

Strategies for remembering words

“Without grammar little can be conveyed;
without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.”

(David Wilkins, *Linguistics in Language Teaching*,
1972).

Remember 'words' or what?

- Emphasis these days on learning common sequences as well as individual words
 - Compounds and more or less fixed phrases with unpredictable features
 - Frequent sequences that are regular and not 'fixed'
 - Whole texts (Schliemann)!
 - From AQA GCSE list: *dans une minute, faire attention, en bonne santé, ça m'est égal* These have some fixed/irregular features
 - NOT listed: *Je pense que... , Mon passe-temps préféré, c'est ...* These are just frequent, not irregular
- Benefits
 - More than one word learnt in one act of memorizing
 - Fluency should improve: sequences retrieved as wholes
 - Helps learn additional types of lexical information about words beyond spelling, pronunciation, and meaning: especially word grammar and collocation which often show up in the sequences

For you to suggest

As cited in AQA list	?More useful frequent sequence for your learners to memorize
besoin le (avoir...de)	
verre le	
offre d'emploi l' (f)	
faire beau	
manquer	

How many 'words' to remember?

- Do you have any idea of the target numbers for....
 - GCSE
 - A Level
 - BA

CEFR level	Description	EFL exam	UK ML exam	Target vocab size
A1	Can communicate in basic language with help			
A2	Can communicate in a limited range of contexts	KET	GCSE lower	1000-1400 “minimum core” (AQA French 2014)
B1	Can communicate essential points and ideas in familiar contexts	PET	GCSE higher	2000
B2	Can use language effectively, with some fluency, in a range of contexts	FCE, IELTS 6	A level	“vocab size predicts A level grade particularly impressively” but even the AQA representative does not know how many words expected
C1	Effective operational proficiency	CAE, IELTS 7		?5000+
C2	Mastery	CPE, IELTS8	BA	?8000+

How many words actually known?

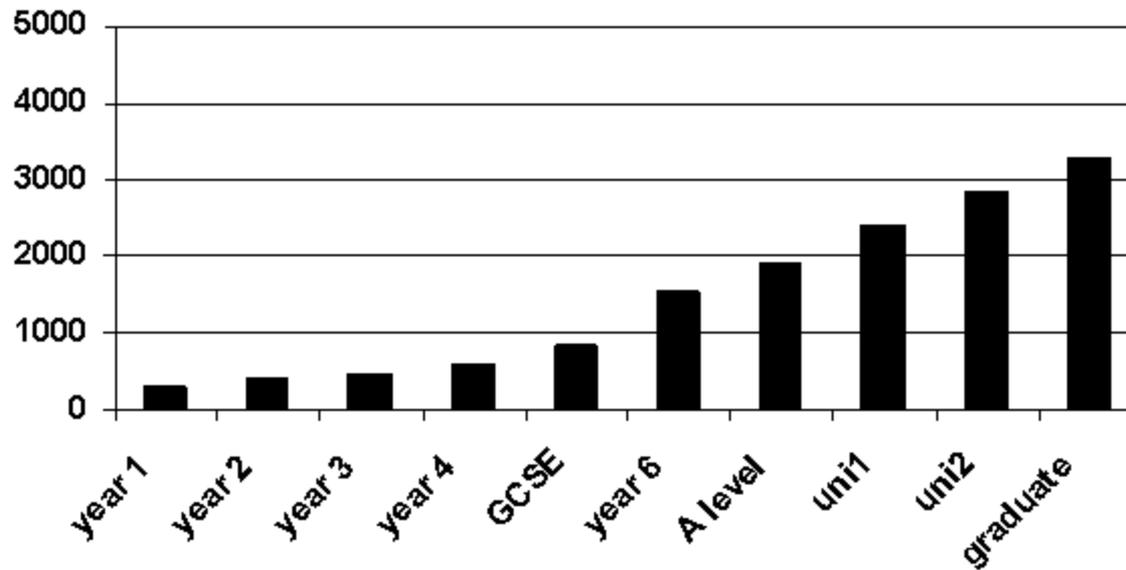


Figure 1: Vocabulary growth in French in a British school and university ([Milton, 2006](#))
Not very impressive compared with EFL learners in some countries... and short of the likely targets

Is the 'learning burden' too great?

