Japanese English Learners' Receptive and Productive Vocabulary Knowledge in Their CEFR B1 Speaking Test

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**日本人英語学習者の CEFR B1レベルスピーキングテストにおける
語彙の受容能力と産出能力の研究**

宇佐美 裕子

これまで語彙能力は，受容能力と産出能力を含め様々な観点から論じられてきた。
Capel（2015）は英語学習者の語彙の受容能力と産出能力には大きな差はないと論じて
いる。しかし，Usami（2018）では，日本人英語学習者のライティングにおける語彙の
受容能力と産出能力に差があったことが論じられており，日本人英語学習者の語彙の受
容能力と産出能力を比較することは価値があると考える。従って，本研究では，日本人
英語学習者のスピーキングにおける語彙の受容能力と産出能力を比較，検証する。結
果，日本人英語学習者の語彙の受容能力は比較的高かったが，ペアの会話で日本人英語
学習者が実際に使用している語彙の CEFR レベルはほとんどが A1レベルで，スピーキ
ングにおける語彙の産出能力も低かったことが判明した。

Keywords: CEFR, English Vocabulary Profile, receptive and productive knowledge,
speaking

1. Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge has been widely discussed from different points of view,
including receptive and productive perspectives (e.g. Melka, 1997; Laufer, 1998). Under
the framework of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR;
Council of Europe, 2001), the linguistic features of learners' English are examined in the
English Profile Project (EPP) (Harrison, 2015). In the EPP, the English Vocabulary Profile
(EVP)[1] assigns one of six CEFR levels to the individual meanings of each word and phrase
based on learners' writing contained in the learner corpora. Capel (2015) claims that no
bigger or more significant difference between learners' receptive and productive vocabulary
knowledge should be found; in fact, however, there is a difference in Japanese English

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1) See the EVP wordlist at www.englishprofile.org/wordlists.

learners' writing between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge in the context of CEFR (e.g. Usami, 2018). Therefore, it is worth examining the differences in English learners' speech in order to investigate whether it corresponds to the difference in learners' writing, in an L1-Japanese English learning context.

The aim of this study is thus to compare the receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge of Japanese English learners as represented in their speech in the CEFR context. In order for their receptive CEFR vocabulary knowledge to be examined, the learners took the CEFR Vocabulary Test, whereas in order to examine their productive CEFR vocabulary knowledge, a speaking task from the Cambridge English Qualifications B1 level was assigned, presenting the rate of words of each CEFR vocabulary level used in their conversation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 CEFR Vocabulary Knowledge in Speaking and Writing

Each CEFR level presented on the EVP was previously assigned to individual meanings of words and phrases based on learners' writing contained in learner corpora (Capel, 2015). Since then, some validation studies have been conducted, including Negishi, Tono, and Fujita (2012), where the CEFR level of each phrasal verb was examined and validated using Japanese students, resulting in the finding that the CEFR levels of some phrasal verbs did not match given a Japanese context.

In addition to the validation studies, the CEFR levels of the writing and speech produced by learners of English have been researched from different perspectives (e.g. Seedhouse 2012, assessing learners' interviews on the IELTS in terms of vocabulary in the context of CEFR; Leńko-Szymańska 2015, examining learners' essays in terms of text length and lexical characteristics in the EVP).

Hulstijn, Schoonen, De Jong, Steinel, and Florijn (2011) examined Dutch adult English learners' speech in terms of their productive vocabulary and grammar knowledge, speed, and pronunciation. Their productive vocabulary and grammar on paper-based tests discriminated well between learners at the B1 and B2 levels of speaking proficiency. Barker (2015) investigated different L1 learners' writing on each of six CEFR levels in terms of EVP and the English Grammar Profile (EGP; Hawkins and Filipović, 2012) and functions (Green, 2012), presenting portraits of each CEFR level. According to Barker (2015), A1 and A2 level learners used A1 and A2 level vocabulary in the essays, whereas B1 and B2 level learners used A1 to B2 level vocabulary and C1 and C2 learners could manipulate all CEFR levels of vocabulary in the essays, which implies that the learners' CEFR writing level would match their vocabulary CEFR level. Usami (2016) researched Japanese learners' conversations in pairs across two different topics in terms of CEFR level of vocabulary. The learners' speaking CEFR level was A1+ to A2+, depending on the topic. In addition, almost half and almost 10% respectively of the vocabulary they used was A1 and A2 level, and they also used many fillers and Japanese words. Usami (2018) examined the Japanese learners' CEFR vocabulary level in their essays, comparing receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge.

