FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS: WORDS THEY HEAR AND WORDS THEY LEARN: A CASE STUDY

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Many studies investigate the plurality of factors that determine the learning of words, but few attempt to analyze the relationship between input and uptake. In the present study the oral input in the foreign language, received in class by a group of fourth graders, is analyzed according to the frequency lists developed by Nation (1986). The study also compares the input from the teacher's speech with the input from the course-book and it offers some indications of the learners' uptake. We set to answer questions such as 1) Which one of the two - books or teachers - seem to offer better chances for incidental acquisition to occur? 2) What proportion of the total vocabulary available in class is typically acquired by the learners? It is suggested that while the teacher's speech as well as the written input available from the textbook represent equally rich lexical environments, the amount of vocabulary produced by the former is substantially greater than the one available from the latter. Our data show that a great proportion of vocabulary can be acquired by the learners in class. An indication is given of the factors that seem to determine the learners' uptake.

Key words: young learners, vocabulary acquisition, classroom, input, uptake.

Existen numerosos estudios que investigan la multitud de factores que determinan el aprendizaje léxico pero pocos son los que intentan analizar la relación entre vocabulario proporcionado al aprendiz de lenguas (input) y vocabulario adquirido (uptake). En el presente estudio, y partiendo de las listas de frecuencia léxica en inglés creadas por Nation (1986), se investiga el vocabulario oral proporcionado a un grupo de alumnos de nueve años en

clase de lengua inglesa. El estudio, además, compara el vocabulario proporcionado en clase por la profesora de dicho grupo con el vocabulario del libro de texto utilizado y, en base a los resultados de dicha comparación, proporciona información sobre el vocabulario adquirido por los alumnos (uptake). En este trabajo, por lo tanto, se abordan cuestiones tales como: (1) ¿Qué / quién ofrece mayores oportunidades para la adquisición casual (incidental) de vocabulario en el aula: los libros de texto o los profesores?; y (2) ¿Qué proporción del vocabulario total proporcionado en el aula suelen adquirir los alumnos? Los resultados de este trabajo indican que, aunque tanto el discurso oral de la profesora como el discurso escrito del libro de texto ofrecen entornos léxicos igualmente ricos, la cantidad de vocabulario generada por la profesora es considerablemente mayor que la del libro. Esto parece indicar que los alumnos pueden adquirir una cantidad mayor de vocabulario en clase. Finalmente, los resultados de este trabajo sugieren posibles factores que determinan la adquisición del vocabulario oral proporcionado en el aula.

Palabras clave: jóvenes aprendices de lenguas, adquisición léxica, aula.

1. The Importance of the Input

"L2 acquisition can only take place when the learner has access to input in the L2" (Ellis, 1994a). At present more than 80% of primary school children in Europe begin to study a foreign language as early as the age of eight and they receive on average 70 hours of foreign language exposure per school year. For the large majority of these learners, there are few opportunities – if any at all - to interact in the target language outside the classroom, for them the classroom remains the only L2 lexical environment available. However, to date, we still have little idea of the amount of language input offered by teachers in their foreign language classrooms and very little is known of the way how this oral input might relate to the contents of the course-book. This study is a pioneering attempt to shed some light on this area of research. It adopts a substantially quantitative approach in the analysis of the *amount* of

oral input available to the students in class and it also focuses on the *way* such input is delivered. Finally, I offer some indications of the proportion, as well as the quality, of the learners' uptake from the input they receive in class.

I became interested in the questions related to the influence of instructional language use on language learning a few years ago when in Italy the Primary School system was re-structured: new policies for modern foreign language teaching were implemented, new syllabi were thought out and a major point for discussion was raised on whether foreign languages should be taught by non-specialist native speakers (NS) or if priority should be given to non-native (NN) primary school teachers willing to follow immersion courses. Although the complex methodological debate was unable to produce clear-cut answers, it certainly achieved the positive result of raising great interest in the field. The teaching and learning of vocabulary finally became a dignified component of the foreign language classroom.