- How many words need to be learnt per contact hour to meet GCSE higher target?
- Assuming
 - five years of learning French
 - minimum 2 hours lesson per week
 - 40 weeks per year (32 in last)
- That yields a rate per contact hour of 5.2 words
- ...which should be achievable, esp. if some learning takes place out of lesson time

Whose job is it to remember them?

- If you want to help a poor man...
 - Give a them a fish? or ...
 - Teach them how to fish?
 - i.e. Teach learners how to learn vocab for themselves rather than only teach them vocab.
- Metaphor fails if person is not motivated to learn French etc. as much as to eat!
- Teacher role
 - A. Direct teaching of vocabulary
 - B. Direct teaching of memory strategies learners can use autonomously (so indirect teaching of vocab)
 - C. Indirect teaching of strategies, through whatever kinds of presentation and practice methods the teacher uses in class for A. Possibly this mostly occurs in practice, so teacher needs to use vocab teaching techniques which are effective and which the learner can also do for themselves
- Remember: Different strategies suit different learners

How to remember the words?

- 3 overlapping principles for
 - The teacher to exploit when teaching
 - The learner to know when trying to learn/memorise vocab
- Paul Daniels and the memory experts who memorise many people's names... they rely on three things... R A and D

Repetition

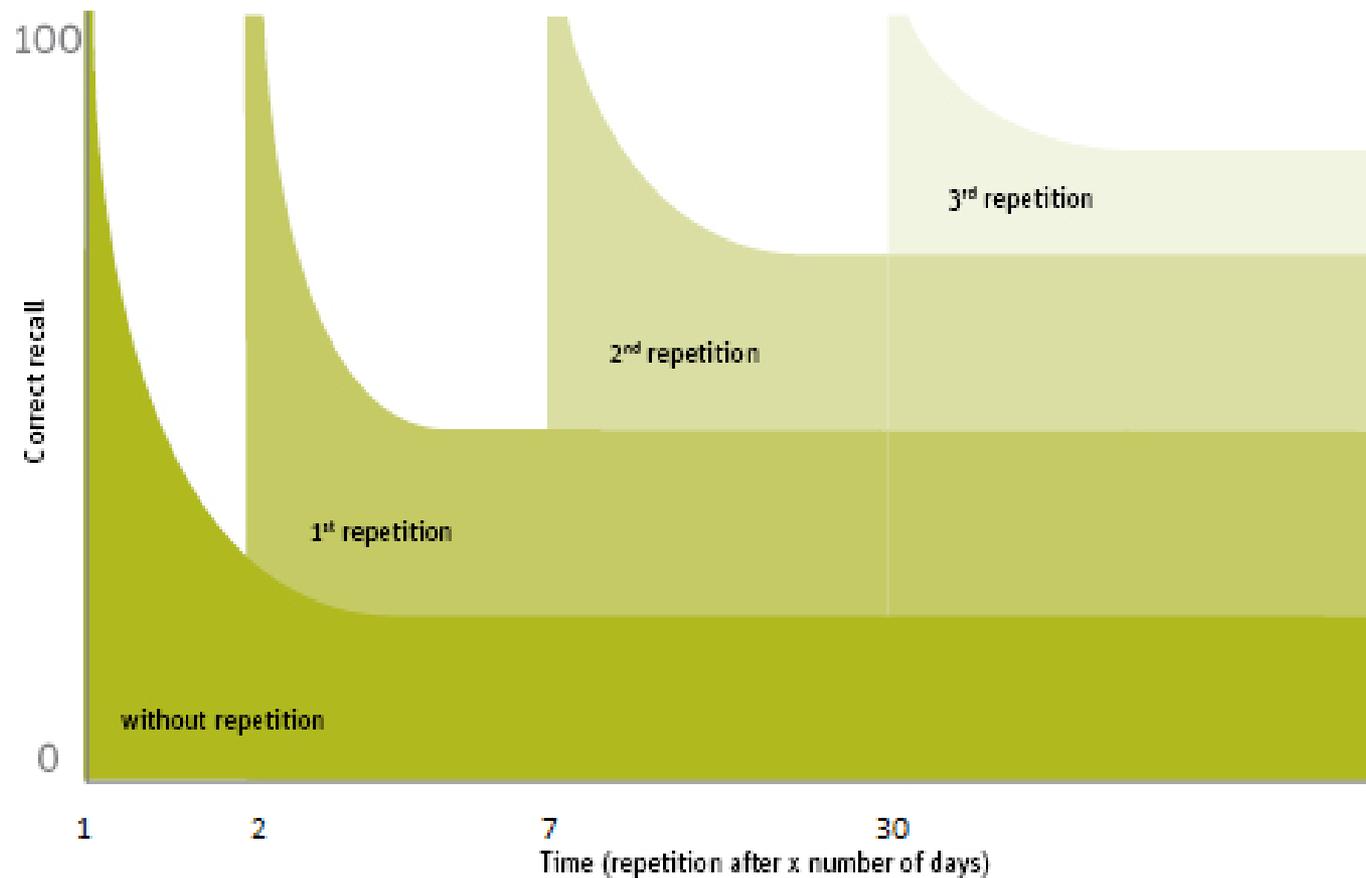
Things are remembered better if they recur

