

A Content Analysis of the Vocabulary Items in "Jordan Opportunities for Twelfth Grade

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Abstract

This study aimed at analyzing the vocabulary items of "Jordan Opportunities" for twelfth grade in order to investigate whether these vocabulary items agree with the vocabulary analysis criteria proposed by Celce-Murcia (1991). This study attempted to answer the following two questions: "To what extent do the vocabulary items agree with the vocabulary analysis criteria proposed by Celce-Murcia?, and "What are the highly and least available criteria in all textbook modules? The results of the Study showed that the vocabulary items were used in appropriate contexts; they were inclusive per syllabus, their accessibility are good, suitable in number and reasonable to the Students' level. But their balanced distribution is weak. The first criterion (Appropriateness of context) and the second criterion (Inclusiveness per syllabus) got the highest rates. The fifth criterion (Load suitability) gained the lowest rate.

Keywords: Content Analysis, Vocabulary, Jordan Opportunities

Introduction

Despite the knowledge explosion nowadays, the book is still practicing its important role for many different reasons. First, the book is very cheap to buy. Second, it is easy to carry. Third, it can be used anytime. Fourth, it is an important source of information. Therefore, it should be given more attention to cope with the people's needs and ambitions.

Textbooks and instruction material are important components to EFL/ESL programs (Ababneh, 2007). The textbooks are essential elements of English language teaching. Teaching – learning situations are not complete if there are no textbooks. Jordan Opportunities is a multi level course designed for Jordanian students learning English in grades: tenth, eleventh and twelfth. The basic premise of the course is that Students learn best when they study interesting and meaningful content. "Jordan Opportunities" for twelfth grade consists of six modules, each based on a topic. There are different sub-topics within each module.

"Jordan Opportunities" (levels: three and four) for twelfth grade is considered as a development step of the curricula and as a response to what teachers of English complain about the students' low performance in English and maybe as a response to the findings of the research studies.

Many evaluation studies were conducted on the currently taught series "Action Pack" for grades one to nine and "Jordan Opportunities" for grades ten to twelve, the previous series PETRA for the basic stage and AMRA for the secondary stage and university textbooks.

Content analysis (CA) can be one of the best evaluating instruments that can be followed to analyze textbooks and show their strengths and weaknesses. CA results provide textbook authors and authorities responsible for issuing such textbooks with meaningful insights that help make the necessary developments and amendments to analyzed textbooks. The method of CA enables the researcher to include large amounts of textual information and identify systematically its properties.

Various definitions have been provided for CA by different researchers. Holsti (1969:14) offers a broad definition of CA as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages".

Pool (1970 In Ahmed and Al-Hammadi, *ibid*: 343) defines CA as "An accurate method that aims at describing textual information which takes accuracy, validity, and reliability of the description into consideration".

CA has wide applications. Although it was first founded by Berelson (Cited in Ahmed and Al-Hammadi, 1987: 343) to analyze media and communication, it was later developed to include the social sciences and humanities. It was also developed from being only quantitative into a combination of both quantitative and qualitative analysis (Ahmed and Al-Hammadi, *ibid*: 345). CA summarizes the contents of a book or a series of books in one table which enables readers to judge its/their suitability.

CA is an organized process. It follows specific and controlled criteria. Sinan (1984) and Al-Khalili, et al.(1987) talk about the general characteristics of the textbook. Ingle (1984) talks about the difficulty of the content, Blazer and Simonis (1991a) talk about books' bias to students' sex. Eltinge and Roberts (1993) talk about the linguistic analysis of textbook lexicon.

Vocabulary forms a very important component in learning a second/foreign language; so it is very necessary to provide foreign language teaching textbooks with enough and suitable vocabulary. Language acquisition starts with learning words not structures, therefore more focus and care should be paid to make textbook authors, teachers, and learners recognize this fact, and as a result build textbooks, and learning strategies that help begin correctly. CA can play a very significant role in directing attention to places of success in vocabulary learning. Wilkins (in Johnson 1977: 1) states that in any second language class, vocabulary should be given at least equal consideration because if the learner knows only structure but not content words, then what he or she says is meaningless.

Celce-Murcia and Rosensweig (1979) say that,

The recognition of written words (vocabulary) and the awareness of each part of speech were primary objectives of language teaching. On the other hand, the reading approach elevated vocabulary and suppressed grammar.

They, furthermore state that:

Vocabulary should be recognized as a central element in language instruction from the beginning stages (*ibid*). They also say that, "Vocabulary is a large area that needs continued growth and development for both native and non-native speakers long after grammar and pronunciation are under reasonable control.