Almost half and almost 35% of the learners respectively received B1 and A2 scores on their writing. However, all CEFR level learners used more than 70% A1-level vocabulary words.

2.2 Research on Receptive and Productive Vocabulary Knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge has been researched from different points of view, as has the comparison between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge (e.g. Melka, 1997; Laufer, 1998). Capel (2015) claims that bigger or more significant differences between learners' receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge should not be found in the present than in the past. However, this is doubtful considering the difference between receptive and productive knowledge that seems to be characteristic of Japanese learners' speech. Actually, Usami (2018) showed that there was a difference in Japanese English learners' writing between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge: the former was much higher. In addition, there were found some discrepancies between Japanese learners' overall writing CEFR level and their CEFR vocabulary levels they actually used, as discussed in Usami (2018).

Based on the above, the aims of this study are to examine Japanese English learners' vocabulary knowledge in a paired-conversation task in the CEFR context by comparing the Japanese English learners' receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge and to examine the Japanese English learners' speaking proficiency by comparing it to their productive vocabulary and grammar knowledge. The following research questions are examined: 1) Is there any difference between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge in paired conversation for Japanese English learners? and 2) Does their overall CEFR level in paired conversation match CEFR level in their receptive and productive vocabulary, compared to their productive grammar?

3. Data Collection

3.1 Participants

In all, 154 university students participated in this study. The participants were categorised into three English proficiency levels, advanced, intermediate, and basic, based on the placement test they had taken as first-year students. The numbers of participants according to the three proficiency levels are as follows: 135 at advanced level, 17 at intermediate level, none at basic level, and two unknown. Most of the participants, 145, are first-year students, with five, two, and two in second, third, and fourth year, respectively. In addition, for the first-year students, the target CEFR levels they are expected to perform at are B1, A2, and A1–A2, for advanced, intermediate, and basic levels, respectively, and B1+–B2, A2+–B1, and A1+–A2, for advanced, intermediate, and basic levels, respectively, for the second-year students. Therefore, most participants' target CEFR levels would be estimated at A2 to B1, with more participants at B1, because the majority of the participants are advanced-level first-year students. Unfortunately, the target CEFR levels are for both listening and speaking skills, and might be quite different from their actual CEFR speaking levels. Therefore, only their actual CEFR levels for speaking ability are going to be

examined in this study.

3.2 Task for Assessing Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge

To assess the learners' receptive vocabulary knowledge, the CEFR Vocabulary Test was administered. The CEFR Vocabulary Test is composed of 60 multiple choice vocabulary questions (10 from each CEFR level) taken directly from Japanese university entrance exams contained in the Japanese University Entrance Exam Corpus (JUEEC). There are four options per item, and the distractors are also directly taken from the original Japanese university entrance exams. Most of the questions in the CEFR Vocabulary Test are gap-filling questions, and some of them are synonyms questions (see below for the examples).

(Gap-filling question)
　　I'm planning to (　) you to Disneyland this summer.
　　A) go B) take C) make D) have
(Synonyms question)
　　What's the fastest way to <u>get to</u> the subway station?
　　A) reach B) leave C) catch D) return

Participants took the test within 25 minutes in exam conditions. Those who could not complete all the questions were excluded from this analysis; ultimately, the CEFR Vocabulary Test results of 154 students were analysed. The descriptive statistics were obtained using SPSS.

3.3 Task for Assessing Productive Vocabulary Knowledge

To examine learners' productive vocabulary knowledge, a paired (learner–learner) conversation task called 'Summer Job', using a photo (see Figure 1) taken from one of the past Cambridge English Qualifications B1 Preliminary speaking tests,[2] was administered to the same 154 Japanese university students. They were given the photo along with instructions in English and Japanese (see Figure 2) by an examiner. After the instructions, they were allowed 30 seconds to prepare their conversation, and were then given English and Japanese instructions again. After that, they were required to engage in a two-minute conversation based on the instructions while looking at the photo. They were not allowed to rehearse their conversations.

