

The Effects of 10-minute Vocabulary Instruction: Using Word Lists in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Vocabulary learning is one of the most important processes of learning a foreign language, however it is often a boring and frustrating task for learners. In class at Bunkyo Gakuin University, students must study hundreds of English words a short time and many of them grow weary of this demanding task. So I introduced a new technique for vocabulary instruction using original word lists. During the class period, students were given 10 minutes to work on a vocabulary list followed by a feedback test. The primary objective of this instruction was to establish students' study habits and help them get higher scores on the chapter tests. As a result of this treatment, the students' average score went up by 10%, and 70% achieved higher scores on the term-end vocabulary test. Many students spent more hours leaning vocabulary during the semester. It was obvious that the classroom teaching worked effectively to motivate the students. In this paper, I discuss the ways it raised student performance and increased motivation.

Introduction

Teachers and learners should give careful consideration to how vocabulary is learned. Many studies emphasize the important role of vocabulary in language teaching. However, some language teachers presume vocabulary learning is solely the students' responsibility. These teachers then do not encourage students to learn vocabulary, nor do they introduce vocabulary study explicitly into their classroom teaching. Although Hunt & Beglar (2005) are convinced that lexical development is a major concern for EFL learners, it is still frequently undervalued by course designers and instructors. In recent years, the idea that vocabulary plays an important role in communication has established a broad consensus in the field of second language acquisition. One cannot speak, understand, read, or write a foreign language without knowing many words. Therefore, Rubin & Thompson (1994) declare that vocabulary learning is at the heart of mastering a foreign

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language. Hunt & Beglar (2005) go on to say that effective second language vocabulary acquisition is particularly important for EFL learners, who frequently have impoverished lexicons despite years of formal study. Rivers (1981) urges language teachers to stimulate excitement for words to help these students. Rivers says teacher can do this by giving students specific techniques to learn vocabulary. In this paper, I would like to introduce my own way of teaching vocabulary as a means for broadening students' vocabulary knowledge, and present three major findings about the effectiveness of my instruction.

Background

The effectiveness of direct learning

The most basic level of knowing a word involves knowing both the form and meaning (Thornbury, 2002). My instruction aims to reach the most basic, decontextualized level; linking one word form to its meaning. My research question is how effective is my instruction.

Rubin & Thompson (1994) characterize two general approaches as follows: with direct vocabulary learning, students focus their attention on learning words in lists or completing various vocabulary exercises; whereas, with indirect vocabulary learning, learner's attention is focused on conveying or understanding a spoken or written message, in the process of which they are likely to learn new vocabulary. The two approaches vie for superiority and have created much controversy. So while criticisms of the direct approach abound, many studies do support the decontextualized style of the direct approach as an effective way of learning vocabulary.

One supporter of the direct approach for vocabulary teaching is Nation (2001), who states the values of direct learning of vocabulary are: (1) it is efficient in terms of return for time and effort, (2) it allows learners to consciously focus on an aspect of word knowledge that is not easily gained from context, and (3) it allows learners to control the repetition. He points out that for the learners who have less time and need to read unsupported texts shortly after they begin learning, it is a way to speed up the learning process. Clipperton (1994) states that it would appear that when new words are first presented, it may be best to do so out of context. Hunt and Belgar (2005) conclude in their study that both explicit and implicit activities should be developed for second language learners of all levels. All the linguists mentioned go on to explain that while using decontextualized lexis the teacher's initial challenge is to create an environment in which the learners can rapidly acquire vocabulary for high frequency or general academic words.

The Purpose of This Study

In order to find out how effectively my instruction raises students' performance, the following three research questions will be discussed in this paper.

Research Questions

Question 1: Is there a difference in the performance of the students on vocabulary chapter tests between the control group and the experimental group?

Question 2: Is using the original word lists helpful for students studying vocabulary and does it effectively broaden students' vocabulary knowledge?

Question 3: Does this style of instruction successfully motivate students and encourage them to learn vocabulary?