To sum up, vocabulary ought to have more attention from all people concerned with the teaching-learning process, such as textbook authors, teachers, researchers, and learners.

Statement of the Problem

Being a supervisor at Jordanian schools, the researcher noticed that most students find it difficult to answer the vocabulary questions whether in the school monthly exams or in the Secondary Stage Certificate Exams. All exams in the four levels of the secondary stage ought to have two vocabulary questions whether receptive or productive questions. The first question normally requires students to fill gaps from a set of words in a box while the other question asks students to complete the sentence with the correct form of the given word. The researcher noticed that most students fail to get 50% of the vocabulary items correct. Therefore, this study aims to analyze all vocabulary items in levels three and four to find out why this happens and to provide recommendations to book authors, teachers, and students.

Questions of the Study:

This study aims at answering the following questions:

- 1- To what extent do the vocabulary items of "Jordan opportunities" textbook modules (levels 3 and 4) agree with the vocabulary analysis criteria proposed by Celce Murcia?
- 2- What are the highly and least available criteria in all textbook modules?

Significance of the Study:

The series of "Jordan opportunities" was introduced for the secondary stage for the academic year 2006/2007. This study is the first to be conducted on its vocabulary items. It is an important attempt to evaluate and analyze its vocabulary items.

The findings of this study will be useful to educators who are interested in curriculum design and development, teachers, supervisors and textbook writers. The findings will show the strengths and weaknesses of "Jordan opportunities" (level three and four for the secondary stage) concerning the vocabulary.

Criteria of Analysis:

The researcher adopted a list of criteria concerning the vocabulary analysis criteria proposed by Celce-Murcia (1991). The following are the criteria:

- 1- Appropriateness of context.
- 2- Accessibility.
- 3- Inclusiveness per syllabus.
- 4- Load suitability.
- 5- Balanced distribution.

Unit of Analysis:

The word is used as the unit of analysis of this study:

Definition of Terms

- **"Jordan opportunities"**: it is a series of three books prescribed by the Jordanian Ministry of Education for tenth, first secondary and second secondary class students. Nowadays it is divided into four levels. Level one and two for the first secondary class students and level three and four for the second secondary class students. It includes student's book, activity book, teacher's book and cassettes.
- **Celce - Murcia Criteria**: it is a five-item scale adopted by the researcher to evaluate the vocabulary of "Jordan opportunities" textbook (levels three and four). Each item should be graded from 0 to 4 (Excellent = 4, good = 3, adequate = 2, weak = 1, totally lacking = 0).
- **Appropriateness of context**: the vocabulary items are introduced in appropriate contexts and situations.
- **Accessibility**: the vocabulary items included in the text are easily accessible to the learner by providing a word list or summaries of new words.
- **Inclusiveness per syllabus**: the vocabulary items included in the text are necessary for using the language up to the complexity / mastery the book achieves and thus these items can match the objectives of the book.
- **Load suitability**: the number of the new words introduced in every lesson seems to be reasonable for the students of that level.
- **Balanced distribution**: the even distribution of vocabulary material among modules.

Limitation of the Study:

This study is limited to "Jordan opportunities" for twelfth grade.

Review of Related Literature:

Despite the importance of vocabulary and the role they play in language learning, the researcher could not find any specialized CA studies that have entirely been devoted to vocabulary analysis. There were some studies that treated vocabulary as an aspect among other language aspects that have been analyzed. Therefore, the researcher is going to provide the local studies which analyzed various aspects of Jordanian textbooks.

Al-Jarrah (1987) conducted a study in which he evaluated the new TEFL textbook (PETRA) which was used by the fifth and sixth grades at Jordanian schools. He used an evaluative scale which he himself developed. The results of his study showed that the rationale and objectives of PETRA textbooks were stated specifically, graded level by level and skill by skill. The sequence of PETRA textbooks flowed smoothly and the material was accurate.

Saleh (1990) conducted a study that aimed to evaluate the second preparatory PETRA textbook. Hitherto, he used two evaluative scales, one for teachers and the other for students. The results of the study revealed that the rationale and objectives of the textbook were suitable and clear for both the teachers and students.

Lababidi (1983) conducted a study in which she analyzed ten randomly selected lessons from the series "New Living English for Jordan" (NLEJ). The purpose of the analysis was to find out whether these lessons convey communication or not. She used a questionnaire including Yes/No and open-ended questions. Some of the results of the analysis showed that:

1. The content of NLEJ books did not reflect student's needs.
2. The objectives of NLEJ books were not realized.
3. Grammar exercises were mechanical.
4. Vocabulary items needed for reading texts were taught to students by the teacher using gestures or sound to show the meaning.

