

IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Most students in Japan spend many years studying English grammar, but they still cannot speak fluent, natural English. Grammar is only part of a language. No doubt, knowing the grammar can help us speak and write correctly. However, more importantly, you need to have a good vocabulary size to speak and write naturally and effectively.

English has thousands of words. To have a “good vocabulary size”, however, does not mean that you have to learn thousands and thousands of single words. In fact, most native speakers know only a small number of all the English words. However, they can almost always get their points across effectively. At this point, you may wonder why. There are several main reasons:

Firstly, native speakers always combine words together to form “*collocations*”. For example, *make* + *mistake* = *make* (a big/serious) *mistake*; *get* + *upset* = *get* (very/extremely) *upset*; *take* + *break* = *take* (a 10-minute) *break*; etc.

Secondly, native speakers use a lot of *fixed expressions*. For example, *as a matter of fact*; *by the way*; *on the other hand*; etc.

Thirdly, native speakers use a lot of *idiomatic expressions*. For example, “He’s just *pulling your leg*.” (Meaning: “He’s just joking.”).

In addition, native speakers use a large number of *phrasal verbs*, such as, *put off*; *take over*; *bring up*; etc.

As you can see, native speakers don’t always use “big” and difficult words. Instead, they use a lot of word combinations. In fact, words almost never occur alone. Many words have no specific meaning if they are singled out. (For example, can you tell me exactly what it means by “of”, “as”, or “point”?)

To speak good English, therefore, you need to learn word combinations (*collocations*), idioms, commonly-used expressions, and phrasal verbs.

Remember, if you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much. However, you will see most improvement if you learn more words and expressions.

I will give you some tips on learning and memorizing new words and expressions in my next article. Stay tuned!