- In isolation or in context? (in context)
- With massed or spaced recurrence (recycling)? (spaced)
- How many times?...
 - No simple answer
 - Maybe min. 8 in a reading text or exercises or repeated reading of a list, if occurring at one time... but likely to be forgotten later without recycling or association or depth of processing

Repetition - massed

- At one time, often close to when words are first met/introduced or just before an exam
- Often in isolation: rote repetition of lists or intensive exercises where the same words recur over a short period
 - What information best to repeat each time ... word alone (no!), or with... spelling letter by letter, pos, translation, picture, example sentence...?
(Crosswords or Matching better than Hangman or Boggle)
 - Which of the 4 skills should be used for repetition? All!
 - Which is the best direction between meaning and form? L2 on left, L1 or other indication of meaning on right
 - What is the best order of going over items in a list? Random order each time
 - Pacing: How much time should be devoted to each item? Self-paced depending on how much learner feels they need

Repetition - spaced



Repetition - spaced

– Spaced over weeks and months, with increasing intervals

- Hopefully a third of what was previously not remembered is retained each time
- Spacing lengths of time? Anki software for lists allows you to choose times
- Other suggested regimes:
- Goldlist method: rewriting lists of 25 words ten times with 2 week intervals....each time write just the words you don't remember from the time before
- Another method I found online involves rewriting lists every hour ... again writing just the words not remembered from the time before

Repetition - spaced

- Recycling can be of words in isolation or in context, but crucially requires:
- some recording method that retains the target information so it can be revisited after considerable lengths of time
- AND a prompt to revisit it after certain intervals
 - Record and prompt external to learner
 - Textbook may recycle but often fails to
 - Curriculum / syllabus may recycle topics and hence vocab
e.g. shopping, the home, but at too long intervals
 - Teacher vocab revision games / tests etc.
 - Teacher ensures topics recur in different class tasks
 - Teacher driven MALL (sends word information to student phones at key moments to prompt revision)
 - Teacher directs learners to suitable extensive reading (graded) or online revision aids

Repetition - spaced

- Record and prompt initiated by learner

Learner vocab notekeeping:

of what (form, information...)?

where? (e.g. highlighted in textbook, vocab note book, computer (Anki), phone, cards....)

in what order? Usually in order as met, but better in topic groups

Learner use of real life context resources as a record / prompt

labels things around the house

seeking exposure to words previously learnt by extensive reading / listening, even of the same story repeated

uses everyday talk as a prompt to use words previously learnt or make up sentences for imagined conversations using the words for production (Abbe Faria)

uses paper or online revision resources (Bitesize etc.)