El-Mustafa (1988) conducted a study whose purpose was to evaluate the first preparatory PETRA textbook. He used two evaluative scales, one for teachers and the other for students. Both scales were directed to cover the rationale, objectives, language skills, grammar, vocabulary, content, methods of teaching, teaching aids, workbook, the teacher's book, and some general aspects of the textbook. The results of the study concerning **vocabulary** revealed that the PETRA textbook selects vocabulary that suits its objectives; distinguishes between receptive and productive vocabulary; presents vocabulary in appropriate context and situations; and recycles and revises new words.

Al-Marzouq (1992) conducted a study in which he evaluated the New English for Nurses textbook used for the second secondary class in the nursing stream. He also used two evaluative scales; one for the teachers and the other for students. The scales were to evaluate the rationale, objectives, teaching aids, vocabulary, structures, drills, and content. The results of the study revealed that the rationale of the textbook was based on teaching English for special purposes that match the learner's needs.

On the other hand, the objectives were clearly stated and the technical aspects of the textbook were attractive. It also revealed that the **vocabulary** items were properly selected to suit communication at hospitals.

Al Momani (1998) conducted a study in which he evaluated AMRA textbooks used for first and second secondary classes of all academic streams in Jordan. He employed three evaluative questionnaires; one for teachers; another for supervisors; and the third one for students. The scales were directed to cover the rationale, objectives, listening and speaking skills, reading and writing skills, grammar and structural functions, vocabulary, methods of teaching, teaching aids, workbooks, the teacher's book, and some general aspects of the textbook. The results of the study concerning **vocabulary** revealed that the new vocabulary items were suitably classified; the new vocabulary items were selected to facilitate communication; the meaning and the phonetic transcription for the new vocabularies were provided in AMRA II but not in AMRA I.

Al-Omari (2002) conducted a study in which he evaluated the Action Pack textbook. He also used two evaluative scales; one for the teachers and the other for supervisors. The scales were to evaluate the rationale, objectives, teaching aids, vocabulary, structures, drills, and content. The results of the study concerning vocabulary revealed that the textbooks are suitably provided word lists; the new words are adequately recycled in different texts; the selection of **vocabulary** items is suitable for the objectives. Besides, the **vocabulary** items are suitably relevant to the learners' needs and interests; above all number of words is suitable.

Magableh (2000) evaluated the Functional English Language Textbook for Commercial First Secondary Class. The sample consisted at (6) teachers and (5) supervisors, and (81) students in Jerash Directorate of Education. The researcher used two questionnaires. The findings of the study showed that the textbook lacked the teaching aids and did not reflect the culture and the values of the Jordanian society.

Shatnawi (2005) conducted a study on the "Cutting Edge" series which is taught at Yarmouk University. The aim of the study was to investigate the role of culture in foreign language textbook through content analysis. Also this study aimed at exploring the attitudes of students and instructors of English at Yarmouk University towards the importance of English and the inclusion of culture in TEFL. The sample consisted of (300) male and female students and (20) instructors at Yarmouk University. Two questionnaires were used; one was for students and the other was for instructors. The researcher also analyzed the content of the "Cutting Edge" series. The findings showed that the textbook includes the following cultural aspects; historical, economical, geographical, literary political, religious, socialman – women relationship, habits, customs and traditions and aspects related to the ways of living.

Ababneh (2007) conducted a study on "Jordan opportunities" for the tenth grade. The study aimed at analyzing the content of "Jordan opportunities" for the tenth grade and investigating the teachers' and the supervisors' opinions concerning it.

The population of the study consisted of (80) teachers and (8) supervisors in Irbid First, Second and Third Directorates of Educations. The researcher analyzed the students' book, the activity book and the teacher's book then presented how the outcomes, language skills, linguistic components, communication activities and the cultural aspects are stated. The researcher developed a five point likert-questionnaire of (78) items and a structured interview to investigate the teacher' and supervisors' opinions of "Jordan opportunities". The findings of the study showed that the outcomes and vocabulary were not finally distributed in modules. Grammar and needing gained the highest frequency and percentage. The cultural aspects were found suitable to Jordanian setting, except that aspect related to man/woman relationship. The findings also showed that the teacher's book was of great help to teachers.