Method

Participants

The Participants are 55 Bunkyo Gakuin University students in grammar-oriented class, all sophomores from 19 to 21 years of age. Their TOEIC scores range from 350 to 500. In this university students are assigned to classes from A (the highest) to L (the lowest) based on their TOEIC reading scores. My students belonged to level G and H, which is the low-intermediate level. This class meets once a week, and in order to make this study longitudinal and objective, all four groups were observed over a one year period. Two groups (28 students in all) were examined in 2009 and the other two groups (27 students in all) in 2010.

In the sophomores' grammar course, Integrated Skills, students are required to study English vocabulary with JACET 8000. JACET 8000 is the word frequency lists for Japanese learners of English. Its 8000 words are presented in eight levels (from 1 to 8) in accordance with frequency and educational significance. Students study Level 4 (3001-4000words) in the spring semester and Level 5 (4001-5000words) in the fall semester. They are expected to study outside the classroom and prepare for the tests weekly and at the end of each semester. The weekly test is called a mini-test (20 matching questions are culled from 100 words) and the test they take at the end of the semester is a chapter test (40 matching questions are culled 1000 words.) This is my third year teaching at the Foreign Language Department of Bunkyo Gakuin University. Students are serious about studying English and have a good attitude about learning new words.

In Japan, the course of study (2001 version) created by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology set a target of 900 words to be taught in junior high school, and 1300 words to be added in high school. This means high school graduates learned 2200 words in the six years from G7 to G12. In the new 2011 Course of study, the number of target words was increased from 2200 to 3000. According to Groot (2000), although in the early stages of instructed foreign language acquisition students learn a few thousand high frequency words, a vocabulary of 2,000 words is not sufficient for functional language proficiency. Hirsh & Nation (1992) say a

target vocabulary of 5,000 is the minimum lexical requirement for understanding general, non-specialized texts. Groot also suggests that a large number of words should be learned in a short period of time at the intermediate and advanced stages of language acquisition. Studying up to 5000 words at university level is quite meaningful for Japanese students especially those who major in English. Learning an additional 2000 words after they learned 3000 is a daunting task for many and my students are no exception.

Materials

Materials used in this classroom instruction are: originally made word lists derived from the JACET 8000 and 5-minute feedback tests (see Appendix1). The original word lists consist of 250 words × 4 sheets.

The Textbook which students use to learn vocabulary and from which I made my original word list is predicated on the JACET 8000. Figure 1 (Aizawa, 2007) shows the coverage rate of JACET 8000 in the English Center test, which is the Japanese nationwide examination, and in the three English proficiency tests (IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC). JACET 8000 establishes Level 4 as the equivalent level necessary for primary liberal arts courses at college, and Level 5 for academic liberal arts courses. It also says Level 5 is necessary to pass Eiken pre-1st or TOEIC 500. Aizawa (2007) also measured the vocabulary knowledge of Japanese university students and computed the means for each level for JACET 8000 (Figure 2). The means gradually decrease from Level 1 to 4, but there is no significant difference between level 4 and 5. With this consideration, I believe it is fair to compare the results of Level 4 and 5 to see how much students improve.

