and some books written in Japanese for those who seek upper-advanced vocabulary as research on this topic is limited. The analysis shows that some English-based books and Japanese books have similar difficult words for Eiken 1, and those to prepare for GRE collect more advanced words. In addition, since various types of books regarding the target vocabulary are available both in Japanese and English, learners can choose books most suited to their learning style. This may help advisers when consulting students who are studying for the SAT, GRE and Eiken Level 1.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary builders, advanced vocabulary, Standard Vocabulary List (SVL), English proficiency tests, CEFR

## I. Introduction

This study investigates which vocabulary books, i.e. vocabulary builders, should be recommended for English learners in Japan who seek information regarding advanced vocabulary to prepare for undergraduate/graduate school in English medium institutions or for application in a professional setting. It also intends to elucidate when ESP-based vocabulary materials<sup>1</sup> become necessary in step-by-step vocabulary building through an academic curriculum.

In Japan, to increase global competitiveness, practical uses of English have been more emphasized such as the concept of English as an International Language, World Englishes, and English as a Lingua Franca (Marlina, 2014), and some educational institutes have come to conduct their English curriculum based on those concepts (e.g., Sakai, 2019; 2018a; Hino, 2018). The importance of English education in Japan clearly appears in the curriculum guidelines promulgated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). According to the curriculum guidelines in 2018, English education should be focused more on the ability to use English, and so to accomplish this, vocabulary taught by the graduation of high school will be around 5,000 words, which is an increase of roughly 2,000 words compared to the previous guidelines. Beyond

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<sup>1</sup> The author (2021) introduced the vocabulary building on mathematics with YouTube video as a case lecture of ESP class

academic settings, the English vocabulary people see or hear daily has increased due to dynamic changes in society (e.g., Sakai 2017;2018a; Shioda, 2022). Japanese people have to increase their English vocabulary for various requirements more than before.

Under such circumstances, selecting an appropriate reference for vocabulary acquisition and building is a critical issue among learners as well as teachers who need to support various levels of learners. There are a wide variety of English vocabulary builders in bookstores and an increased number of textbooks have appeared in Japan. However, the colorful variation of vocabulary builders written in Japanese disappears past a certain threshold. The actual vocabulary size of the border will be discussed later, but first, the existence of such a boundary could be argued for. The largest group of English professionals in Japan, i.e. high school English teachers, aim to pass Eiken<sup>2</sup> pre-1 level and 72% of them have achieved this goal (MEXT, 2019), so it could easily be imagined that the vocabulary required to attain this level would be a boundary for many books.

This is the author's anecdote, but it was difficult to find a vocabulary book for GRE tests in the early 2000s. In that period, information was scarce, and the author was at a loss after seeing the daunting word list attached to Barron's preparation kit (Green, et al., 2000). Only a few Internet sites introduced how to prepare for the GRE (which have since been closed) and recommended to use *1,100 Words You Need to Know* and *601 Words You Need to Know to Pass Your Exam* – which were the only titles the author found. The author believed many Japanese English learners who prepared for the GRE or other tests for graduate school in this period had difficulty finding resources for help.

At present, access to information has improved because of Internet infrastructure and purchasing materials has been enhanced by network-based shopping. However, at the same time, some Japanese people may still have difficulty in finding vocabulary builders to study highly advanced vocabulary because of the very small number of books and limited information about them. This study intends to clarify some effective materials for Japanese people who aim to learn higher levels of vocabulary, as well as those who advise those types of students. Another aspect of the study is to find how certain vocabulary builders are used in relation with others, including ESP textbooks since words commonly used in ESP often aren't included in frequency-based word lists, as they're not as frequently used in general English communication.

## **II. Types of vocabulary builders and the level of selected vocabulary**

This section first defines a word list that can be referred to in selecting vocabulary builders, the books optimized to increase the number of vocabulary for Japanese learners, as opposed to English corpora word lists based on frequency. The ideal word list would take into consideration manageability of the vocabulary list in terms of size as well as usability for Japanese learners when studying English in Japanese educational contexts including mandatory school education. Next, this section introduces the types of vocabulary builders widely disseminated in Japan with the rationale of how these types of books are applied based on their approaches.