Al- Barakat (1996) carries out a study aimed at identifying and evaluating English language textbooks for the basic stage in Jordan, PETRA series. The researcher made a quantitative analysis which consisted of all the main passages which were presented for reading. He also made a qualitative analysis which included all the material. The findings of the study showed that the six books of PETRA series reflected cultural bias. Shatnawi (2003) conducted a study to evaluate Enterprise textbooks series which is used at Yarmouk University Model School and many other private schools in Jordan. The findings of the study showed that some parents, teachers and pupils were not fully satisfied with the content of Enterprise since it was not more relevant to the students' culture and background (cited in Shatnawi, 2005).

Methodology

The researcher used a list of criteria concerning the analysis of vocabulary items suggested by Celecia-Muricia (1991). All criteria follow likert scale (0-4). The (0) means that the criteria is totally lacking, while (4) rate means that the criterion under investigation is excellent. Table (1) presents the likert-scale of the vocabulary analysis criteria used by the researcher in this study.

Table (1) Likert – Scale of the Vocabulary Analysis Criteria

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Weak	Totally lacking
1. appropriateness of context					
2. accessibility					
3. inclusiveness per syllabus					
4. load suitability					
5. balanced distribution					

Each item should be graded from (0-4) that is:

- 0 = totally lacking
- 1 = weak
- 2 = adequate
- 3 = good
- 4 = excellent

In order to estimate the rates of the criteria listed in Table (1), the researcher analyzed the words in "Jordan opportunities" for Twelfth Grade (levels: three and four). Furthermore, the researcher counted the number of the new vocabulary items of the six modules in order to be able to estimate the rates of the fourth and fifth criteria.

All the vocabulary items in the six modules were analyzed by two raters, the researcher himself and another rater who has got an M.A in TEFL and taken a course in CA recently. Above all, he has been teaching this textbook (Jordan opportunities) for three years. The raters analyzed each module separately, following the ten item scale. After that the researcher made another check on some modules to ensure the reliability of the instrument of the analysis. There was a very high agreement between both raters according to the agreement formula:

$$\frac{154 \text{ (Number of items agreed on by both raters)}}{160 + 6 \text{ (The number of all items + the number of disagreed ones)}} \times 100 = 93\%$$

Percentages were the only statistical treatments followed to determine the results of the questions of the study. Since this study aimed at analyzing the new vocabulary items in (levels 3 & 4), the researcher took **the word** as the unit of analysis.

The word in this analysis includes the words the boxes at the beginning of each unit in the Student's Book. The word can be a single word or an expression as classified in each box; that is: a noun, a verb, an adjective, an adverb, a phrasal verb or an idiom (or expression as sometimes called).

Findings of the Study

This section presents the findings of the analysis in accordance with its question which asks about the extent to which vocabulary items in "Jordan opportunities" for Twelfth Grade (Level: 3 and 4) agree with the vocabulary analysis criteria proposed by Celce – Murcia (1991). Table (2) presents the rates of the vocabulary analysis criteria according to Likert-Scale.

Table (2) The Rates and Means of Vocabulary Analysis Criteria According to Likert-Scale

Criteria	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4	Module 5	Module 6	Means
1	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
3	4	2	2	4	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Table (2) shows that the rates of vocabulary analysis criteria range between 1 and 4 since the first criterion (Appropriateness of context), the second criteria (inclusiveness per syllabus) and the fourth criterion (Load suitability) have the highest rates which means that these criteria are presented in an excellent manner. The third criterion which is accessibility obtained the rate (3) which means that the accessibility of the vocabulary items in the modules is good. Whereas the fifth criterion (Balanced distribution) gained the rate (1) which means that the balance of vocabulary items among modules is weak. The rates of the fourth and fifth criteria were achieved by counting the number of the vocabulary items and the results are shown in Table (3).

Table (3) The Number and the Percentages of the Vocabulary Items in "Jordan Opportunities for Twelfth Grade, Levels Three and Four (Modules 1-6)

Module	Number of Vocabulary Items	Percentage
1	64	17.67
2	47	12.98
3	66	18.23
4	40	11.04
5	57	15.74
6	88	24.3
Total	362	

Table (3) shows the number of vocabulary items in the modules of "Jordan opportunities" for twelfth grade (Level: three and Four) ranges between 40 and 88 (11% and 24%). Module 6 has the biggest number whereas module 4 has the smallest number. The number of new vocabulary items in the six modules and their distribution on word group or parts of speech with their percentages are presented in Table (4).

