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A Critical Review of Academic Vocabulary in Use: Vocabulary reference and practice self-study and classroom use

Title of the book: Academic Vocabulary in Use: Vocabulary reference and practice Self-study and classroom use. 176 pp.

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Abstract

The present book review introduces to the readers the main issues in the book, which are valuable to their educational goals. It helps to provide an objective evaluation of the contents of the book, its strengths and weaknesses, and explains how the book achieves its goals effectively. It critically presents an overview of this book, Michael McCarthy's and Felicity O'Dell's *Academic Vocabulary in Use: Vocabulary reference and practice Self-study and classroom use*. It is divided into units, sections, exercises and key answers, beside six reading texts; they all highlight the importance of contextual vocabulary to learners, scholars, and academics to achieve the appropriate way of writing and presenting texts in English. Due to the importance of the book, it can be recommended to be a teacher's guide to teaching essay writing at English departments.

Keywords: Academic Vocabulary, Classroom, Review, Self-study.

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مراجعة نقدية لكتاب "استخدام المفردات الأكاديمية: مرجع المفردات وتطبيقات
الدراسة الذاتية واستخدام المفردات داخل الصف"

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الخلاصة: تقدم مراجعة الكتاب الحالية للقراء القضايا الرئيسية في الكتاب، والتي تعد ذات قيمة لأهدافهم التعليمية. تساعد هذه المراجعة في تقديم تقييم موضوعي في محتويات الكتاب، ومواضع القوة والضعف فيه، وتوضح كيفية تحقيق الكتاب لأهدافه بشكل فعال. تطرح هذه المراجعة بشكل نقدي نظرة عامة على هذا الكتاب، المفردات الأكاديمية المستخدمة في هذا الكتاب المؤلف من قبل مايكل مكارثي وفيليسيتي أوديل والموسوم بـ "مرجع المفردات وممارسة الدراسة الذاتية واستخدام الفصول الدراسية". وهي موزعة على وحدات وأقسام وتمارين وإجابات رئيسية، فضلاً عن ستة نصوص مخصصة للقراءة. تسلط هذه الأجزاء الضوء على أهمية المفردات السياقية للمتعلمين والباحثين والأكاديميين، لتحقيق الطريقة المناسبة لكتابة، وعرض النصوص باللغة الإنجليزية. ونظراً لأهمية الكتاب، يوصى بأن يكون دليلاً للمعلم في تدريس كتابة المقالات في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات الافتتاحية: المفردات الأكاديمية، الفصل الدراسي ، المراجعة ، الدراسة الذاتية.

This critical review is concerned with Michael McCarthy's and Felicity O'Dell's book, "Academic Vocabulary in Use: Vocabulary reference and practice Self-study and classroom use". It aims to review four issues related to the book: corpus of data of the book, its contents, its strengths, and its weaknesses. Besides, it overviews the following points: authors' academic career, their approach to the academic vocabularies, and their conception of these vocabularies. It is also concluded by a summary of the issues and points presented in the review.

Michael McCarthy's and Felicity O'Dell's book tackles the use of academic vocabulary. Michael McCarthy has the position

of an Emeritus Professor specialized in Applied Linguistics at the University of Nottingham, UK, and is well-known for his expertise in the teaching and learning of grammar and vocabulary. He is also co-author of Cambridge Grammar of English and the English Vocabulary in Use series for elementary, upper-intermediate and advanced levels. He has written many useful books for teachers, including "*From Corpus to Classroom*" and "*Spoken Language and Applied Linguistics*". As for Dr. Felicity O'Dell is a part-time teacher at the University of London's Institute of Education, co-running an online education and training course. She also serves as Chair of the CAE Writing Paper and Listening Paper Committees for the Cambridge Young Learners examinations.

The fields of the book contain vocabulary reference, self-study exercises, and use in the classroom. The book aims to guide students, learners, scholars, and academics to the appropriate way of writing and presenting texts in English. The academic vocabulary explained in this book has been selected from language approved Cambridge's International Corpus of Written and Spoken English, as well as the CANCODE Corpus of Spoken English developed at the University of Nottingham in collaboration with Cambridge University Press. These rich collections consist of a range of written and spoken works at academic level, helping to define language that is distinctive in academic contexts.

Significantly, the book also utilized the Cambridge Learners Corpus, a collection of greater than sixty million words of works borrowed from hundreds of thousands of texts submitted by students sitting Cambridge English tests around the world. Through this corpus, the authors were capable to understand the types of mistakes students were committing, such as students'

mistakes in IELTS exam. In planning this book, authors considerably utilized Averil Coxhead's text on developing academic word lists.

The book falls into fifty units, each unit falls into two pages. The left page introduces the vocabulary in the academic level that is focused on in the unit. Words and expressions are contextually presented with and, if appropriate, notes on the meaning and use of the words attached. The right page scrutinizes the learner's understanding of the information presented on the previous page, by presenting a collection of exercises to accomplish.