Association

Things are remembered better if connected to what is already known

– L2-L2 connections in the mental lexicon

- Meaning connections: Word association

- Lion

 - tiger animal roar cat

- Soft

 - hard light pillow bed

- Doux

 - dur moux agréable duvet

- Travail

 - repos dur fatigué pénible

Association

- Meaning connections: Word association
 - Paradigmatic word field connections (spider diagrams, word/mind maps Buzan <http://mindmapfree.com/#>. Odd one out and matching exercises)
 - Syntagmatic connections (compounds, collocations, common sequences)
 - It is debated whether it is really desirable for the learner to achieve the native speaker mental organisation
- Word family connections and morphological decomposition such as *feliz, infeliz, infelizmente, felicidade*
- Sound connections (clang) and Spelling connections
 - Intra-L2 keyword method e.g. Port. *comboio* 'train' *com boi* with ox. French *château* 'castle' *chat eau* cat water. Bizarre, but works for some learners to make such connections
- Grammatical connections such as part of speech

Association

– L2-L1 connections

- Translation equivalents the most popular associate among learners. Difficult because often arbitrary
- Cognates... inherently easy to remember if spotted. Port. *mito* is not at first obviously a cognate
- ‘Keyword method’ for good translation equivalents (also involves nonlinguistic image connection). Find an L1 word sounding / looking like the L2 word in whole or in part (e.g. stressed syllable). Create image/story combining meaning of L1 associate with real meaning. Ger. *Gift* Fr. *poupée* Port. *boneca*

– L2-nonlinguistic connections

- Realia (Pelmanism)
- Actions/mime (TPR method)
- Pictures/mental images (Pictionary, and Rosetta Stone)
- Music (Songs)
- Real situations where word is used or could be used / found

'Depth of processing' and the 'Involvement load hypothesis'

Things are remembered better depending on what kind of mental work is done on them when learning or using them

- Applies to any activity where learner finds out new vocab or uses known vocabulary as well as when he/she tries to memorise it by repetition or association
- Involves both thinking and feeling
- Teacher can determine it through the activities required, as well as learner him/herself through choices made
- Can you guess for each activity which involves deeper processing / greater involvement so should mean vocab is better remembered? A or B?

A	B
Being told new word's meaning by book/teacher	Getting new word's meaning by guessing and then using dictionary
New word's meaning has to be selected from a set of alternatives,	New word's meaning is given in the form of a synonym, as a gloss
Make up sentence using the word	Understand a sentence where the word is used
Rote repetition of words	Making associations with words
Multiple choice exercise (e.g. Which of 4 words is the opposite of <i>lent</i> ?)	open response exercise (e.g. What is the opposite of <i>lent</i>)
Reading a text where words to be learnt are used	Reading words in a text plus doing vocab exercises on them
Saying and writing words repeatedly	Silently reading words repeatedly
Saying word aloud when reading it	Thinking of meaning of word when reading it
Paying attention to trivial aspects of a word when repeating it (e.g. Is it in capitals? Do you like this word?)	Just repeating the word

Answer: BAABABABA

A	B
Words are studied in dictionary entries	Words are studied using lines taken from an authentic language corpus
Teacher provides associations for new words	Learner makes own associations for new words
Creating a bizarre or emotive keyword association	Creating a straightforward keyword association that anyone would get
Words occur in disconnected sentences	Words occur in the context of a meaningful story or dialog
Words occur in reading text where they are central to understanding the text	Words occur in reading text where they are not central to understanding the text
Make up sentence using the word correctly	Make up sentence where the word is required to convey a real message
Meet previously learnt words while reading extensively material that you are interested in	Meet previously learnt words while reading extensively material that the teacher selected as suitable

Answer: BBABABA

RAD

Combinations

There are many 'memory methods' you may come across which combine more than one aspect of the key ideas above

E.g. this one combines the ideas of learning words in context, recycling, L1 association, and depth

- Lampariello refers to a “back-and-forth” translation method, in which he reads a bilingual text (usually a dialogue) on a topic of interest to him, and tries to translate the sentences back and forth into his native tongue. So after having initially read a text, he goes through it one more time in the target language, and this time, without looking at the translation, he tries to translate the text back to his native tongue and then checks for mistakes. A few days later, he goes through his translations and tries to **translate them back to the target language**. By doing so, he forces himself to convey a message. His desire to say again what he read/heard in a sentence helps him enormously to remember words. In fact, he says, the words “stick” as a consequence of wanting to say something, to convey a message.)