One of the first to propose a major role for vocabulary was Wilkins (1972). Opposing a general trend in those years - when linguistics had predominantly regarded *form*, rather than *meaning*, as the key factor for measuring language proficiency - he suggested that language teaching had in fact to be equally concerned with both form and meaning, because if it is true that "without grammar very little can be conveyed", it is equally true that "without vocabulary *nothing* can be conveyed". (Wilkins, 1972: 111)

There is a substantial difference between the amount of forms and meanings that are conveyed and made available in the language classroom and the proportion of these that are actually taken in and acquired by the learners. This fundamental distinction between input and uptake was first introduced by Corder (1967):

> The simple fact of presenting a certain linguistic form to a learner in the classroom does not necessarily qualify it for the status of input, for the reason that input is *what goes in* not what is *available* for going in. (Corder, 1967: 165)

The relationship between availability of input and its retention –
leading to acquisition - has been investigated by scholars in a number of
ways. Krashen (1985, 1989) based his *Comprehensible Input Hypothesis* on
the belief that language is acquired through written and oral exposure to
linguistic forms slightly in advance of the learner's existing knowledge and
he postulated that all learners of a second language will follow the same
sequence of acquisition in a predictable and *natural* order. Stressing the
importance of comprehensible input, Long (1980) identified *negotiation* and
interaction as the gateways to acquisition. It is only through modifications in
interactional conversations that it is possible to achieve a fine tuning of the
input, which so becomes fully accessible and comprehensible. Finally, the
Comprehensible Output Hypothesis formulated by Swain (1985) identifies in
the attempt of the learner to successfully convey the intended meaning and
therefore in comprehensible output the key factor towards language
proficiency. These three main hypotheses to language learning were
challenged in a substantial number of experiments. Ellis and his co-
researchers investigated the correlations between different types of
vocabulary teaching and vocabulary learning (Ellis, Tanaka and Yamazaki,
1985; Ellis, 1995; Ellis and He, 1999). They isolated four different learning
conditions, 1) the unmodified input environment (UMI) – where the learners
were exposed to new vocabulary with no explanation of form and meaning;
2) the pre-modified input environment (PMI) – where explanations of word-
items occurred in *asymmetrical discourse*: from teacher to students; 3) the
interactionally modified input environment (IMI) – where clarifications on
new items and interaction occurred in a 'dialogically symmetrical discourse'
(Ellis and He, 1999) – from teacher to student as well as from student to
teacher; finally 4), the modified output environment (MO) – where the
learners were asked to interact in pairs and adopt strategies of negotiation in
order to convey their intended meanings. Learners exposed to IMI acquired a
greater proportion of new words than their peers taught in a PMI
environment. As expected, UMI proved to be the least successful condition,
while MO the most successful one – with the limitation though of a much
slower rate of acquisition, which will represent a difficulty in the

applicability of the latter experimental condition in ordinary syllabus-restricted school environments.

A first important analysis of classrooms as lexical environments, under non-experimental conditions, was carried out by Scholfield (1991). He calculated the vocabulary rate plot of a set of 5 textbooks – three aimed at beginners and two at intermediate learners – and he observed the rate of introduction of new vocabulary. No consistent patterns were found in the way how new lexical items are introduced in the courses. Scholfield reports a huge degree of variation both within units and between books. The number of new words typically encountered per unit period varied enormously: from a minimum of 21 to a maximum of 58.

The vocabulary available in the speech of 10 teachers of ESL was analyzed by a study by Meara, Lightbown and Halter (1997). The context is that of immersion courses in Quebec, where a mainly communicative approach to language learning is employed. The subjects are 11 and 12 year-olds, native speakers of French. A total of 10 thirty-minute samples of teachers' oral input were transcribed. The corpus was analyzed according to the frequency lists developed by Nation (1986). On average 85% of teachers' utterances belonged to Nation's baselist 1 and therefore to the most common 1000 words in English, while only 3% of the vocabulary available to the learners could not be found in the first 2500 most common words and was therefore regarded as *unusual*.

Finally, a study by Tang and Nesi (2003) analyzed the speech produced by two teachers of EFL during a week of formal instruction. Lexical richness of the teachers' output was calculated by means of two different measures - lexical variation (LV - type/token ratio) and frequency count – using VocabProfile and according to Nation's frequency lists. The outcomes indicate a strong correlation between the two measures of lexical richness. Also, an interesting point raised by the authors is the relationship between syllabus requirements and the *amount* as well as the *type* of vocabulary available for acquisition. The study suggests that strict syllabus

guidelines may lead to the creation of poor lexical environments, while teachers who are allowed a degree of instrumental autonomy and methodological freedom may get to produce lexically richer output, thus enhancing the learners' chances for implicit vocabulary acquisition.