Table (4) Numbers and Percentages of New Vocabulary Items in Modules One to Six of "Jordan Opportunities" for Twelfth Grade

Module/Item	Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Adverbs	Phrasal Verbs	Idioms/Expressions	Total	Percentage
1	38	11	4	-	11	-	64	17.67%
2	23	-	18	-	6	-	47	12.98%
3	26	4	35	1	-	-	66	18.23%
4	20	1	2	-	11	6	40	11.4%
5	33	-	12	-	12	-	57	15.74%
6	42	11	24	-	6	5	88	24.3%
Total	182	27	95	1	46	11	362	
Percentage of Each Group	50.27%	7.45%	26.24%	0.27	12.70%	3.30%		

Table (4) shows the number of new vocabulary items in the six modules of "Jordan opportunities" for Twelfth Grade, as they appeared in the vocabulary boxes and exercises is 362. It also shows that the number of nouns occupied the highest number of the new vocabulary items (182 and 50%), where as the adverbs got the lowest number and percentage (1 and 0.27%).

Discussion of the Findings

As it is shown in Table (2), the first, second and fourth criteria have the highest rates which means that such criteria were given a special interest by the planners of the curriculum.

Concerning the first criterion which is the "Appropriateness of context", it is observed that the vocabulary items were used in appropriate contexts which help students to identify the meanings of such vocabulary items without checking the dictionary for meaning. For example, the vocabulary items: "get down", "competition" and "revolutionary" occurred in the following contexts:

- 1- Omar never let things get him down.
- 2- When he was very young, Teimour started winning competitions and titles.
- 3- Currently, three schools in the Richmond area are taking a part in a revolutionary M-learning project which will involve people using mobile phones.

Regarding the second criterion which is "Inclusiveness per syllabus", table (2) shows that the vocabulary items are inclusive for achieving the objectives of the modules. For example, one of the objectives in module three is "to describe people". Therefore, some of the vocabulary items listed in the module were: calm, honest, reliable, mean, sensitive, bad-tempered, cheerful, creative, generous, sociable and selfish.

This agrees with El-Mustafa whose study concerning vocabulary revealed that the PETRA textbook selects vocabulary items that suit their objectives.

Concerning the third criterion which is Accessibility criterion, it is clear that in most cases the vocabulary items which have something in common are grouped together which makes it easy for students to study them. For example on page (34) the vocabulary items: "bad-tempered", "cheerful", "creative", "disorganized", "dynamic", "generous", "hard-working", "helpful", "honest", "insensitive", "selfish", and "shy". These are adjectives that can be used to describe people. Furthermore, some lessons in some modules lack boxes of new vocabulary items. For examples, module 6, lesson 2 "Focus on Jordan" page 82. A second example is the "Literature spot 1, the Fruits of Labour" page 99. Accordingly, it can be suggested that the accessibility criteria in the six modules is good.

The last criterion is "Balanced distribution". It seems that the vocabulary items do not have a balanced distribution among the modules. For example, module 4 contains 40 new vocabulary items, whereas module 6 contains 88 new vocabulary items. Therefore the balanced distribution criterion seems to be weak.

Table 4 shows that the number of new vocabulary items in all modules ranges between 1 and 182 with the percentage of 0.27% and 50.27%. It also shows that the number of nouns occupied more than half of all new vocabulary items. It shows that there are 182 nouns out of 362 new vocabulary items that is 50.27%, whereas there is very rare presence of adverbs. There is only one adverb with the percentage of 0.27%.

To be more precise table (4) shows that there was no balanced distribution of new vocabulary items among the modules which range between 40 and 88 and there was no balanced distribution in terms of parts of speech classification which ranged between 1 and 188.

Conclusions

On the basis of the findings of this study, it can be concluded the following:

- 1- The vocabulary items in "Jordan opportunities" for twelfth grade were used in appropriate contexts.
- 2- The vocabulary items in this textbook are inclusive per syllabus.
- 3- The accessibility of the vocabulary items is good.
- 4- The number of the new vocabulary items seems to be suitable and reasonable to the students' level.
- 5- The balanced distribution of vocabulary items is weak.

Recommendations

In the light of the results of this study, the researcher recommends the following:

- The authors of "Jordan Opportunities" are recommended to take into consideration the fair distribution of vocabulary items among the modules.
- The authors of "Jordan Opportunities" are also recommended to take into consideration the suitable distribution of Vocabulary items in terms of parts of speech among modules.
- Teachers ought to be more flexible with the textbook's new vocabulary items. They should not be slaves to what is recommended in the teacher's book.

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