

About the Author

The author...Keith S. Folse

I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, and grew up on the Mississippi Gulf Coast where the Louisiana influence was strong. This meant that language and dialect were very apparent to me very early on in life, so it's no wonder that I became interested in foreign languages when I was in high school. I took both French and Spanish. When I won some awards in state and national French contests in high school, I was hooked.

Like most ESL teachers, I entered the ESL field through the backdoor. I started college as a French major. At some point, someone told me about the possibility of majoring in English with emphasis in TESOL, so I switched over. I knew about ESL only because my first college roommate, a friend from high school, moved out of the dorm after the first semester to experience apartment life. I thought I was going to have the room to myself, but after the Christmas break, the suitcase of one Rafael Ferreti from Ecuador appeared in my room.

Rafael was in the upper-intermediate level at the English Language Institute at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM). His English was good, but his friends from all over Latin America frequently stopped by the room. Their English was not so good, so I had to use my one year of high school Spanish to talk to them. I helped some of them open bank accounts and get settled into life in the U.S., and this forced me to understand a lot of Spanish.

When I graduated, I could not get a teaching job. I discovered I was going to need at least two years of experience or a Master's in TESOL. So, I entered grad school at USM. In my first graduate course, we had an assignment for a final project. Mine was a paper explaining the limitations of audio-lingualism that included a manuscript for a workbook for the classic Michigan publication *English Sentence Structure*. I called my book that accompanied this title *English Structure Practices*. In 1983, it became my first ESL textbook. I've now written more than 30 ESL books!

I taught at USM for a year and then at an intensive program at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, for four years. In 1984, I accepted my first EFL position, which was in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. After that, I taught in Malaysia for three years and then in Japan for six years. In 1994, after 10 years abroad, I decided it was time to come home. I needed to get to know my own culture again. I secretly longed to be around native speakers who could understand my language—including idioms and phrasal verbs!

In late 1994, I started work on a PhD in Second Language Acquisition and Instructional Technology at the University of South Florida in Tampa. I learned how to decipher all those research articles in the *TESOL Quarterly*. Suddenly, a whole new world had opened up to me. I jumped right into my real area of passion—vocabulary acquisition—and have not looked back. In 2004, 10 years later, this passion culminated

in the publication of *Vocabulary Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching*.

Currently, I teach and coordinate the MATESOL program at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, where I have been since 2000. I write books and frequently present papers, workshops, or teacher-training courses all over the world. I recently did workshops for the U.S. State Department in Mexico, Argentina, Guatemala, Saudi Arabia, and Uzbekistan, as well as teacher-training graduate coursework in Arkansas and Vermont.

I have tried very hard to write a book that presents useful information on the topic of second language vocabulary learning and teaching. I have gone out of my way to write in a style that is accessible. I know that one of my biggest turn-offs is a book that comes across as being too theoretical or too pedantic. I hope that you find *Vocabulary Myths* to be practical and accessible.

I welcome feedback on this book at kfolse@mail.ucf.edu

Reader's Guide

Before you read the book, answer these questions. It is important to have a record of your thoughts before you read the book and then after reading the book.

If you have already read the book, use these questions to interview an ESL teacher.

1. What do you see as the role of vocabulary in learning a second language?
2. Rank these in importance in learning a language: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling.
3. Have you ever used word lists in teaching or learning a second language? What were the results?
4. How are words usually presented in books? Are the vocabulary words ever pulled out and presented?
5. How did the author organize the words within units? Are the words in semantic sets? (color words, body parts, etc.)
6. What is your experience with translations of words? Did any of your language teachers ever tell you anything about translations (i.e., to translate or not to translate)?
7. What is the value of context clues?

8. How effective is relying on context clues for the learning/acquisition of vocabulary? How does this compare with rote learning?
9. What is the best learner strategy for learning a lot of vocabulary? What are the strategies that the “good learners” use?
10. Which is better for ESL vocabulary growth: a monolingual dictionary (English—English) or a bilingual dictionary (native language—English)?

Activities and questions have been presented once you have read each of the parts of the book.

An Introduction to Second Language Vocabulary, pp. 2-18:

1. Make a list of compound nouns that are single words (e.g., *tablecloth*) and then those that are multiple words (e.g., *table legs*).
2. Make a list of set phrases.
3. Make a list of phrasal verbs.
4. Find a website that has phrasal verbs on it; which website offers the most exercises for ESL students to practice this?
5. Make a list idioms with these themes: animals (e.g., *let the cat out of the bag, a snake in the grass*, etc.), colors, body parts, numbers, time words (e.g., *thank God it's Friday, if I had a dollar for every time ..., not a minute too soon*), plants, clothing.
6. Find 10 examples of polysemous words in English.
7. Find words that have interesting denotations and connotations.
8. Prepare an exercise where students would have to fill in the missing part of speech forms for a word: noun/verb/adjective/adverb: *intelligence*, ---, *intelligent, intelligently*
9. Identify pairs of words that are synonyms or near synonyms but have different frequencies (e.g., *purple/violet*; why is purple much more common?)

10. The best example in the book for a collocation is the word *squander*. Can you find other collocation combinations for advanced vocabulary like *squander*?
11. Find a concordancer software program and run a concordance on any "advanced level" word (e.g., *exempt*, *satisfy*, *arduous*, etc.)

Myth 1 (pp. 19-34)

1. Can you think of a time when not knowing one word (in your native language) caused a problem for you?
2. Ask an ESL student to name the five most important qualities of an ESL teacher.
3. "Clear English," meaning good pronunciation and comprehensible input, frequently comes up. Now ask the student about the vocabulary an ESL teacher uses in class. Is vocabulary one of the important qualities?

Myth 2 (pp. 35-45)

1. Discuss any experiences that you have had with vocabulary lists.
2. Discuss what you have been taught about rote learning techniques?
3. Explain how Krashen's model of ESL teaching would be against using lists.

Myth 3 (pp. 46-58)

1. What is a semantic set?
2. If semantic sets are not so good, why are they so common in textbooks?

Myth 4 (pp. 59-70)

1. When you studied another foreign language, how often did you translate? Which types of words did you find yourself translating? What is the conventional wisdom on having teachers learn a foreign language?

Myth 5 (pp. 71-84)

1. Guessing words from context is a good reading strategy but not a good vocabulary acquiring strategy. Explain.
2. What are some of the problems using context clues?
3. Find a word in a real piece of English that you don't know. It can be from the newspaper or from the Internet. Take a pen and blacken out the word and the words just before it and after it. Now pass this on to another speaker to see if can fill in the missing word well.
4. Read and summarize the Schatz and Baldwin (1986) article on native speakers'
5. ability to guess from context. It was a very reliable study with three smaller studies within the study.

Myth 6 (pp. 85-106)

1. What are some vocabulary learning strategies? Can you make a list of 5? 15? How about 50?
2. Take a look at the list of strategies in Schmitt and Schmitt 1997. Or review other lists you might find on the Internet. Will you incorporate any into your teaching? Which ones? Why?

Myth 7 (pp. 107-126)

1. How many foreign languages have you studied? Did you use/have dictionaries for all of them? If no, why not?
2. What kinds of dictionaries did you use? Were they monolingual? Bilingual? Why do you favor one of these types over the other?

Myth 8 (pp. 127-159)

1. Do you have any ideas for increasing the amount of vocabulary instruction in an ESL program (or in any class with any teacher)?

After reading the book

1. What surprised you the most about the material presented in this book?
2. Will you change your teaching as a result of what you've read in this book? Why or why not?
3. What pieces of advice would you give a new ESL teacher about teaching vocabulary.