2.The Study. Part A – Foreign Language Input to Learners

It appears that there are no published studies that aim to compare the teacher's speech with the course-book's written input. The latter is representative of the syllabus requirements; it is thanks to the former though if a silent, hardly accessible input comes to life and becomes available for acquisition. With the present study, I am attempting to shed some light on this neglected area of research and in part B, I will also give some indications on the learners' uptake from the input they receive in class.

2.1. Education in Italy

Italian children start compulsory education at the age of six. At age ten or eleven they enter middle school, which they complete aged fourteen. From fourteen to eighteen they attend secondary school and, at age eighteen, around 60% secondary school graduates enrol at university. Italian children are first introduced to the formal study of a foreign language in their third year of primary school - that is at the age of eight, and they usually continue studying this language until they finish school.

The teacher who took part in the experimental study is a native speaker of American English. She has taught at primary level for over fifteen years and mainly follows the guidelines specified in the National Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages – integrating it when possible with cross-curricular projects. In class, she adopts a mainly communicative/situational approach with some explicit teaching of vocabulary and use of Focus on Form activities. The duration of each lesson is of approximately 50 minutes.

In one complete academic year the learners receive in all 50-hour-exposure to the foreign language.

2.2. The Data I: the Course-book

The course-book used in class and analyzed in the present experimental study is Storyland 4. Corso di inglese per la quarta elementare (Read and Soberon, 1999). It is composed of five units, a wordlist/glossary session and a final session with cut-outs and photocopiable material for extra activities. Each unit will feed 10 to 11 successive teaching hours. The wordlist includes a mixture of individual word-items and semantic units (e.g.: Father Christmas, I'm wearing, the treasure hunt) all listed in order of appearance in the text.

2.3. The Data II: Oral Input from Teacher

The teacher's oral production in the foreign language was recorded, at every class, for one academic year: a total of 55 successive classes. There were two classes per week and each lesson lasted approximately 50 minutes. The children in the study were in the fourth year of primary education and were therefore in their second year of foreign language study.

3. Instruments and Methods

The 55 hour-long recordings were transcribed and an equal number of files were obtained. The words occurring in the transcripts were analyzed with the online version of Range (available free at http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/staff/paul-nation/nation.aspx) and according to the frequency lists developed by Nation (1986). We obtained four lists – with list 1 including the word-items from our corpora that belonged to the first 1000 most common words in English; list 2 selecting the second 1000 most common words in English, the third including the vocabulary in the

AWL and, finally, list 4 made of the words not included in the first 2500 most common words in English. The same procedure was also used for the lexical analysis of the course-book. Our working assumption was that a large percentage of low-frequency words would reflect a rich lexical input, while a small number of low-frequency and therefore unusual words would mirror a poor lexical environment.

In this first part of the study, I set to answer the following research questions:

a) How much vocabulary is available to the children from the teacher's speech and how much from the course-book?

b) How many *new words* learners typically encounter in a class period?

c) What proportion of the total vocabulary - in the course-book written input as well as in the teacher's oral input - is made of *unusual words*?

4. Analysis and Results

In order to answer question a) I calculated the number of word-types produced by the teacher per class period (Fig. 1) as well as the number of types in each unit of the textbook (Fig. 2).

Figure 1. Teacher's speech: number of word-types per class period.