The students' conversations were transcribed and added to a self-created CEFR Learner Corpus, composed of Japanese university students' writing and speaking based on Cambridge English Qualifications. Their conversations were rated in terms of three categories; overall spoken production, vocabulary range and control, and grammatical accuracy by 13 detailed CEFR levels (Pre-A1, A1, A1+, A2, A2+, B1, B1+, B2, B2+, C1, C1+, C2, and C2+) by a professional CEFR rater, and also analysed in terms of statistics such as type, token, and type–token ratio. In addition, their writing and transcribed speech were

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2）The task was adopted from the website
　　https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/preliminary/preparation/.

annotated with metadata such as target skills, tasks, time, topics, and test conditions, and data about the learners, such as grade, major, class, and class level in the CEFR Learner Corpus. The CEFR Learner Corpus will work as a monitor corpus, adding learners' essays and speech tasks based on Cambridge English Qualifications in the future. In addition, the percentage of each CEFR vocabulary level used in their conversations was obtained using the website Text Inspector (see Figure 3).[3]
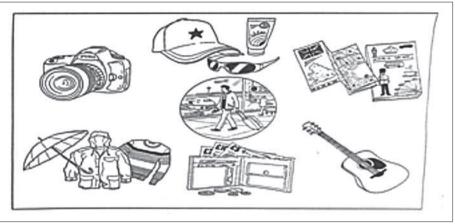

Figure 1. The photo used in the paired-conversation task

I'm going to describe a situation to you.
A young man is going to travel to England to do a summer job. Talk together about the different things he should take with him and say which would be most useful.

Figure 2. The English instructions

Word List	Types	Tokens
A1	33 (48.53%)	56 (57.14%)
A2	15 (22.06%)	22 (22.45%)
B1	7 (10.29%)	7 (7.14%)
B2	6 (8.82%)	6 (6.12%)
C1	1 (1.47%)	1 (1.02%)
Unlisted	6 (8.82%)	6 (6.12%)

Figure 3. An example of the percentage of each CEFR vocabulary
level on the Text Inspector

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3) See the website of the Text Inspector at https://textinspector.com.

4. Results and Discussion
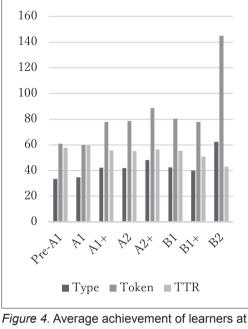
4.1 Productive Speaking Proficiency

First, in order to examine the learners' productive speaking proficiency on the task 'Summer Job', their CEFR levels for overall spoken production were examined.

Table 1. *Learners' CEFR levels for overall spoken production*

Pre-A1	A1		A2		B1		B2	
	95 (61.7%)		34 (22.1%)		10 (6.4%)		2 (1.3%)	
13	A1	A1+	A2	A2+	B1	B1+	B2	B2+
8.4%	71	24	26	8	9	1	2	0
	46.1%	15.6%	16.9%	5.2%	5.8%	0.6%	1.3%	0.0%

Table 1 shows the number and percentage of students who obtained each CEFR level. According to the table, more than half of the learners, 61.7%, obtained A1 (including A1 and A1+), followed by A2 (including A2 and A2+) (22.1%). If examined in more detail, almost half of the learners, 46.1%, obtained A1, followed by A2 (16.9%) and A1+ (15.6%). Few learners obtained A2+ (5.2%) or B1 (5.8%), and very few learners obtained B1+ or above. As Table 1 shows, the learners' actual CEFR levels for overall spoken production are A1 to A2, although their target CEFR levels of the most participants are A2 to B1 and this speaking task is targeted to B1 learners.

Figure 4 demonstrates average achievement, by type, token, and type–token ratio (TTR), of each CEFR learner's conversation. The learners were required to discuss the given topic for two minutes. However, the numbers of types and tokens were quite different for learners at different CEFR levels: they increased until A2+ learners and then slightly decreased until B1+ learners, but B2 learners had by far the greatest number of types and tokens. However, A2+ learners tended to speak more and use more varied vocabulary — the most, next to the B2 learners.

Figure 4. Average achievement of learners at
each CEFR level

4.2 Productive Vocabulary Knowledge

Table 1 above shows the number and percentage of learners at each CEFR level in overall spoken production. In this section, those at each CEFR vocabulary range and control level are focused on.