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<sup>2</sup> “EIKEN is an abbreviation of *Jitsuyo Eigo Gino Kentei* (Test in Practical English Proficiency), one of the most widely used English-language testing programs in Japan”. (Eiken Foundation, 2021)

## 1. Analysis of the word level recorded in vocabulary builders

In language learning, vocabulary is an essential foundation. However, when selecting English textbooks and other resources, it is challenging to find comprehensive references tailored to each learner group. In practice, educators and learners rely on their sense of difficulty, cultivated over time, along with general guidelines provided by book authors, to determine the difficulty, primarily based on frequency. This accurately describes the situation in Japan.

One issue in selecting vocabulary builders is the fact that a standard vocabulary list for English education is not issued by the Japanese government. In the past, the Japanese government announced which vocabulary should be taught in junior and senior high schools. However, the government now only shows a guideline of how many words should be taught in each grade of education, and the new vocabulary used in school textbooks ultimately depended on the authors of the textbooks. Furthermore, the "frequency lists" of textbook publishers, test companies, and reference book creators are likely kept as trade secrets. This means that Japanese English language professionals have been considering and determining word levels without knowing the complete core of this "black box." Anyone involved in English learning and education in Japan has likely experienced this situation.

In this regards, Kairyudo (2016) summarizes the vocabulary shown in the major junior high school English textbooks in Japan: *Sunshine* (Kairyudo), *Crown* (Sanseido), *Horizon* (Tokyo Shoseki), *Columbus* (Mitsumura Tosho), *One World* (Kyoiku Shuppan) and *Total* (Gakko Tosho), and revealed that all six textbooks include a group of 625 words. Moreover, 1,003 words are shared in more than 4 textbooks. In fact, 1,000 is a common number of words that Junior high school students are exposed to. This number<sup>3</sup> seems to be widely recognized.

For example, one of the famous vocabulary builders for high school students (and older learners) *Duo 3.0* states "there are about 1,000 to 1,500 basic English vocabulary (I, my, do, go, etc.)" (Suzuki, 2000). Another popular series, *Eiken High frequency pass vocab*, explains that Eiken level 5 often employs 319 words that are studied in the first year of junior high school (Obunsha, 2021c); Eiken level 4 employs 349 words that are studied in the first and second years of junior high school (Obunsha, 2021d); for Eiken level 3, 300 must words and 300 frequently used words are employed (Obunsha, 2021e). Eiken level 3 is used to indicate English proficiency equivalent to a graduate from junior high school in Japan, so if the number of vocabulary words shown above is summed, i.e.  $319 + 349 + 300 + (300)$ , the total equals 968 to 1,268 words. If several books share vocabulary, it's reasonable to expect that they introduce more than 1000 words based on the learning levels they target. These approximately 1,000 words can be considered the beginning level for English learners in Japan.

As referred to above, one of the possible indices to indicate English proficiency is the Eiken<sup>4</sup> as the Eiken is a test designed to correspond with English education in Japan. Table 1 shows Eiken grade levels and the estimated vocabulary sizes of certified people according to Honda (2019).

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<sup>3</sup> However, the revised edition of the curriculum guidelines suggests teaching 600-700 words in elementary school education so this recognition may be altered in near future.

<sup>4</sup> Approximately 3 million junior high school and high school students, about 80% in all examinees, applied for the test in 2020 fiscal year (Eiken Foundation, 2021)

**Table 1***Eiken and expected vocabulary size (Source: Honda, 2019)*

Level	Approximated Vocabulary Size	Proficiency
1	10,000-15,000 words	University – advanced
Pre-1	7,500 words	University – intermediate
2	5,100 words	High school – completion
Pre-2	3,600 words	High school – intermediate
3	2,100 words	Junior high school – completion
4	1,300 words	Junior high school – intermediate
5	600 words	Junior high school – basic

Honda claims that at pre-1 level English learners have mastery of about 7,500 words. However, it is difficult to ascertain specifically which 7,500 words. For example, *Eiken High frequency pass vocab pre-1* only lists 1,600 words for study. If we try to find a complete set of words, 800 words are missing (i.e. 7,500 words - 5,100 words = 2400 words, so even if 1600 words are introduced in the book, there are no information on the remaining 800 words)<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, we need other vocabulary builders to collate the vocabulary.