| △	= assessment exercise sessions
↩	= revision classes
⋮	= end of term
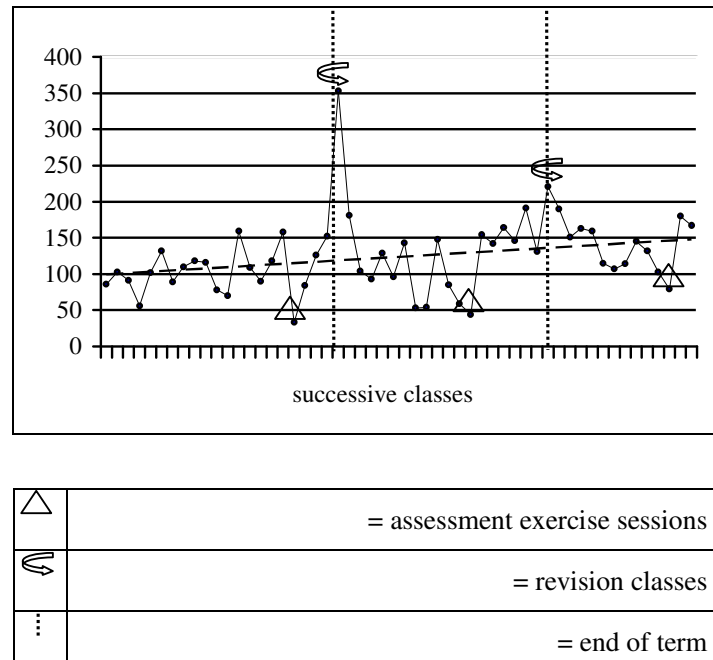
As shown in figure 1, there is a huge degree of variation in the amount of vocabulary the children are exposed to per class period. The number of word-types per lesson ranges from a minimum of 33 to a maximum of 353. Is this variation random or does it rather correlate with factors, such as for example the implementation of specific structural/methodological approach to language teaching? Can we identify any recurrent patterns in the way words are presented in class? To help clarify these issues, a qualitative analysis of the tape-transcripts was run which allows the peaks and troughs represented in figure 1 to be investigated. The dotted lines dividing the plot into three sessions define the

end of each term and the beginning of the next. The peaks highlighted with a circular arrow are the classes used by the teacher for revision; finally the triangles identify the class periods used for routine assessment exercises, that obviously resulted in classes with the lowest vocabulary exposure.

Our data seem to suggest that the teacher adopts a *term-pattern*. From a regular alternation of vocabulary loaded classes (teacher-centred) and activity-centred classes (learner-centred) the teacher moves on slowly towards the planned assessment exercise session. Thereafter, the input seems to get heavier and the teacher concludes each term with a vocabulary loaded revision class.

The same method was implemented for the analysis of the vocabulary in the course-book (Fig.2).

**Figure 2.** Number of word-types per text unit.
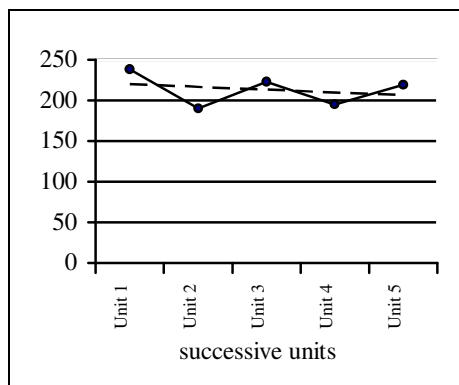
The trend here has become, somehow, reversed. While the input from the teacher gets heavier as the year moves on, the opposite seems to

occur for the textbook, where the later units show a lighter language load than the earlier ones. During one complete academic year, the textbook supplies the learners with 740 different words. In the same length of time, the teacher produces nearly twice the amount of vocabulary - 1322 types. That is to say that, the teacher typically makes 24 words available to the children per class period – while only 13.4 of these come from the course-book.

In order to answer question b), I set up a cumulative study that analyses the number of *new words* available to the learners per teaching session, as shown in Fig. 3.

Figure 3. Cumulative vocabulary by successive classes/units.