All the units are structured into many sections. Beginning with a unit entitled "Before you start", the authors highly advice "the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*", as it involves the same type of information ... to understand and employ English vocabulary" (McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell, 2016: 8). They state that learners of English need a specialist dictionary related to their own field of study as well (Ibid). They resume that the teacher may also recommend other dictionaries that suit their learners' needs (Ibid). The first section covers nine units that highlight the elementary aspects of academic vocabulary, such as distinctive features, main verbs, and key quantitative expressions. Section two contains 8 units devoted to typical word combinations in academic language. Section three consists of 6 units that focus on aspects of life in academic institutions. Section four presents 4 units that address aspects of scheming and starting work, while section five contains 5 units related to the process of thinking and interaction. Section six covers 6 units that deal with ways to express different concepts, such as numbers, time and cause and effect. As for section seven, it has 12 units assessing the sides of organization as well as the introduction of ideas.

At its end, there exist in the book six reading texts related to various academic registers, with exercises that are grounded in the vocabulary found in these texts. The authors recommend learners to read the texts beside doing the exercises even though they are related to an academic topic which may be completely different from their field of study.

The book has five reference sections relating to a range of key topics, making it easy for learners to access lists of items that are not fully presented in the main part of the book, such as the informal and formal academic expressions and words, common units of symbols and measurement, numbers, American and British academic terms, and difference in word formation and spelling. The authors argue that these reference sections give learners the opportunity to provide additional examples from their own experiences. Finally, the book provides the main answers to all the exercises, as well as an index containing all the main words and expressions, referring to the units in which they are found. The phonemic system used in the book is the one adopted in standard British English.

In fact, the book deals with a type of vocabulary used in academic contexts regardless of the specialty of the learner. Hence, it covers words and expressions such as concept, theory and conclusion, without being restricted to field-specific vocabulary such as anatomy or physics. The book considers specialized terminology easy to learn, as it is taught and explained during the subject study, which may sometimes resemble English language and the language of the learners. However, general vocabulary is more used to explain ideas, research, talk and write about academic work, and learners must adapt to it to feel relaxed in the academic level. Although this general vocabulary is more

common than specialized terms, they often seem more difficult to learn. Therefore, the book conceive dealing with this vocabulary in the systematic manner proposed in the book (McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell, 2016: 6). The units of the book concentrate on vocabulary that are basic for the learner wherever he studies or where he may intend to study in the future.

Words for describing people and the ones for describing places show differences from each other and these differences are given attention in Unit 19 of the book. Reference sections 3 and 4 also draw attention to some vocabulary and spelling differences. With the exception of quoted texts using American spellings, British English spelling conventions are used in the units of the book. The authors assert that much of the vocabularies used in the book are featured by neutrality in the sense that they are equally appropriate in both written and oral contexts (Ibid). They resume that these instances are referred to in which a particular word is so exaggerated that it is not suitable for use in conversation, or so exaggerated that it is not suitable for use in academic writing (Ibid).

The book has its points of strength. They help to open up new ways of understanding the use of vocabularies in academic contexts. The book is significant to anyone who aims to learn English, as it addresses English as a language employed in written texts such as course books and scientific articles, and also includes spoken English in lectures and seminars. Its vocabularies are also utilized by students at the university or college level, covering subjects related to the academic field. It is especially fruitful to students preparing to take exams such as IELTS, the Pearson Academic Test, or any other exam aiming to assess English language skills at an advanced level for study at an institution that uses English as a means of instruction.

Furthermore, the book assists people who are required to attend or deliver lectures as well as participating in international conferences, and enables students who prepare to do assignments or write dissertations in English to be done in a convenient way. It fulfills the learners' need of writing English appropriately.

Yet, the book has its points of weakness. Due to its restriction to the use of academic vocabularies, the functional side of these vocabularies is not given its worth in all the sections of the book. This side has its cohesive and coherent relationships in texts, whose roles cannot be ignored in the study of vocabulary. The authors' focus on the academic context and classroom use has not taken into consideration the creative element of writing, which is not restrained by the academic context and classroom use. Furthermore, the book confinement to the six reading texts at its end has not sufficiently surveyed writing the academic vocabulary in the different disciplines.

To conclude, this review critically treats Michael McCarthy's and Felicity O'Dell's book, *"Academic Vocabulary in Use: Vocabulary reference and practice Self-study and classroom use"*. Its purpose is the reviewing of four issues relating to the book: corpus of data of the book, its contents, its points of strength, and its points of weakness. It also overviews the other points: authors' academic career, their approach to the academic vocabulary, and their conception of these vocabulary. Thus, due to the significance of this book in improving students' proficiency in academic writing on the grammatical and stylistic levels, the reviewer recommends to assign the book to be a teacher's guide to teaching essay writing at the departments of English in both the College of Education for Humanities and the College of Arts in Mosul University in the future.

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