**Figure 1***CEFR and English proficiency tests (MEXT, 2018a)*

CEFR	ケンブリッジ 英語検定	実用英語技能検定 1級-3級	GTEC Advanced Basic Core CBT	IELTS	TEAP	TEAP CBT	TOEFL iBT	TOEIC L&R/ TOEIC S&W
<b>C2</b>	230   200 (230) (210) C2 Proficiency			9.0   8.5				
<b>C1</b>	199   180 (190) C1 Advanced	3299   2600 (3299) (2630) 1級	1400   1350 (1400)	8.0   7.0	400   375	800	120   95	1990   1845
<b>B2</b>	179   160 (170) C1 First / for Schools	2599   2300 (2599) (2304) 準1級	1349   1190 (1280) C2	6.5   5.5	374   309	795   600	94   72	1840   1560
<b>B1</b>	159   140 (150) B1 Preliminary / for Schools	2299   1950 (2299) (1980) 2級	1189   960 (1080) C1	5.0   4.0	308   225	595   420	71   42	1555   1150
<b>A2</b>	139   120 (120) A2 Key / for Schools	1949   1700 (1949) (1728) 準2級	959   690 (840) Basic		224   135	415   235		1145   625
<b>A1</b>	119   100 (100) 各試験CEFR 算出範囲	1699   1400 (1699) (1456) 3級	689   270 (270) Core					620   320

To find another reference, collating Figure 1 and Table 1, it can be seen that CEFR B2 level covers pre-requisite English proficiency requirements for non-native speakers of English according to TOEFL or IELTS to

<sup>5</sup> However, several words are contained in several grades, so the number is actually smaller.

enter undergraduate/graduate schools so this will be equivalent to Eiken pre-1 level and the vocabulary size of advanced Japanese learners start from around 7,500 words according to Table 1. Alternately, from another viewpoint, the score prestige universities request, for example IELTS 7, is equivalent to the pass mark on Eiken 1 level, so people would know around 10,000 words in this stage of vocabulary study.

Here, fundamentally, which words should be included has been decided based on the English corpora that illustrate how frequently each word appears on various occasions. The representative corpora are American National Corpus (ANC) and British National Corpus (BNC). In Japan, there are several lists based on academic research such as the 6,868-word list of CEFR-J (Tono, 2020) and the JACET 8000 (JACET, 2016). However, the quantity of words provided in these lists is insufficient for examining the vocabulary books tailored for advanced learners, as their sizes are too small.

Amid such a vague understanding of word levels for high school students and test takers, the SVL (Standard Vocabulary List), developed by ALC, has emerged. The SVL is a comprehensive dataset covering up to 12,000 words, utilizing native frequency lists and data related to Japanese English language learning (ALC, 2023). Although not used in rigorous academic research, the SVL has been employed among language learners on forums (such as 5ch and websites offering English learning methods), particularly for exchanging opinions on vocabulary books for levels above Eiken Grade 1 and foreign books. The difficulty is discussed in terms of the inclusion of words outside the SVL. In other words, although it may not be the best option, the SVL serves as a common language in the actual English learning of Japanese people as a de-facto standard. SVL consists of 12,000 words that are selected based on the frequency of use by native speakers together with adjustments for Japanese learners.

SVL beyond the 12,000-word level is extended by Narishika, covering 12,000 to 35,000 words based on the Corpus of Contemporary American English and Age-of-acquisition ratings (Perc\_known\_lem) (Narishika, 2018a). Although his vocabulary research may not be based on the most recent studies, these publications employ general methods using frequency corpora (for details, see Narishika, 2018a). It is likely that other vocabulary books have also used these methods, making this extended list a reasonably reliable extension with credible quality. Because of the coverage, this can be a useful list to analyze the difficulty of vocabulary builders to select. In a more precise sense, Narishika's books are not the SVL. However, for the sake of effective discussions in relation to ALC's list, this study refers to Narishika's books as SVL as well.

Regarding the application of SVL for vocabulary study, concerns may arise about the list's quality. Its creation process lacks transparency, raising doubts about its validity. There's also uncertainty if the authors constructed the list based on rigorous academic theories, especially since it hasn't been published by any institution related to academia.

While there are valid concerns about using the SVL for vocabulary studies, primarily due to its questionable origin and unclear adherence to rigorous academic theories, its broad accessibility makes it an attractive option for the general public. Certainly, the list may not epitomize the pinnacle of vocabulary research or assimilate the latest findings and corpus data. However, it can be particularly beneficial for those not specializing in vocabulary

acquisition who merely want an overarching understanding of vocabulary builders. Referring to original corpus data and incorporating recent studies to analyze vocabulary books can be an excessively demanding task for these individuals.