●	= new word-types per unit period (course-book)
—	= new word-types per class period (teacher)
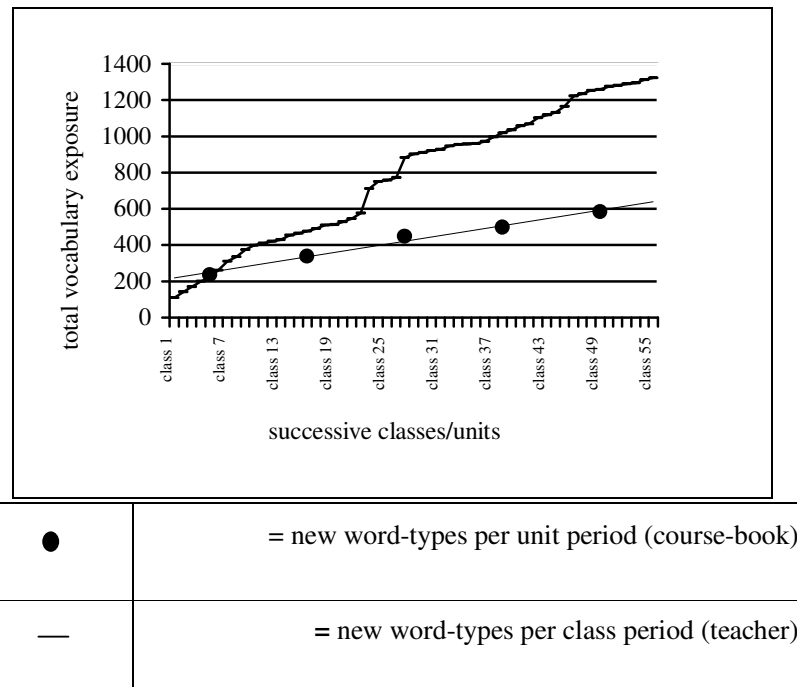
For the counting of the word-types contained in the course-book, types from the *contents* page as well as those from the *wordlist*, that were never used in class as teaching material, were omitted. However, types from the *extra-activities* section were retained. By the end of the academic year, the total vocabulary exposures from the teacher and from the book were substantially different. The former typically produced 24 different words per class period - 1 new word every 24 running words, the latter only 10.6 types per class period – 1 new word every 7.3 running words, as shown in Table 1. Our data seem to suggest that lexical evaluations of courses based on textbooks is likely to cause a severe under-estimation of the amount of new lexis available to students.

Table 1. Total number of tokens/types produced by the two sources of input during one complete academic year.

	total no. of tokens	total no. of types
	(running words)	(different words)
Input from teacher	32096	1322
Input from course-book	4218	583

While interpreting the data, we should keep in mind the level of proficiency of our learners. Having to cope with 24 new words per 50-minute class appears as a rather challenging task for a nine-year old whose only exposure to the language occurs in class and who has only received a total of 50 hour exposure to the FL, prior to this investigation. Scholfield (1991) suggests that a figure of 9 to 12 new words per class period is

recommendable. Gairns and Redman (1986) indicate 8 new words to be a fair measure. Milton and Meara (1998) found that British secondary school students of French as a FL tend to learn from a minimum of 3.8 to a maximum of 6.0 words per hour. The figures produced in this study are not directly comparable. The figures quoted were obtained working on lemmatized lists but in the present study I have decided to work with types rather than lemmas for a number of reasons – our subjects have only just started to learn a second language and their lexical ability would not allow them to recognize pairs such as, for example, goose/geese, walk/walking, child/children as members of the same word-family. Vassiliu (2001) faced the same situation in examining the lexical uptake of beginners and also chose this methodology to reflect the real learning load of his students. Also, in the Italian school system the four language skills – listening and speaking, reading and writing – are normally introduced at the same time, so that a child who is able to recognize the phonetic characteristics of a word, is also expected to have acquired its written form. In other words, for each word-item he learns he should be credited a double score, rather than 1 point for two, three of four words as with lemmas.

Question c) aims at investigating the lexical richness of the two types of input. The vocabulary in both the teacher's speech as well as in the course-book was analyzed with Range and according to the frequency lists developed by Nation (1986). A large percentage of low-frequency words would be read as reflecting a rich lexical input, while a small number of low-frequency and therefore unusual words would characterize a poor lexical environment (Table 2).

Table 2. Mean percentage of types per frequency level - teacher and course-book.

		first 1000 words	**second 1000 words**	**AWL words**	**Unusual words**
Input teacher	**from**	50.41	17.80	1.06	30.73
Input course-book	**from**	52.17	16.56	1.08	30.19

A very similar percentage of unusual words is found in both types of input. Around 30% of the total vocabulary produced by the teacher in class is not to be found in the first 2500 most frequent words in English. The same is true for the course-book. Nearly one third of the whole vocabulary exposure is made up of unusual words. This looks like an incredibly heavy loading for any type of learners, particularly for children with only 50-hour contact with the foreign language. A study by Milton and Hales (1997) on three 1000-word samples taken from different types of texts (an ordinary text, *Marie Claire*, a quality newspaper, *The Guardian* and a technical car manual, *Autohall*) reports that the percentages of low frequency words per text were respectively 15% , 21% and 30%. Looking at the figures only, it could be argued that the course-book materials for the learners in the present study are as lexically hard as a respectable British newspaper. However, a qualitative analysis of the individual words showed that the large majority of the infrequent vocabulary produced by the teacher is actually made up of words that contain the subject matter of the language course and are therefore among the most salient words. Similar results are reported by Vassiliu (2001). He found that 31% of the total lemmas that students

encountered in their courses of EFL in Greece is made up of infrequent vocabulary. A direct comparison of the figures (lemmas and types) though is not possible.

