

think I minded this because I could do it and do it quite well, and I was good at learning a language in this way.

The big change for me was going to Germany as a student and becoming fluent over a period of several months. This involved:

- a lot of talking and interaction
- a lot of reading
- using everyday German every day, and also having long serious discussions over a game of chess or a pint, or both, on whatever the issue was that came up.

As for specific vocabulary strategies, it's very difficult to say if I had any. Because I knew Latin, and because learning and using (German) vocabulary invite a certain creativity (you can literally join words together to try and express that particular meaning or idea that you are after), I was good at decoding and guessing German word formation from different prefixes and suffixes (and using my knowledge of Latin to help me, too). Most important of all, I feel now, is that I always enjoyed learning and later using German. Overall, I would characterize my lexical history in German as input- and translation-based, expanded by exposure, interaction, and meaningful use, as well as inspired by an exceptional teacher, Paul Dicker, and enriched by an ever-growing sense of confidence and purpose in using German.

### Note

1. These extracts come from Paul Dicker's obituary, which is included in *EFA Tributes to Former Players and Officials. (A-E)*. Retrieved from <http://www.fivesonline.net/oldefasite/information/obituaries.a-e.html>

### Keeping Vocabulary Notebooks

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Although I am a native English speaker, the first time I tried intentional learning of vocabulary was in high school. We would have weekly vocabulary quizzes in English class, and to prepare I would happily drill the list outside of class, usually resulting in a perfect score. Years later, my friend and classmate would prompt me with a word from a list for fun, and I would run off at least several from the list: *ecclesiastic* (of the church), *predatory* (preying), etc. In a college English course the memorization paid dividends as I defined a word exactly as I recalled it from the high school list, and the teacher marked it wrong on the midterm exam. Confident that she had mismarked it, I visited her office showing her the entry in a dictionary, and she reluctantly reversed it, which pushed my score up to 90. In the end I got an "A" for the course by the narrowest of margins.

Even though my efforts were grossly rote, I feel that it was a positive learning experience, and I did learn many new words. Similarly, during my "I want to be a writer" phase during my early 20s, I made a push to learn vocabulary on my own, keeping a notebook of words I gleaned from books I was reading. That too, I enjoyed.

Unfortunately, I had no interest in the Spanish class I took in high school, and can recall no effort to learn a single word. When I finally did feel desire to learn a foreign language, after earning my bachelor's degree, I tried to learn French on my own, but failed miserably using a

cassette tape course I found ridiculously difficult due to the natural speed of the dialogs. So I made no progress, with no intentional learning of vocabulary. I did a little better with Mandarin Chinese during my year in Taiwan (1989-1990), eventually becoming capable of having basic conversations, but again, I cannot recall any special focus on vocabulary. That changed when I began studying Japanese in 1995.

One of the key aspects of my self-study (which is about all I've ever done) was utilizing a vocabulary notebook. Over the 15 or so years since I started I have kept a dozen or more vocabulary notebooks. While they have evolved to a degree, all contain a basic translation definition.

One reason I have been relying on a vocabulary notebook is my infamously bad memory. It is very difficult for me to remember a word that I haven't written down. It's almost as if I never really hear it completely, never get a firm hold on the pronunciation, until the word is written on paper. Indeed, I have over the years learned very few new words without writing them down at one time or another.

Since starting to self-study Japanese around 1997 I have been carefully recording words, and taking time to review them. Admittedly, I never really review them as thoroughly as I have always intended, but all pages get looked over at least a couple times, some pages and notebooks more than that. For another admission, I go through periods when I don't review or study Japanese at all, then other periods when I study more intensively. To review, when I recall either the English or Japanese (depending on whichever I chose to cover to quiz myself), I highlight the word. As I tell my students to this day, keeping a pocket sized vocabulary is very advantageous because then it is easy to carry it onto a train or plane, and do some reviewing during otherwise boring times.

One method that I wanted to try was to have a recording made of my words so I could listen to pronunciation while drilling. I paid a student at a previous university to do the recording, and by the time the MD was made, I got busy with other things, or lost interest. Sadly, I never used it to study at all. One of the false starts of my life that fall under the heading of "the best laid plans...."

At one point, frustrated at the number of new words that was flooding me, I wrote down every new word I encountered. Of course, I have always been aware of the importance of choosing words carefully, and focusing on useful (higher frequency word), but my effort was an act of defiance, as if shaking my fist at a language which would find so many varied ways to express things. So I opened my mind wide and grasped for every new word that crossed my path. I don't think I really learned too many of them, but for a while at least enjoyed the all-out effort.

My vocabulary notebook has been tweaked in various ways over the years. Some I have crammed with words on every available line. Those literally hold hundreds of new words. More recently I have begun skipping spaces, and putting the definition on the opposite page rather than squeezing it on the same page. In addition, I have written sample sentences from my electronic dictionary. Another technique, that I've grown to dislike, is rearranging the definitions and sample sentences so they are not directly across from the targeted word. The idea is to then, while reviewing, find the right definition and sample sentence.

Over the years I've become more forgiving and less ambitious perhaps. I feel it's fair enough to only feel like I'm learning 50% of the targeted words, and do not put pressure on myself to scramble to rewrite, and focus more on, words that just don't stick. And some clearly don't want to stick, for whatever reason.

I still do enjoy writing the words down and defining them. One of the keys is writing the words neatly. In the few cases where I have written the words and/or definitions sloppily, I can't bear to go back and review them. I've tried various colors (having read about how it stimulates the brain or some such research), but prefer just using my favorite pen at the time, usually black or blue.

Having considered the advantage of word cards, which gives the learner the chance to shuffle the deck, I have tried them, but don't like them. I think the reason is I enjoy flipping through the notebook's pages, almost admiring this record of my learning. The word cards, on a ring, are clumsy.

Since I have made many Hot Potatoes vocabulary quizzes for my students, I have wanted to try that, and would if someone else would create the quizzes! I can't bring myself to take the time to create quizzes just for myself.

This essay has almost exclusively focused on vocabulary notebooks for one main reason: it's about the only method I've really tried. It is certainly one I've enjoyed and found helpful.

### **Grammar Translation and the Audio-Lingual Method in French and Japanese**

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As a native English speaker and graduate of a late, half-and-half, French Immersion program in Canada, I brought to the table a few strategies for learning Japanese vocabulary. Most of my Japanese study has been self-directed using the internet and free Japanese learning sites with some of my exposure coming listening to recordings of Japanese while riding the train. I did take one very low-level beginner class for a few months in my second year as a resident of Japan, and I believe that it was effective for my getting a better understanding of Japanese grammar as well as learning Japanese vocabulary and some of the rules associated with the lexical differences to my L1 and my L2. My Japanese vocabulary acquisition is the result of both grammar translation through self-study and audio-lingual using language tapes and, of course, listening to the language being spoken all around me in Japan.

I have used the approaches that my French teachers employed—Grammar Translation and Audio-Lingual—and will explain why these were useful and necessary for my learning French and how they gave me focus in my Japanese language learning. It might be important to mention that after 11 years in Japan, I periodically search for vocabulary that was once very automatic or habitual when engaged in a French conversation. I believe that my L2 (French) is located in the same part of my brain as my L3 (Japanese) and evidence of this is found in my regular code-switching between French and Japanese vocabulary words when struggling to use a specific word in either language. English doesn't seem to be a part of this phenomenon.