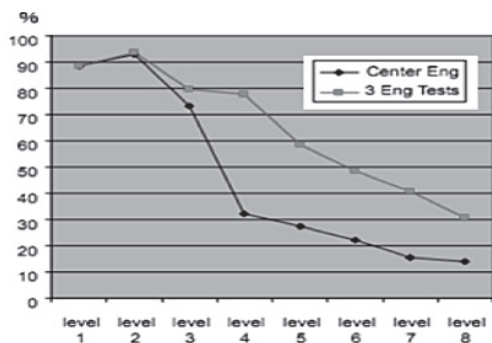


Figure1 *The coverage rate of JACET 8000 in Center Test and Three English Tests*

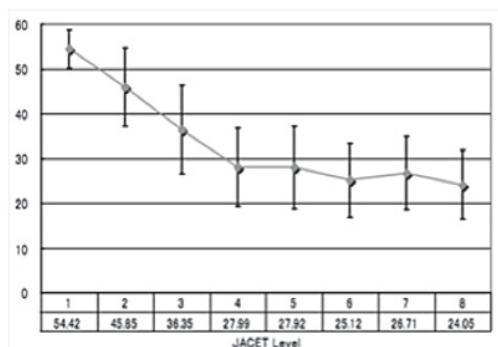


Figure2 *Each Level of JACET 8000 and Means of TDU VLT*

Procedure

As a classroom activity in both spring and fall semesters, I incorporate pronunciation practice for the vocabulary students are expected to learn. This activity involves choral reading and individual oral reading. Aizawa & Mochizuki (2010) suggest the way of introducing new words is very important for teachers since the meaning and pronunciation students first learn often stays with them. Most students can't read phonetic symbols and they tend to read new words with the often misleading Roman letters unless they are taught the correct pronunciation. Nation (2001) says rich instruction would involve giving attention to several aspects for the same word and suggests that from the aspect of spoken form, pronouncing words, reading them aloud is an important activity. Students tend to learn only with their eyes and don't learn the correct pronunciation, so I always try to read new words aloud with them.

Control group (Spring semester). During spring semester, no special instruction was given to the control group except the pronunciation practice. No word lists were provided to these students. They were required to learn voluntarily and prepare for the vocabulary chapter test on their own.

Experimental group (Fall semester). During fall semester, experimental group students were given 10 minutes to work on vocabulary in each class period, followed by a feedback test. The primary objective of this instruction was to establish students' study habits and help them get higher scores on the chapter tests. The instruction involved the following four procedures: (1) 10-minute classroom learning using original word lists, (2) 5-minute Feedback testing followed by 10-minutes of study, (3) Clarifying objectives, (4) Emphasizing the importance of repeated study the outside classroom.

(1) 10-minute classroom learning using original word lists.

The word lists consist of 4 sheets which, combined, cover all Level 5 vocabulary. Since the class time is limited and students were asked to have studied these words for the mini tests before class, I used one sheet (250 words) each time. Students were given just 10 minutes and instructed to review quickly as many words as possible. More than 10 minutes would be too long for the students to concentrate. The main point of my teaching is not to remember all the words in class, but to teach the effectiveness of short-time learning and the importance of repeated study outside the classroom.

Each sheet of word lists has three vertical rows. Students are instructed to review one row in three minutes and time it exactly with a timer. They are supposed to finish reviewing three rows in 3-min X 3 + 1 minute, 10 minutes in all. They can spend the last 1 minute on whatever they like. They should be told in advance that a feedback test will follow right after the 10 minute of study.

Benefits of the original word list are: (1) Word lists are written in a very simple form, one word – with the single, most frequent meaning. (2) Words are divided into very small boxes in alphabetical order. This helps students to easily find their place on the list the next time they use it. (3) Word lists are portable so students can look at them anytime and anywhere they want. (4) Word lists reduce students' stress from learning pages of words from the textbook.

(2) 5-minute Feedback test followed by 10-minutes of study. Learners should be aware of, and excited by, their progress in vocabulary learning (Nation, 2001). There are two purposes for conducting a feedback test: (1) to enhance students' motivation toward the 10-minute study technique, and (2) to make students see their progress after each 10-minute learning segments. Each feedback test has 40 matching questions. They are arranged in alphabetical order so that students can easily recall what they had just learned.

(3) Clarifying objectives. Setting modest, realistic objectives can sustain students' motivation and interest. Students differ in vocabulary memorizing ability, so it is important not to have them set their goal for 100% on the chapter test, but rather to set a clear and realistic goal based on their ability. Some students may set their goal at 90%, and some 60%. Most students said their target score was 70-80%. Rubin & Thompson (1994) advise learners that their chances for success in language learning are vastly improved if they set realistic goals that can be attained over time.

(4) Emphasizing the importance of repeated study outside the classroom. It is natural that even if students can recall 100% immediately during a class period, their recall may drop to 50% next day, and be much lower a week later. One purpose of this instruction is to establish students' repeated practice of vocabulary learning outside school. Schmitt (2008) says vocabulary acquisition is not a tidy linear affair, but rather incremental with backsliding. This attrition is natural for learning. Kersten (2010) mentions emphatically in various sources on vocabulary learning and teaching (e.g. Schmitt 2000, Nation 2001, Thornbury 2002, Folse 2004) that learners need to be exposed to a word numerous times before it can be regarded as fully acquired. Nation (2001) states that spaced repetition results in more secure learning. He advises teachers to give repeated attention to words because knowledge of a word can only accumulate if learners meet the word many times. Hunt & Belgar say 5-10 minutes can be devoted to reviewing vocabulary in most courses, and those that only meet once or twice per week will have a long delay between the introduction and the initial review of new vocabulary. Consequently, a greater emphasis will need to be placed on training and requiring learners to review regularly outside the classroom.