Table 2 indicates the number and percentage of learners at each CEFR vocabulary range and control level for productive CEFR vocabulary knowledge in conversation.

Table 2. *Learners' CEFR levels for vocabulary range and control*

Pre-A1	A1		A2		B1		B2	
	88 (57.1%)		38 (24.6%)		8 (5.2%)		1 (0.6%)	
19	A1	A1+	A2	A2+	B1	B1+	B2	B2+
12.3%	78	10	23	15	6	2	1	0
	50.6%	6.5%	14.9%	9.7%	3.9%	1.3%	0.6%	0.0%

As shown in Table 2, more than half of the learners, 57.1%, obtained A1 (including A1 and A1+), followed by A2 (including A2 and A2+) (24.6%). Examined in more detail, almost half of the learners, 50.6%, are assigned to A1, which is almost the same as for their overall spoken production shown in Table 1; this is followed by A2 (14.9%), Pre-A1 (12.3%), A2+ (9.7%), and A1+ (6.5%). Compared to their overall spoken production shown in Table 1, the number of A1+ learners decreases by almost half, and the numbers of A2, B1, and B2 learners also slightly decrease. However, the numbers of Pre-A1, A1, A2+, and B1+ learners

slightly increase. Almost like the results for overall spoken production, the number of learners who obtained above B1 level is quite low.

As mentioned above, the learners' CEFR vocabulary range and control levels were lower than their overall CEFR spoken production. If their conversations are rated in terms of grammatical accuracy, different results are obtained, as seen in Table 3 below.
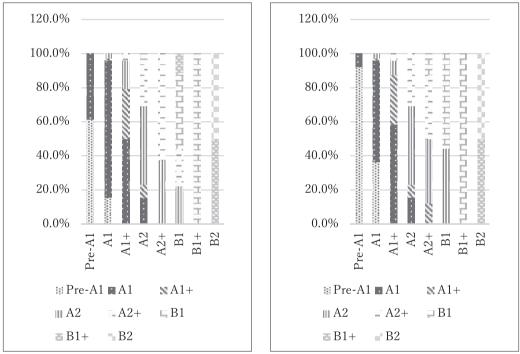
Table 3. *Learners' CEFR levels for grammatical accuracy*

Pre-A1	A1		A2		B1		B2	
	72 (46.7%)		35 (22.7%)		8 (5.1%)		1 (0.6%)	
38	A1	A1+	A2	A2+	B1	B1+	B2	B2+
24.7%	61	11	23	12	7	1	1	0
	39.6%	7.1%	14.9%	7.8%	4.5%	0.6%	0.6%	0.0%

Table 3 shows the number and percentage of learners at each CEFR level for grammatical accuracy. As shown in Table 3, less than half of the learners, 46.7%, obtained A1 (including A1 and A1+), followed by A2 (including A2 and A2+) (22.7%). Examined in more detail, almost 40% of the learners are assigned A1, and approximately 25% Pre-A1; approximately 15% of the learners are assigned as A2, followed by A2+ (7.8%), A1+ (7.1%), and B1 (4.5%). Compared to their overall spoken production shown in Table 1, the number of A1+ learners decreases by almost half, while the numbers of A2, B1, and B2 learners also slightly decrease. In contrast, the number of Pre-A1 learners dramatically increases, whereas the number of A1 learners decreases. Compared to their vocabulary range and control shown in Table 2, a big difference between the number of Pre-A1 and A1 learners can be found. In grammatical accuracy, 24.7% of the learners are assigned Pre-A1, whereas almost half, 12.3%, are assigned Pre-A1 in their vocabulary range and control. In addition, in vocabulary range and control, 50.6% are assigned A1, and 39.6% in grammatical accuracy. Therefore, the results imply that in overall spoken production, more learners obtained a higher CEFR level in vocabulary range and control than in grammatical accuracy. In addition, their overall spoken production would be affected more by their vocabulary range and control than their grammatical accuracy. Interestingly, this result is different from that for their productive writing knowledge; according to Usami (2018), more learners obtained a higher CEFR level in grammatical accuracy than in vocabulary range and control in their essays, where 52.7% of learners were assigned B1 or B1+ and 28.7% were assigned A2 or A2+ in grammatical accuracy. On the other hand, in vocabulary range and control, 74.2% of the learners were assigned A2 or A2+, and 12.2% B1 or B1+.