Our data seem to suggest that both the course-book (written types of input) and the teacher's speech (oral input) offer the learner an equally rich lexical environment.

5. The Study. Part B – Learners' Uptake

In this second part of the study I aimed at investigating what proportion of the total vocabulary available in the FL class is acquired by 17 nine-year old subjects at their second year of studying English. The instrument employed for assessment is a Yes/No test.

6. Instruments and Methods

The three final lessons of the school year were isolated from the rest of the corpus and the FL input from the teacher's speech was transcribed. Class A was recorded two weeks before the test, class B one week before the test and class C was recorded 2 days before the test. From a word list derived from each class transcript, 20 different lexical word-items were randomly selected, mostly nouns. Class A, B, C became in the test format list A, B, C, monitoring altogether a total of 60 words. Each list included words only appearing in that particular class and not in the other two, *non-words* were not included in the lists. Not all of the word-items in the test were lemmatized in order to present the learners with exactly the same sounds they had been previously exposed to in class. Words such as *skiing* were left unchanged if *ski* did not appear in the input; regular nouns appearing in the plural form only were also reported unchanged; regular nouns appearing both in the singular and in the plural form were lemmatized and the frequency of occurrence in the teacher's speech was calculated as the sum of the two individual frequencies. For consistency in pronunciation, the items in the test were read aloud by the class teacher. Instructions given to the

children were simple and straightforward. They were asked to answer *yes* or *no* to the question "Have you heard this word before?"

It was intended that the data produced would answer the following questions:

a) What proportion of the total vocabulary available in class has been *taken in* by all learners?

b) Are words heard closer to the date of test easier for the learners to acquire?

c) Are words from low-frequency bands harder for the learners to acquire?

21 words out of 60 were recognized by all learners, which constitute a proportion of 35% - around 1 word-item acquired every 3 available. Accepting that the items appearing in the test represent a balanced proportion of the total vocabulary available in class, by the end of the year the subjects would have acquired 462.7 words, that is a rate of 8.4 words per contact hour – possibly not very different a figure from the one reported by Milton and Meara (1998), 1.7 – 4.4, for students of EFL from different backgrounds, once you allow for the difference in word counting in the two studies.

An important issue to be taken into account is the fact that these learners are in their *second* year of foreign language study, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that they have already acquired a certain number of words during the previous course and that some of the word-items assessed in our study would have been learned during a previous exposure. In order to estimate the proportion of vocabulary only in use in the academic year when the students' uptake was measured, I compared the total vocabulary in the teacher's input with the total vocabulary in the previous year's course-book. The data suggest that 31% of the total vocabulary available to the learners in this study was recycled from the year before, while 69% of the word-types in the teacher's speech were specific of the work carried out in grade 4 and

would not appear in grade 3. The above figure of 8.4 types acquired per contact hour would thus be decreased to a rate of 5.80 words.

Another interesting point of this investigation is the analysis of the degree of efficacy between two types of input – instructional *oral* input and instructional *oral and written* input. It would be reasonable to expect – particularly for students at the outset of learning - that words that become available in class in a variety of forms (phonological, morphological, semantic, etc.) are better as well as more easily acquired by learners than those only *seen* on a written page or *heard* in class. In order to test this hypothesis, the items in the Yes/No test were divided into two groups of words. Group 1 listed the types only appearing in the teacher's speech and not in the course-book, while group 2 included words appearing in both types of input. The data suggest a significant difference in the means, t = 3.158 sig = 0.003. The average number of hits for the words in group 1 was 10.88, while the types in group 2 were better acquired by the subjects with a figure of 14.51.

In order to answer question b), I calculated the mean number of *yes* answers per list, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Mean number of types acquired per class period.

	2 weeks before test	1 week before test	2 days before test	TEST
Types acquired per class period	10.85	15.01	13.05	TEST

The data show no evidence that words heard closer to the date of test are easier for the learners to remember and therefore to acquire. T-test results suggest that these differences are significant at the 5% level.