Moreover, even if a vocabulary list doesn't meet the highest standards of quality, it is plausible that such lists are formulated from sources similar to those used in creating the most credible ones, although these top-tier lists may not be public. Therefore, a publicly available vocabulary list could potentially exceed a reasonable quality threshold, making it both practical and replicable for a wide audience.

Additionally, this list is specifically tailored to Japanese speakers' use of English, who are the primary focus of this study. This has led some Japanese users to regard it as a default standard for English vocabulary levels in various online communication platforms. While it would be ideal to rely on more credible sources, we need to wait for specialists to produce and release a more comprehensive, extensive list in the public sphere in the future.

However, the author does provide a succinct rationale for using the SVL in the material evaluation process. *Eiken 1 High frequency pass vocab* is analyzed here. *Eiken High frequency pass vocab* is a leading vocabulary book for Eiken whose collection is said to have a high correlation with the vocabulary asked/used in real tests. Table 2 illustrates the vocabulary shown in these books within four categories: 1) vocabulary below Eiken pre-1 level, 2) vocabulary level 7,000 to 10,000 words which Eiken did not set as a level of either pre-1 and 1, 3) 10,000 to 15,000, what Eiken 1 mentions as their target vocabulary level, 4) 15,000 or more, beyond Eiken 1 level. This shows that corresponding with the title of the book, the words whose levels between pre-1 and 1 are included in the same difficulty level shown in SVL – 7,000<sup>6</sup> to 15,000. Therefore, the database for them can be quite similar, and applicable to investigate the word level of the vocabulary builders. Similar to *Eiken 1 High frequency pass vocab*, most books only show a limited number of vocabulary within this level range, but SVL enables researchers to analyze the vocabulary level of each book objectively with the same ground.

**Table 2**

*The difficulty of words in 'Eiken 1 High frequency pass vocab'*

SVL	N
-7000	344
7000-10000	609
10000-15000	833
15000+	195

Additionally, in Table 2, the 344 words below the Eiken pre-1 level can be the follow-up of high-frequency words used in the Eiken 1 as well, and the existence of 15,000+ words may be because of simply the fluctuation of vocabulary use in society, as the frequency of these levels of words will be relatively small and easy to change in

<sup>6</sup> As the SVL difficulty level is set in each 1,000 words, so Eiken pre-1 level is regarded as 7,000 here, as 7,500 may be those who master this level, beyond average.

rank.

## 2. Types of vocabulary builders in Japan

English vocabulary builders produced in Japan can be categorized by several methods. At first, they can be categorized based on the target readers: school textbook-based (so-called *Gaku-san*, or *Gakushū sankou sho*), English proficiency test-based, those designed to pass entrance examinations, particularly university entrance examination (mostly published by famous prep schools) and those written for the general public. However, regardless of whether they are written for students or not, the content is basically the same, particularly in the beginning to intermediate stages. Therefore, this may not be so significant.

The other type of categorization is the presentation method of the target vocabulary. There are several types of presentations. 1) Some books show a list of words with a definition or equivalent translation. This type of book is likely to present an example sentence as well. This is the most common type of vocabulary builder in Japan. 2) Another type adopts text-based vocabulary learning. In these books, target words are used in a composition with several paragraphs. Learning vocabulary through reading improves the retention rate (Fraser, 1999), and how to provide a gloss is one of the current issues in this mode of vocabulary learning (e.g., Yanagisawa, et. al., 2020). Although there are some challenges, text-based vocabulary builders make learning more effective. 3) Information on word roots is gaining increased attention in Japan. *A pictorial book on the English etymology* series (by Shimizu & Suzuki, 2018, 2019) is a mega hit in Japan. Not limited to books, many websites on English vocabulary by Japanese hosts introduce “14 master words” by Brown (1949) as a method to increase vocabulary.

Books in these three categories mostly occupy the Japanese market, but other types of presentation exist as well. Some books mainly use pictures or illustrations as the main content and others incorporate linear rhyming to support memorizing new words. There are several types of vocabulary builders, but these books can be divided into these 5 basic types: 1) Word List, 2) Text, 3) Etymology, 4) Illustration, and 5) Linear rhyming <sup>7</sup> (In detail, please see the original texts mentioned in Footnote 7). Therefore, it may be sufficient to discuss these types.

To evaluate vocabulary builders, one essential criterion is the availability of accompanying audio material. English vocabulary books in Japan mostly provide this. Since learners will have a listening test as a part of their English proficiency test, it is reasonable that vocabulary books provide audio for the words that they may encounter.