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, some discrepancies between learners' overall spoken production and their vocabulary range and control CEFR levels can be found. Therefore, next, which CEFR vocabulary range and control level learners obtained will be examined by CEFR level for overall spoken production. Figure 5 indicates the percentage breakdown of learners' CEFR vocabulary range and control level by their overall spoken production. According to Figure 5, approximately 60% of the Pre-A1 learners had acquired Pre-A1 in

vocabulary range and control and another almost 40%, A1. Thus, approximately 80% of the A1 learners in overall spoken production had acquired A1-level in vocabulary range and control. However, while approximately 50% of the A1+ learners still stayed at A1, the other approximately 50% of them had also acquired A1+, A2, and A2+ in vocabulary range and control. Approximately 45% of the A2-level learners in overall spoken production had achieved A2 in vocabulary range and control, and approximately 30% of the A2-level learners in overall spoken production had acquired A2+ or B1 in vocabulary range and control. More than 60% of the A2+ learners had acquired A2+ in vocabulary range and control, though almost all the rest were still at A2 in vocabulary range and control. All the B1+ learners had acquired B1 in vocabulary range and control, whereas almost half of the B2 learners had obtained B2 in vocabulary range and control. These results, shown in Figure 5, are quite different from those for grammatical accuracy in Figure 6.

Figure 5. Learners' CEFR levels for vocabulary range and control by their overall spoken production level

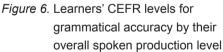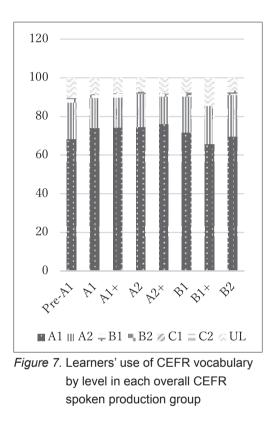*Figure 6.* Learners' CEFR levels for grammatical accuracy by their overall spoken production level

Figure 6 demonstrates the percentage breakdown of learners' CEFR grammatical accuracy levels by their overall spoken production. According to Figure 6, almost all of the Pre-A1 learners had acquired Pre-A1 in grammatical accuracy and almost 60% of A1 learners had acquired A1 in grammatical accuracy. Compared to their vocabulary range and control level, more Pre-A1 learners had acquired Pre-A1 in grammatical accuracy, and more A1 learners had acquired lower, Pre-A1 grammatical accuracy. A1+ speakers had

acquired A1 grammatical accuracy and to some degree A1+, A2, and A2+; and A2 speakers had acquired A1 and A1+, and to some degree A2 and A2+, which is almost the same as the case of vocabulary range and control, shown in Figure 5. In contrast, learners with A2+ level in overall spoken production had acquired A1+ and A2 grammatical accuracy, and to some degree A2+ and B1. Almost half of the B1 speakers had acquired B1 grammatical accuracy, as had all of the B1+ speakers.

Figure 7. Learners' use of CEFR vocabulary by level in each overall CEFR spoken production group
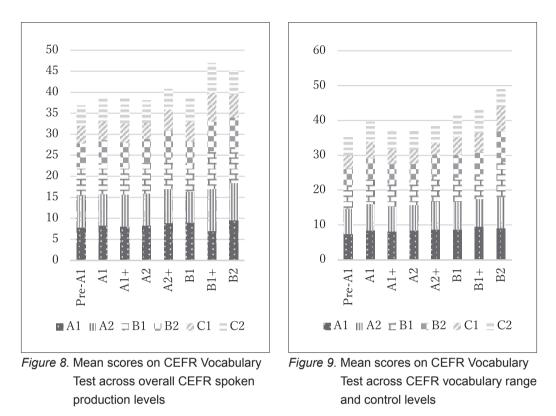
Next, the extent to which learners of each CEFR level in overall spoken production actually use CEFR vocabulary by level in conversation is examined using the Text Inspector. Figure 7 demonstrates the percentage breakdown of vocabulary words from each CEFR level used in conversation by CEFR level in overall spoken production. Learners of all CEFR levels in overall spoken production used approximately 70% or more A1-level vocabulary. Very few learners could use B2-level or above vocabulary at all. Thus, no matter how high their ostensible CEFR level in overall spoken production, in fact these learners use mostly A1-level in vocabulary.

