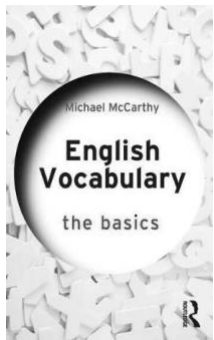


English Vocabulary: The Basics

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English Vocabulary: The Basics			
Author:	Michael McCarthy (2022)		
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"...without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" - David Wilkins (1972, p. 111)

As David Wilkins once pointed out, the significance of vocabulary in language and communication cannot be downplayed, which breathes life into ideas and thoughts, transforming them from abstract notions into concrete, meaningful expressions. However, until recently, vocabulary was often an overlooked element of language learning (Meara, 1980). As time has gone by, scholars have given vocabulary research more and more attention. With such history in mind, *English Vocabulary: The Basics* by Michael McCarthy reflects the importance of vocabulary in language and language learning with an introductory text for novices completely new to the area of vocabulary studies. As its title suggests, the book aims to provide readers with a fundamental understanding of key concepts underpinning this complex and multifaceted field.

The book consists of six chapters and a glossary of key terms. Chapter 1 examines the grammatical, spelling, and phonological conventions of words, using Lewis Carroll's (1872/1998) fabricated words as examples of how these conventions can be applied. The chapter also focuses on word formation, morphology, collocations, idioms, and formulaic

expressions, providing readers with a deeper understanding of how words can be combined to convey meaning. Following this, Chapter 2 details a broad overview of the origins and evolution of the English language from the distant past to modern times. The author traces the influences of Latin, French, and Greek on the development of English vocabulary and highlights key moments in its history, such as the Old English period, the Viking invasion, and the French-speaking Norman occupation. The chapter also attends to the role of literary works like Shakespeare's plays and the King James Bible in shaping modern English.

Chapter 3 is a comprehensive inquiry into semantics and how words convey meaning. It covers technical terms concerning different layers of meaning, the existence of synonymy, homonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and meronymy. The chapter also deals with componential analysis and concludes with a brief explanation of pragmatics and an overview of Paul Grice's (1975) conversational maxims. Chapter 4 builds on this by addressing idiomaticity and differentiating between the literal and figurative meanings of words. The chapter analyzes the use of body parts, animals, food, and drink in idioms across languages, and discusses proverbs and sayings as semantically idiomatic expressions. It concludes by highlighting the idiomatic use of language by means of figures of speech.

Chapter 5 probes into the internal operation of the mental lexicon, the part of the human mind responsible for storing and processing words. It offers a detailed account of language acquisition, employing metaphors to clarify the underlying mechanisms of mental lexicon, as well as issues surrounding the assessment of vocabulary knowledge. This chapter is followed by detailed examination of the social dimension of words, exploring how synonyms and near-synonyms emerge from social interactions. The chapter examines the consequences of social changes on word meaning and the role of age, gender, generation, geography, and occupation on vocabulary.

One of the greatest strengths of this book is its accessibility, which caters to a broad readership seeking to learn about English vocabulary. It offers an introductory overview of the field without overwhelming readers with terminology. Its clear and engaging prose ensures that it is suitable for novice readers with no prior knowledge of the field seeking to strengthen their understanding of specific concepts in the field of applied linguistics. The book offers a short but well-structured presentation of basic vocabulary concepts, supported by illustrative examples and pedagogical features. The information add-on boxes are insightful and interesting. Similarly, the reflection point boxes serve as a useful self-assessment tool. Furthermore, the corpus evidence boxes provide a wealth of examples of actual English usage, enhancing the reader's understanding of the book's contents. This accessibility is further enhanced by the book's comprehensive glossary of key terminology, as well as its numerous references and resources for further reading.

Besides the strengths of the book, some minor shortcomings can also be mentioned. The author's approach to the content of the different chapters is not balanced. Although the writer states in the introduction to the reader that topics will not be oversimplified, Chapter 1, which deals with the formal structure of words, reads like an extended glossary due to the bolded terms and their short explanations almost every three to five lines. Similarly, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 are full of terminology with superficial explanations that need many examples for better understanding. On the contrary, Chapter 2, which deals with how and why words have changed in the historical process, is easy to read and digest. These chapters contrast in their

content, ranging from introductory material to content only appropriate for seasoned academics.

Regardless of its minor shortcomings, *English Vocabulary: The Basics* should be considered as an essential first step for anyone looking to expand their knowledge of English vocabulary. Its clear and concise approach to the theoretical background in the field makes it an introductory text for anyone seeking an introduction to the understanding of English vocabulary. It is a useful resource for students who want to enrich their knowledge of vocabulary, teachers who want to supplement their theoretical knowledge to improve their practice in the classroom, and very early researchers just beginning to take an interest in issues related to vocabulary. As such, *English Vocabulary: The Basics* has the potential to attract a diverse range of readers who are curious about English vocabulary, without any prior qualifications or training prerequisites.

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About the reviewers

Mustafa Yildiz holds a PhD from the Department of English Language Teaching of Anadolu University. He is currently working as an English instructor at Samsun University. His research interests include vocabulary acquisition/teaching. ORCID ID: [0000-0002-7971-5847](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7971-5847) Email: mustafa.yildiz@samsun.edu.tr

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