As a salient difference of vocabulary builders between Japanese based and English based builders, most Japanese builders contain audio material, but many English vocabulary builders do not. This circumstance can be analogized that, for Japanese who study the higher levels of the Japanese Kanji (Chinese characters) Aptitude Test, such as level pre-1 and 1, the texts usually do not contain listening material as sound information is not as

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<sup>7</sup> An example title of each type of vocabulary builders: 1) Word List: *Eiken 1 High frequency pass vocab*; 2) Text: *Eiken 1 learning vocabulary combinations with sentences*; 3) Etymology: *Increasing Science vocabulary through their etymology*; 4) Illustration: *1,880 English vocabulary to impress upon your brain through remembering illustrations*; 5) Linear rhyming: *Linear rhyming English vocabulary to pass exams V words*

important when learning vocabulary in the native language despite the fact that many kanji at this level are not regularly used in daily life. However, when studying higher levels of English, the lack of sound material accompanying English-written vocabulary builders should be a point of caution for Japanese learners.<sup>8</sup>

To discuss vocabulary learning, Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is worth mentioning. Considering the learning environment along with the history of computer technology in Japan, one big news that was reported in 2007 is the educational use of *Eigozuke* released by Nintendo DS by news sources such as Sankei-shinbun. Educators such as Matsufuji (2010) incorporated Nintendo DS into English programs, and indicated that learner autonomy can be improved with this method.. Ban and Minagawa (2011) reported the effects of TOEIC study software titles, characterizing them as “convenient” and “compelling”. These are important factors for learners to begin and continue learning (Sakai 2007).

Compared with that time, many types of computer-mediated learning and communication are available now, and English acquisition research applying these systems have gained attention in this field as well. For example, research studies on a computer game as an English learning tool, report several positive outcomes on vocabulary learning (e.g., Rahman & Angraeni, 2020). In addition, smartphone applications for vocabulary learning have also increased and their content extended. For example, *Mikan* (developed by Mikan Cooperation), a vocabulary learning application through multiple-choice questions, includes many English vocabulary builders in Japan. Therefore, more Japanese people have the opportunity to engage in vocabulary learning conveniently, but selecting an appropriate level of material becomes essential.

### III. Method

This study analyzes the level of vocabulary in several vocabulary builders written in English and Japanese based on SVL (35,000), counting words belonging to each 1,000-word level (as the reason the original book does not distinguish the levels between 24,001-25,000 and 25,001-26,000, the words 24,001 to 26,000 level are counted together). The books are chosen from each category of English vocabulary builders: word list/phrase presentation type, texts type, etymology type, and other presentation types, which represents each type of book. The books for the study are as follows:

Japanese books

- *MBA English Vocabulary*
- *Strategizing the 2,163 essential vocabulary to pass the GRE General Test*
- *The Most Powerful English Vocabulary 1700* (This is the Japanese translation of ‘Basic Word List’ by Brownstein)
- *Eiken 1 learning vocabulary combinations with sentences*
- *Speed reading and listening English words Advanced 1100*

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<sup>8</sup> Audio files can be made relatively easily with reasonably good quality speech software, such as *Amazon polly*. If learners have a motivation to do so, the lack of accompanying audio may not be a disadvantage.

English books

- *1100 Words You Need to Know / 601 Words You Need to Know to Pass the Exam*
- *Verbal Advantage / Word Workout*
- *Merriam-Webster Vocabulary Builder*
- *Vocabulary Cartoon*

#### IV. Results and discussion

##### 1. Word list/Phrase-based vocabulary builders

First, the famous *You Need to Know* series is examined. This series has two levels: *1100 Words You Need to Know* and *601 Words You Need to Know to Pass the Exam*. The former is recommended to use for studying the SAT/ACE, while the latter is for tests such as the GRE. By comparing vocabulary levels of the two books and the SVL, we gain insight as to which book would be best for preparing for a particular test. Table 3 compares the range of each book.