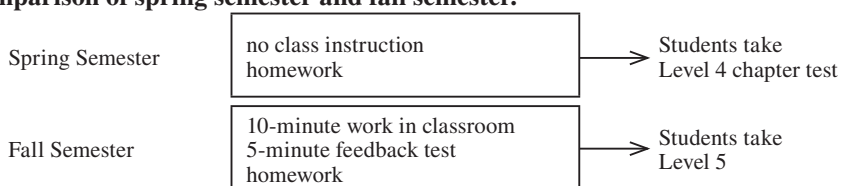
One of the most important aspects of this instruction is to introduce students how the material

should be repeated and retain newly learned vocabulary over long period. In my class students were told to review each word list 10 times before the test. I made a check box on the top right corner of each word list and had them to mark every time they finished 10-minute vocabulary learning.

Data Analysis

All students were given the same tests. Comparisons were observations of the performance difference between spring semester (Level 4) and fall semester (level 5). Level 4 and 5 are assumed comparable as explained in the material section.

Comparison of spring semester and fall semester.



Questionnaire responses. Students self-report at the end of the semester. Questions about the effectiveness of the 10-minute classroom vocabulary instruction were included, along with questions about their thoughts on why it was, or was not, effective.

Results

Mean scores of the mini tests and the chapter tests

In the spring semester, the mean for the mini-tests was 79/100 and in the fall semester it was 85/100. The Mean score of the chapter test was 16/40 in spring and 20/40 in the fall. Not only the chapter test but also the mini-tests showed improvement in the fall semester.

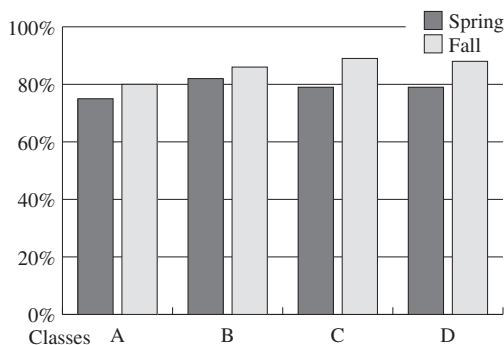


Figure3 Mean of Vocabulary Mini Test

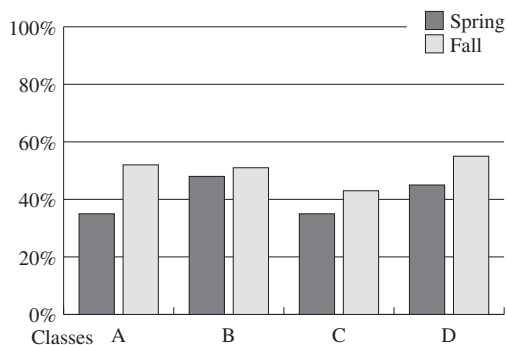


Figure4 Mean of Vocabulary Chapter Test

Comparison of individual differences in the chapter test scores between spring and fall semester

Thirty-seven of the 55 students showed improvement on their chapter tests. Table 1 shows their progress. Figure 5 to 8 shows the differences for each student.

Table 1 Individual Improvement on Chapter Test (raw score)

Difference of two tests (full score=40)	number of students				Total N=55
	Class A n=15	Class B n=12	Class C n=17	Class D n=11	
1~5 points more	3	3	3	6	15
6~10 points more	4	2	4	1	11
11~15 points more	4	0	4	1	9
more than 16 points	1	1	0	0	2
Total	12	6	11	8	37