4.3 Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge

Receptive vocabulary knowledge is investigated in this section, complementing the discussion of productive vocabulary knowledge above. Figure 8 shows mean scores on the CEFR Vocabulary Test across the learners' overall CEFR spoken production levels, whereas

Figure 9 shows mean scores on the CEFR Vocabulary Test across the learners' CEFR vocabulary range and control levels.

Figure 8. Mean scores on CEFR Vocabulary Test across overall CEFR spoken production levels

Figure 9. Mean scores on CEFR Vocabulary Test across CEFR vocabulary range and control levels

According to Figure 8, learners' mean total scores range from 36.92 (for Pre-A1 learners) to 47 (for B1+ learners), with an average total score of 40.39 out of 60 on the CEFR Vocabulary Test. It has to be noted in this context that learners have a 25% random chance to get the correct answer for each question, with four options per item. However, interestingly, learners of almost all levels scored at least some points on each sub-test, with averages ranging from 4.89 for the C1 sub-test to 8.34 for the A1 sub-test, although the mean scores on each sub-test varied according to the learners' overall CEFR spoken production level. It was especially surprising that almost all learners scored at least some points for C1- and C2-level vocabulary, in spite of the fact that their CEFR productive vocabulary knowledge is generally low as shown in Table 2 and that they use little vocabulary above A2 level in their conversations as shown in Figure 7. This might result from the fact that although learners know higher CEFR levels (such as C1 and C2) of vocabulary and can choose only one correct answer on the CEFR Vocabulary Test, they actually cannot use such higher-level vocabulary in their conversation, or alternatively they might not have had to use it.

According to Figure 9, as the learners' productive CEFR vocabulary range and control level increases, their receptive vocabulary knowledge on the CEFR Vocabulary Test also

increases, except for A1 learners, compared to the case where their receptive vocabulary knowledge is measured according to their overall CEFR spoken production level. Again, learners of almost all CEFR levels seem to acquire at least some points on each sub-test, with an average of 4.76 for the C1 sub-test and 8.50 for the A1 sub-test. Moreover, almost all learners could understand some C1- and C2-level vocabulary.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the differences between Japanese English learners' receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge in speech were investigated using the CEFR Vocabulary Test and a paired-conversation task. For overall productive speaking proficiency, almost half of the learners were CEFR level A1, approximately 15% each were level A2 and A1+, approximately 5% each were A2+ and B1, and very few learners were higher than B1+. Generally, as their CEFR speaking level increased, the learners tended to speak more and use more varied vocabulary in conversation. Surprisingly, however, A2+ learners spoke more and used more varied vocabulary than B2 learners.

Focusing on productive CEFR vocabulary knowledge, approximately 50% of the learners were at level A1, almost the same as for their overall speaking proficiency. In addition, approximately 15% of the learners were at level A2, followed by Pre-A1 (12.3%), A2+ (9.7%) and A1+ (6.5%) learners. Again, very few learners obtained above B1 level. Focusing on grammar, approximately 40% of the learners were at level A1 and approximately 25% at Pre-A1, indicating generally low levels of productive grammar both in absolute terms and relative to vocabulary and overall speaking level. In addition, compared to their writing, more learners demonstrated higher productive CEFR vocabulary knowledge rather than grammar knowledge in their conversation (Usami 2018).

Investigating their actual vocabulary used in conversation by overall CEFR speaking level, almost all learners used more than 70% A1-level vocabulary, and much less vocabulary above A2 level. Regarding receptive vocabulary knowledge, their mean total score on the CEFR Vocabulary Test was approximately 65%, and even some of the C1- and C2-level vocabulary on the CEFR Vocabulary Test was acquired by almost all the learners. As their productive vocabulary used in conversation (their CEFR vocabulary level) increased, their receptive vocabulary knowledge on the CEFR Vocabulary Test also tended to increase, implying a correlation between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge.

This study was based on only very limited data, because the number of the learners was only 154 and just one kind of paired conversation was analysed. In addition, the CEFR Vocabulary Test contains just 60 questions (10 for each CEFR level), and item facility and item discrimination of some items were questionable and need to be confirmed in future research, with more varied CEFR learners and alongside other tests.

This research was conducted under the approval of the Tokai University ethical committee (IRB No. 16032 approved in 2016 and 2017).

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