**Table 3**

*The difficulty of words in the You Need to Know series.*

SVL	1100	601	SVL	1100	601	SVL	1100	601
1000	0	0	13000	24	13	26000	3	6
2000	0	2	14000	48	26	27000	11	8
3000	5	2	15000	27	24	28000	5	16
4000	7	0	16000	22	29	29000	7	10
5000	13	1	17000	26	20	30000	6	13
6000	18	1	18000	16	22	31000	8	13
7000	26	7	19000	19	12	32000	1	8
8000	38	6	20000	17	13	33000	0	8
9000	63	12	21000	20	20	34000	1	7
10000	87	14	22000	14	15	35000	5	1
11000	142	37	23000	14	10			
12000	129	43	24000	5	15			

While *1100* mainly covers from levels 5,000 to 23,000, *601* selects more words at higher levels. If one can master the vocabulary in both books, this will aid in passing difficult exams. For Japanese learners, *1100* could perhaps be used to prepare for Eiken 1 if they want to study vocabulary in English.

As for Japanese books, *Strategizing the 2,163 essential vocabulary to pass the GRE General Test*, covers a wide range of vocabulary. Table 4 shows the level of vocabulary for this builder which includes words whose

frequency are over 30000 in rank. This book does not provide audio materials, so if the learners seek listening materials, they may need to find a different book that has similar levels of words.

**Table 4**

*The difficulty of words in Strategizing the 2,163 essential vocabulary to pass the GRE General Test.*

SVL	N	SVL	N	SVL	N	SVL	N
1000	3	11000	275	21000	61	31000	16
2000	15	12000	269	22000	44	32000	11
3000	15	13000	75	23000	45	33000	4
4000	21	14000	92	24000	30	34000	2
5000	34	15000	90	26000	19	35000	1
6000	39	16000	75				
7000	74	17000	69	27000	36		
8000	70	18000	57	28000	32		
9000	103	19000	57	29000	29		
10000	137	20000	53	30000	20		

Another vocabulary book written in Japanese is *The Most Powerful English Vocabulary 1700*. This is a translation of *Basic Word List*, so the difficulty of the content is native-speaker level and back when Japanese written vocabulary builders were very rare, this was a precious resource. Table 5 shows that this book has a similar vocabulary level profile as *1100 Words You Need to Know*, so this book may also be effective for those studying for Eiken 1 + α.

**Table 5**

*The difficulty of words in The Most Powerful English Vocabulary 1700.*

SVL	N	SVL	N	SVL	N	SVL	N
1000	2	11000	293	21000	33	31000	11
2000	2	12000	295	22000	34	32000	3
3000	3	13000	49	23000	21	33000	1
4000	1	14000	107	24000	25	34000	0
5000	5	15000	64			35000	14
6000	10	16000	59	26000	5		
7000	55	17000	61	27000	21		
8000	63	18000	46	28000	20		
9000	94	19000	46	29000	14		
10000	160	20000	42	30000	13		

*MBA English vocabulary* is based on the author's personal vocabulary notebook recorded during his graduate study in the U.S., and many advanced academic words are collected. This book has long been recognized as one of the most difficult vocabulary books written in Japanese and many proficient English learners have praised it. Table 6 shows the distribution of words in each difficulty level, and broadly covers from Eiken pre-1 level to 1st level, and beyond. For Eiken 1, this book may be a little overkill, but it may be useful as a second book.

**Table 6**

*The difficulty of words in MBA English vocabulary.*

SVL	N	SVL	N	SVL	N	SVL	N
1000	5	11000	389	21000	61	31000	24
2000	26	12000	343	22000	46	32000	18
3000	48	13000	139	23000	43	33000	12
4000	68	14000	149	24000	33	34000	9
5000	66	15000	131			35000	0
6000	102	16000	101	26000	42		
7000	157	17000	85	27000	32		
8000	167	18000	84	28000	28		
9000	188	19000	80	29000	29		
10000	245	20000	69	30000	23		

Several Japanese and English books of this type have been observed in detail. As for the difficulty levels, there seem to be two trends as the word of Japanese learners: books applicable for Eiken 1 study and those that are for beyond Eiken 1 study. In other words, Japanese authors tend to keep in mind Eiken 1 although it may not be stated obviously, and these books may be effective, however, these books do not mention which words are for Eiken 1, so learners need to check this some other way. For some English books, Eiken 1 level is regarded as easy or basic and then introduces the difficult words necessary for exams such as the GRE. Regarding the SAT and GRE, the researcher has also analyzed the comprehensive word list (5000+ words) from Barron's for previous test versions, which relied more heavily on vocabulary knowledge than the current version. A significant portion of the vocabulary in this list is widely distributed across the SVL, ranging from 1000+ to 35000. Therefore, it can be a supporting source to demonstrate that the SVL list is fundamentally applicable for analyzing exams primarily targeted at native English speakers. This may be one of the keys to choosing the most suitable vocabulary builder written in English.