Note: n=number of students in each class N= total students number

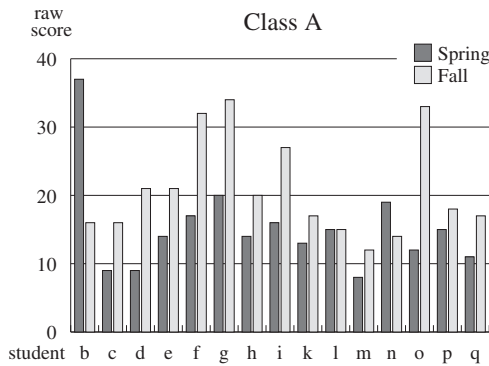


Figure5 Individual Difference in Class A

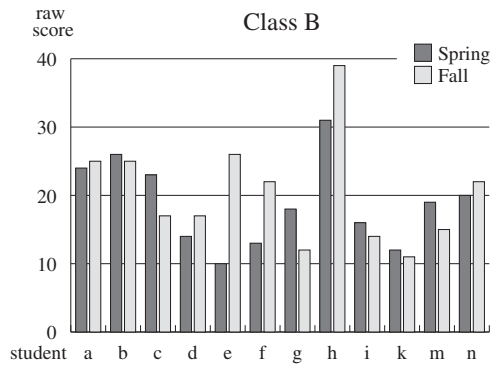


Figure6 Individual Difference in Class B

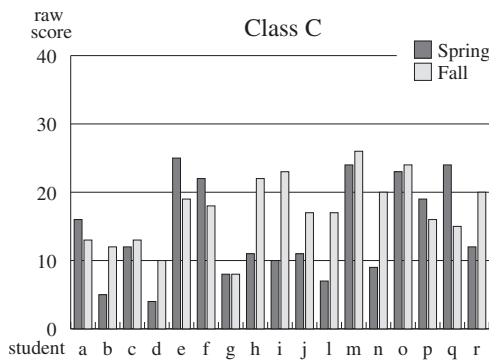


Figure7 Individual Difference in Class C

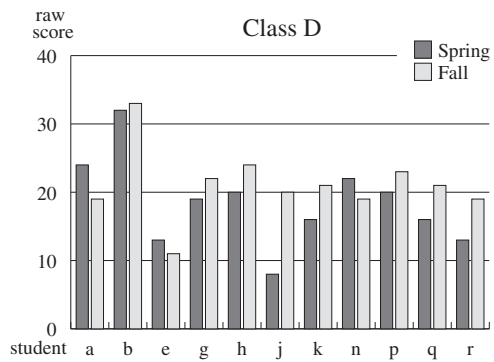


Figure8 Individual Difference in Class D

Student Questionnaires (28 responded)

(1) How long did you spend to prepare for the vocabulary chapter test?

Table 2 *Comparison of How Long Students studied for the Test*

Length of Study	number of students	
	Spring Semester	Fall Semester
0 Hours	7	2
2-3 Days	11	8
Once a Week	7	8
Twice a Week	2	5
Once a Month	0	4
Regularly	1	1

(2) Was the 10-minute classroom vocabulary instruction effective for you?

18 students out of 28 students answered that the 10-minute classroom instruction was effective for them, whereas 8 students said they were not sure. No student said that it wasn't of any help.

(3) If you answer yes, why did you think so?

Students' answers were as follows;

- (A) I got better scores in fall semester than in spring semester..... 8
- (B) The word lists were easy to use 2
- (C) I learned 10-minute concentration worked well to memorize words. ... 5
- (D) Spaced repetition was helpful. 6
- (E) It made it easier for me to read other materials. 5

Discussion

Question 1: Is there difference in the performance of the students on the vocabulary chapter tests between the control group and experimental group?

The students' average scores went up 10% (from 16 to 20 out of 40), after they were given classroom instruction. The degree of improvement differed from class to class (Figure 4). While Class B showed only 3% progress, other classes showed significant progress; 17% in class A, 10% in class D and 8% in class C. Regarding individual improvement, about 70% of the students achieved higher scores in the fall semester (see Table 1 and Figure5-8). Half of the students improved their scores more than 1.5 times compared with those of spring semester. Another advantage of this instruction was that it also affected students' mini test scores every week even though I didn't

intend or expect it (see Figure 3).

Question 2: Was using the original word list helpful for the students when studying vocabulary and did it effectively broaden students' vocabulary knowledge?