No correlation was found between the number of oral repetitions of the single items in the teacher's speech and the number of subjects who knew the words [r = 0.186 not significant] – which might suggest that the relationship between occurrences and learnability is not a simple and linear one. However, t-test on learnability scores, where I divided the groups between words that occur 10 times or less and those which occur 11 times or more shows a significant difference between the means, t = 2.210, sig = 0.031. There is an indication in the data that words repeated more than 10 times by the teacher are likely to be better known than those repeated a fewer number of times.

Finally, question c) addresses the issue of whether *unusual* words in general English are harder for learners to acquire. As shown in Table 5, the words not in the first 2500 most common words in English were selected from each list. Two groups of word-items were obtained, group 1 listed words from low-frequency bands only and group 2 included all the rest of the words. The mean number of *hits* (that is of *yes* answers) per group was calculated. The mean number of hits for group 1 was 12.78, while 13 for group 2. There is no evidence in the data that words from lower frequency bands are harder for the learners to acquire.

Table 5. Word-items per list that are not among the first 2500 most common words in general English.

List A		List B		List C	
Unusual words	*yes* **answers out of 17**	**Unusual words**	*yes* **answers out of 17**	**Unusual words**	*yes* **answers out of 17**
basketball	17	chant	8	chicken	17
Soccer	14	zebra	17	scarecrow	13
Tennis	17	shorts	16	geese	5
chattering	1	grass-hopper	16		
homework	5	lion	16		
		pencil-case	17		

7. Conclusions

Our data seem to suggest that the *amount* of vocabulary introduced by the teacher in class is much heavier then the amount available to students from the course-book. The teacher uses twice the number of types that appear in the book – 1322 versus 740 – and this proportion would change to almost three times - 1322 versus 583 - if elements such as the *glossary* and *contents* section, not used in class, were not included. This substantial quantitative difference between the two types of input was an unexpected result which may, of course, be a feature of the teaching of this particular teacher or these particular classes. Therefore, the implementation of larger scale experimental studies would be essential in order to gain a better

understanding of the volume of vocabulary which is included in foreign language classes, and how much this varies.

As far as lexical richness is concerned, the teacher seems to substantially rely on the course-book and therefore on the guidelines of the National Curriculum. The proportion of infrequent vocabulary is in fact similar in both types of input. In favour of the findings in the study by Tang and Nesi (2003), it may be argued that, despite syllabus limitations, teachers *are* able to create a stimulating lexical environment – one that would encourage better chances for incidental acquisition to occur (Ellis, 1994b) - if allowed a certain degree of autonomy in the language classroom. On the other hand, there is a place for arguing that autonomy and flexibility are not by themselves guaranty of success but may become so if handled by teachers of exceptional linguistic abilities and with a good cultural knowledge of the country where the language is spoken. This takes us back to the beginning of the dilemma that shook the Italian primary education system not so long ago – should Modern Languages be taught by NSs, or equally proficient graduates in the FL, or would NNSs with consolidated methodological and pedagogical skills prove more effective in creating tailor-made classes, with particular reference to the younger learners? The teacher who contributed to the present study, we feel is not a *typical* teacher in the Italian school system, being a native speaker and, therefore, our results might not reflect the overall situation in Italian language teaching. Not only is she native speaker of English, she also holds a formal qualification to teach at primary level, together with a 15-year professional experience. To date, primary school teachers of a FL, in Italy, are normally educationalists who have been employed for a period of time in the primary sector and who decide, for a variety of reasons, to attend intensive language courses and to re-qualify as FL teachers. Unfortunately, our past experience taught us that it is extremely improbable that teachers who follow this route become involved in *inquisitive* research studies.

Our data also suggest that the amount of *new words* the learners encounter in their course-book is doubled in the teacher's speech. The text

cumulative vocabulary seems to stabilize quite early in the year, while the vocabulary introduced by the teacher continues to grow. However, the exposure to a progressively stimulating vocabulary does not seem to discourage the learners who appear, on average, to acquire a good proportion of words. The words that can only be found in the course-book scored a lower number of hits than the ones available in both types of lexical input - the book and the teacher's speech - which were better acquired by the subjects.

The data show no evidence that words heard closer to the date of test are easier for the learners to acquire. No evidence was found that infrequent/ unusual words in general English are more difficult for learners to remember but there is an indication in the data that frequency of occurrence in the micro-environment is a better predictor of the learners' uptake. This reinforces, if it were needed, the importance of systematic recycling of important vocabulary.

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