## 2. Text-based vocabulary builders

As an advanced vocabulary book for those who aim to pass Eiken 1, two famous Japanese books show the

target levels of vocabulary within texts, namely *Eiken 1 learning vocabulary combinations with sentences* and *Speed reading and listening English words Advanced 1100*.

Table 7 illustrates the vocabulary shown in these books within four categories: 1) vocabulary below Eiken pre-1, 2) vocabulary level 7000 to 10000 which Eiken did not set as a level of either pre-1 or 1, 3) 10000-15000, what Eiken 1 mentions as their target vocabulary level, and 4) higher than the 15000 word-level, which is beyond Eiken 1 level. This table illustrates that vocabulary among 7000-15000 is most numerous in these books, but the number of words common to both books is quite limited, and how the most essential words within the level were chosen depends on the authors of the book. From another viewpoint, these books on the same level focus on different words, so it may be an advantage for learners to study both books to effectively expand their vocabulary without seeing the same words. These books include audio materials, so learners can study by listening.

**Table 7**

*The difficulty level of text-based vocabulary builders written in Japanese.*

SVL	<i>Eiken 1 learning vocabulary combinations with sentences</i>	<i>Speed reading and listening English words Advanced 1100</i>	Common to both books
-7000	430	252	27
7000-10000	369	286	32
10000-15000	280	187	11
15000+	191	141	8

In terms of English books, *Verbal Advantage* (VA) and *Word Workout* (WW) are in this category, which have 1000 headwords, and each word has a definition and is explained in the reading texts, together with extensive synonyms and antonyms. The good point of these two books is the availability of audio material that many other English vocabulary builders do not have, so this matches the English learning style of Japanese people. One comment about the vocabulary in these two books, many words other than the headwords are also included in the text as new words, so here the author shows the frequency analysis for all single words in the books, instead of analyzing only the headwords.

Table 8 shows the coverage of vocabulary is extensive if we study all the words that appear in the text. This is an advantage as we can encounter many words that we may not otherwise have the opportunity to come across. At the same time, this may be a disadvantage to those who feel the book may be too linguistically demanding and just want to study for the examinations. An interesting feature of the book series is that it includes many trivia columns such as introducing long words such as floccinaucinihilipilification, so learners can see and hear very rare words, which may give motivation to some learners.

**Table 8**

Vocabulary contained in Verbal Advantage (VA) and Word Workout (WW).

SVL	VA	WW	VA or WW	SVL	VA	WW	VA or WW	SVL	VA	WW	VA or WW
1000	859	906	943	13000	175	216	306	26000	106	143	213
2000	784	807	892	14000	177	202	297	27000	48	77	106
3000	341	729	772	15000	132	178	258	28000	32	65	86
4000	344	740	800	16000	121	162	233	29000	36	52	74
5000	318	596	678	17000	143	153	238	30000	30	46	67
6000	235	531	611	18000	105	142	198	31000	29	39	58
7000	237	496	580	19000	96	121	183	32000	31	48	65
8000	170	447	502	20000	85	108	163	33000	16	28	40
9000	232	407	488	21000	92	104	163	34000	13	28	38
10000	177	338	421	22000	78	105	147	35000	7	10	16
11000	191	368	467	23000	44	102	144				
12000	189	312	409	24000	64	102	134				

### 3. Etymology based vocabulary builders

For this category, the author only analyzes one English book since the Japanese books for this level are not widely known.<sup>9</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Vocabulary Builder* is an etymology-based vocabulary builder. This book explains the meaning and formation of the roots of words and then shows representative words used in the root explanation. Merriam-Webster's Vocabulary Builder presents etymology-based and topic-based headwords (typically in groups of four), which could serve as the primary vocabulary for enhancement. Table 9 illustrates which levels of words are explained as a headword, and perhaps unexpectedly, the book covers vocabulary beyond Eiken pre-1 to a great extent. One concern for first-time users is that it may not be effective for test preparation purposes in a short period of time since the words are listed based on the roots, so it does not lend itself for quick study.

Because of space limitations, there is no extra analysis shown here, but in this category, there are also interesting books for vocabulary learning: *Instant vocabulary* (Ehrlich, 1988) and *The Aldrich Dictionary of Phobias and Other Word Families* (Aldrich, 2006). The latter one seems like a book on psychiatry but contains a large collection of root-derived vocabulary. These books do not introduce phrases, and the definitions of words are simple, so for non-native speakers some creativity may be needed to learn with these books.