Folse (2004) advocates using word lists to learn L2 vocabulary. He states that learning a word involves knowing many different kinds of things about that word, thus learning lists of words with a translation is a solid first step. Nation (2001) strongly recommends using word cards, but he isn't supportive of word lists. He says learning from word cards is a way to quickly increase vocabulary size through focused intentional learning. Whereas for word lists, he says: (1) word cards are a better way to retrieve the meaning of the word from memory because the form and meaning aren't written on the same side, (2) fixed order word lists cannot vary, so difficult words or words in the middle might be slighted, and (3) word lists cannot avoid serial learning.

However, I maintain that my instruction, using word lists, was the best way in my circumstances and could be as effective as card learning. Firstly, when the amount of vocabulary is very large, making word cards is time-consuming and frustrating. Secondly, word lists can also retrieve the meaning of words from the memory by covering up the meaning, as Nation (2001) advises with the flashcards. It is certainly true that word list cannot change order, but more difficult words can also be repeated if students mark them in the list. In addition, mnemonic techniques sometimes work better to recall the meaning when the order is not changed. Thirdly, it has many common features with card learning; it can be carried, provides simple explanations and increases students' opportunities to repeatedly pay attention to the words. Lastly, word lists give learners a sense how much word study they will need to do during the course so they can set their goals and plan their time.

The effectiveness of the word lists can't be numerically measured in its entirety. However, when I consider that classroom instruction was done with the original word lists and most individual students improved their test scores as discussed in Question 1, I assume that word lists worked well for the students.

Question 3: Was the classroom instruction successful enough to motivate students and encourage them to learn vocabulary?

When analyzing students' study habits, I found many students spent more hours learning vocabulary in the fall semester than in the spring semester (see Table 2). So my classroom teaching evidently worked effectively to motivate the students. Many students replied that they were very

happy because they got higher scores on the chapter test, some much higher. I believe they felt more confidence, which will encourage further vocabulary study.

The problem is that not many students repeated studying the word lists ten times as I requested. When I saw their check lists which showed how many times they had studied each word list, I found only five or six checks on the average. Further steps are necessary to ensure students' continuous study outside classroom.

Conclusion

Vocabulary size is directly linked to communication ability and reading comprehension, but as Kersten (2010) says learners do not usually commit a new item to memory after the first encounter. It requires a process that takes place over time. Schmitt (2008) suggests anything that leads to more and better engagement should improve vocabulary learning, and thus, promoting engagement is the most fundamental task for teachers and learners. Even though only a short time is spent on vocabulary teaching in EFL classes, the vocabulary teaching technique is very important and greatly affects students' achievement level as my study shows. Giving the students only 10 minutes of vocabulary instruction enhanced students' motivation to study and led them to spend more time on vocabulary, and, as a result, 70% of the students increased their vocabulary test scores. Therefore, it warrants attention and should be carefully considered in every EFL classroom. I am convinced that students' concentration on learning improved with just an additional 10 minutes of instruction, and their vocabulary knowledge was expanded by repeated contact with the words.

On the other hand, learning vocabulary only on the basis of form-meaning correspondence isn't enough for productive use of new words. Schmitt (2010) mentions the quality or 'depth' of vocabulary knowledge is as important as vocabulary size. Coady (1997) states three principles that underlie any effective vocabulary teaching:

- (1) Providing learners with both definitional and contextual information about words;
- (2) Encouraging learners to process information about words at a deeper level;
- (3) Providing learners with multiple exposures to a word. Many of my students commented that the vocabulary they learned in my class helped them read materials in other classes. When it is integrated with other English classes, such as reading, writing and speaking, optimally effective teaching is realized. I will continue seeking better ways to teaching vocabulary so I can be the greatest possible help for students eager to study but occasionally frustrated by the demands of learning a huge amount of vocabulary.

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Appendix 1

10分見たら一コマチェック

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JACET8000

Level 5 ③～⑤

ace
ache
activate
albeit
amend
arch
arouse
array
aspiration

エース
痛み
作動、活性化させる
～とはいえ
修正する
アーチ
呼び起こす
配列
熱望

fare
fatal
feedback
firstly
fiscal
flank
forbid
furious

料金
致命的な
フィードバック 反応
まずは
財政上の
側面(に置く)
禁止する
立腹した

quid
realm
restraint
revision
revive
rip
rod
rug

1ポンド
領域
抑制、自制
修正
生き返る
引き裂く
棒
敷物

bacteria
basin
betray
bolt
bowel
bronze

細菌
くぼ地
裏切る
ボルト ねじ釘
腸
ブロンズ、青銅

garment
grid
grind
guerrilla
gut

衣服
格子 碁盤目
ひく
ゲリラ兵
根性 内臓

scrutiny
serial
shaft
skull
slim
solicitor
span
spine
stag

綿密な検査
連続的な
シャフト、柄 軸
頭蓋骨
ほっそりした
勧誘員、法務官
期間
背骨
男だけの

calcium
caravan
caution
clarify
clergy
click
clutch
collaboration

カルシウム
隊商
注意 注意する
明らかにする
聖職者
カチッと音
ぐいと握る
強調 協力

heir
hollow
injection
intact
intake
intermediate

相続人
うつろな
注射
無傷な 完全な
摂取 取り入れ口
中級の

stall
sterling
steward
stiff
suppress
surge
swiftly

露店、仕切り、止まる
イギリス貨幣
乗客係
硬い
抑える
急上昇する
すばやく

compel
compile
configuration
congregation
crush
curse

無理にさせる
収集する
外形
集合 集まり
押しつぶす
呪う

jeans
jewelry
knight
knot
legacy
lemon
levy
librarian
lifestyle
lounge

ジーンズ
宝石類
騎士
結び目
遺産
レモン 不快な人
徴収する
司書
ライフスタイル
ラウンジ

telecommunication | 電気通信
temper
tender
textile
throne
torture
toss
trim
trophy

気性
やわらかい
織物
王座
拷問
投げる
刈り込む
トロフィー

deed
deem
diesel
dilemma
distress
divine
donation

行為
考える 思う
ディーゼル
ジレンマ
悩み 苦痛
神の
寄付

manipulate
manuscript
matrix
membrane
minus

巧みに扱う、操る
原稿
行列
薄膜
～をひいた

upright
utterly
villa

まっすぐな
完全に
別荘

elaborate
eligible
embark
embassy
endeavor
exemption

精密な 手の込んだ
適切な
授業に乗り出す
大使館
努力
免除

omit
optimistic
overnight
pence
penetrate
polytechnic
predator
pulse

除外する
楽天主義の
一晚
ペンス
浸透する
工芸学校
略奪者
脈 脈打つ

warehouse
weep
wicked
wicket
wit
witch
workstation

倉庫
涙を流す
くぐり戸 改札
ひどい
機知
魔女
パソコンのあるデスク

Check TEST ③～⑤ p287～296

Name _____

- | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|----------------|----------|
| 1. activate | ア. くぼ地 | 21. injection | ア. 楽天主義の |
| 2. amend | イ. 作動させる | 22. intact | イ. 領域 |
| 3. aspiration | ウ. 無理にさせる | 23. legacy | ウ. 扱う、操る |
| 4. basin | エ. 修正する | 24. levy | エ. 完全な |
| 5. betray | オ. 行為 | 25. manipulate | オ. 抑制 自制 |
| 6. compel | カ. 考える | 26. optimistic | カ. 注射 |
| 7. congregation | キ. 裏切る | 27. predator | キ. 遺産 |
| 8. curse | ク. 熱望 | 28. pulse | ク. 徴収する |
| 9. deed | ケ. 集まり | 29. ealm | ケ. 略奪者 |
| 10. deem | コ. 呪う | 30. restraint | コ. 脈 |
| | | | |
| 11. elaborate | ア. 立腹した | 31. revision | ア. 精密な検査 |
| 12. eligible | イ. 衣服 | 32. scrutiny | イ. 背骨 |
| 13. endeavor | ウ. 精密な | 33. serial | ウ. 完全に |
| 14. exemption | エ. 財政上の | 34. spine | エ. 修正 |
| 15. fare | オ. 免除 | 35. suppress | オ. 倉庫 |
| 16. fiscal | カ. ひく | 36. surge | カ. 王座 |
| 17. furious | キ. 相続人 | 37. throne | キ. 抑える |
| 18. garment | ク. 適切な | 38. torture | ク. 連続的な |
| 19. grind | ケ. 努力 | 39. utterly | ケ. 拷問 |
| 20. heir | コ. 料金 | 40. warehouse | コ. 急上昇 |