<sup>9</sup> However, for ESP, there are some good Japanese books in this category such as *Increasing Science vocabulary through their etymology* (Shimizu, 2014) and *Studying the etymology of Medical English 550* (Hirai, 2011). ESP will be the most effective genre to use etymological knowledge to increase vocabulary.

**Table 9**

*The difficulty of words in Merriam-Webster's Vocabulary Builder.*

SVL	N	SVL	N	SVL	N	SVL	N
1000	1	11000	88	21000	29	31000	10
2000	3	12000	106	22000	34	32000	13
3000	4	13000	64	23000	20	33000	8
4000	11	14000	52	24000	18	34000	4
5000	13	15000	61	26000	24	35000	2
6000	22	16000	48				
7000	28	17000	44	27000	16		
8000	42	18000	39	28000	14		
9000	63	19000	23	29000	12		
10000	60	20000	29	30000	13		

#### 4. Other types of vocabulary builders

Some books apply a unique method to introduce vocabulary. One book series in this level is *Vocabulary Cartoons I and II*. This book, as can be seen in the title, intends to introduce the vocabulary through situational cartoons. Table 10 illustrates the vocabulary levels shown in these books.

**Table 10**

*The difficulty of words in Vocabulary Cartoons I and II.*

SVL	N	SVL	N	SVL	N	SVL	N
1000	1	11000	101	21000	14	31000	7
2000	0	12000	88	22000	10	32000	3
3000	2	13000	13	23000	6	33000	0
4000	4	14000	17	24000	8	34000	0
5000	4	15000	23	26000	2	35000	0
6000	10	16000	14				
7000	23	17000	18	27000	9		
8000	24	18000	15	28000	5		
9000	30	19000	17	29000	6		
10000	47	20000	15	30000	4		

Based on the table above, these books are targeted for the SAT, so they contain very difficult words, but the books also widely cover 7,000 to 15,000 level words. In this sense, these books may be recommended to learners who have just begun to study the words beyond Eiken pre-1 or English proficiency tests for just passing the

language requirement. One possible difficulty is that the cartoons apply jokes rooted in English cultures and Japanese learners may not have the background to understand them, and therefore the advantage of having the cartoon illustrations may be undermined.

## V. Conclusion

As a summary, this study investigates 10 vocabulary builders (+1 for Eiken 1) of various presentation types. Because the books use different approaches, it may be difficult to discern their difficulty level, but by using the SVL (a large set of word difficulty levels based on frequency lists with adjustments for Japanese uses), the characteristics of these books will become clearer—especially for those who are targeting to pass the Eiken level 1. By profiling the vocabulary difficulty level, the appropriate vocabulary builder can be chosen. Table 11 is a summary of some of the most pertinent characteristics, and the author hopes this information will be helpful for learners who are seeking a higher level of vocabulary learning.

**Table 11.**

*List of vocabulary builders*

Title	Language	Type	Audio	For Eiken 1	For SAT/GRE
<i>Eiken pre-1 High frequency pass vocab</i>	Japanese	List/Phrase	Y	Suitable	Bit insufficient
<i>1100 Words You Need to Know</i>	English	List/Phrase	N	Suitable	Bit insufficient
<i>601 Words You Need to Know to Pass the Exam</i>	English	List/Phrase	N	Too difficult?	Suitable
<i>Strategizing the 2,163 essential vocabulary to pass the GRE General Test</i>	Japanese	List/Phrase	N	Too demanding?	Suitable
<i>The Most Powerful English Vocabulary 1700</i>	Japanese	List/Phrase	N	Suitable	Suitable
<i>MBA English vocabulary</i>	Japanese	List/Phrase	Y	Too demanding?	Suitable
<i>Eiken 1 learning vocabulary combinations with sentences</i>	Japanese	Text	Y	Suitable	Insufficient
<i>Speed reading and listening English words Advanced 1100</i>	Japanese	Text	Y	Suitable	Insufficient
<i>Verbal Advantage/Word Workout</i>	English	Text	Y	Too demanding?	Suitable
<i>Merriam-Webster's Vocabulary Builder</i>	English	Etymology	N	Suitable	Suitable
<i>Vocabulary Cartoons I/II</i>	English	Other	N	Suitable	Suitable

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