The Forgotten Skill:

Building Vocabulary for Spoken Production Using Authentic EAP Materials

BY: KERSTIN OKUBO

The Forgotten Skill

- The problem from the students' point of view
- Current practice
- The 4 Levels of Vocabulary
- The problem from my point of view
- Building Productive Vocabulary (Mental Lexicon)
  - What to study?
  - Using a "hit list"
- Outcomes

Student Feedback

- This class was very useful for me, especially to improve my pronunciation and help me to feel more comfortable talking with others in English. I believe I will be prepared to have good conversations in my academic life at U of T.

- I learned so much strategy about speaking but I still don't find right words to express my idea.

- I would like to practice more and more about speaking with vocabulary.

- My vocabulary is not good yet. I want to more improve my vocabulary when I speak.

Deliberate Vocabulary Teaching

"'Incidental' learning of vocabulary is inefficient. So we need to teach vocabulary deliberately, in focused vocabulary activities in the classroom and for homework."

(Penny Ur, 2010)

Teacher-provided Word Lists

(Students) believe all unknown words to be equally important and (have) difficulty judging word frequency. Learners also expressed a belief in the need for teacher provided word lists.

(James McCrostie, 2015)

- *defenestrate*
- *sediment*
- *equestrian*

Vocabulary Preparation Lists

deliberate vocabulary teaching **+** teacher-provided word lists **=** vocabulary preparation lists

- Pre-teach vocabulary before a lecture
- Vocabulary list with definitions, exercises, etc. is typical

One interesting common thread has to do with, in many cases, the rapidity of collapse after a society reaches its peak. There are many societies that don't wind down gradually, but they build up, get richer and more powerful, and then within a short time, within a few decades after their peak, they collapse. For example, the classic lowland Maya of the Yucatan began to collapse in the early 800s, literally a few decades after the Maya were building their biggest monuments, and Maya population was greatest.

Or again, the collapse of the Soviet Union took place within a couple of decades, maybe within a decade, of the time when the Soviet Union was at its greatest power. An analogy would be the growth of bacteria in a petri dish. These rapid collapses are especially likely where there's a mismatch between available resources and resource consumption, or a mismatch between economic outlays and economic potential. In a petri dish, bacteria grow. Say they double every generation, and five generations before the end the petri dish is 15/16ths empty, and then the next generation's 3/4ths empty and the next generation half empty. Within one generation after the petri dish still being half empty, it is full. There's no more food and the bacteria have collapsed. So, this is a frequent theme that societies collapse very soon after reaching their peak in power.

Taken from "Why do Societies Collapse?" by Jared Diamond 2003
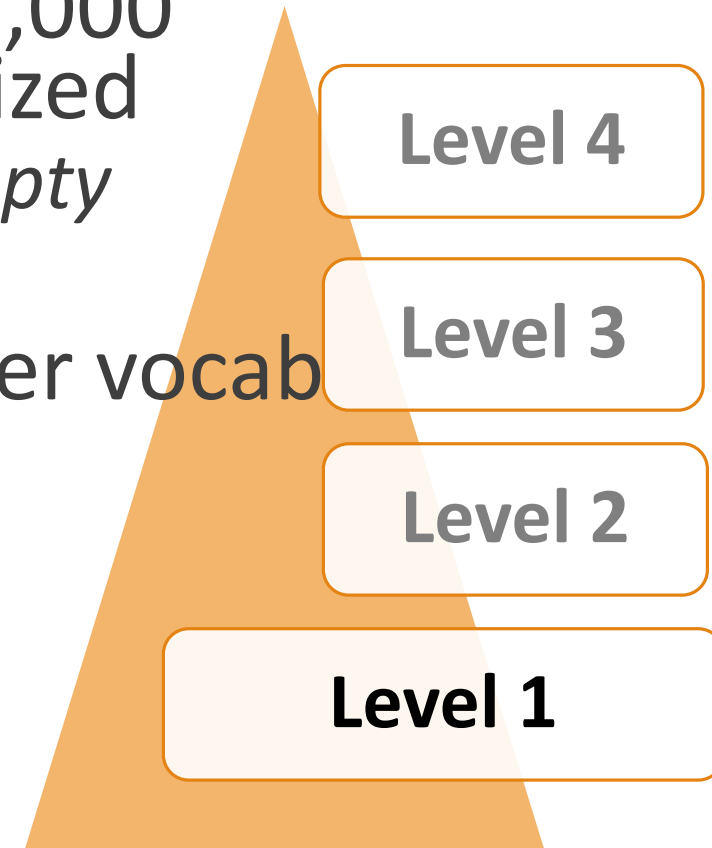
4 levels of Vocabulary

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

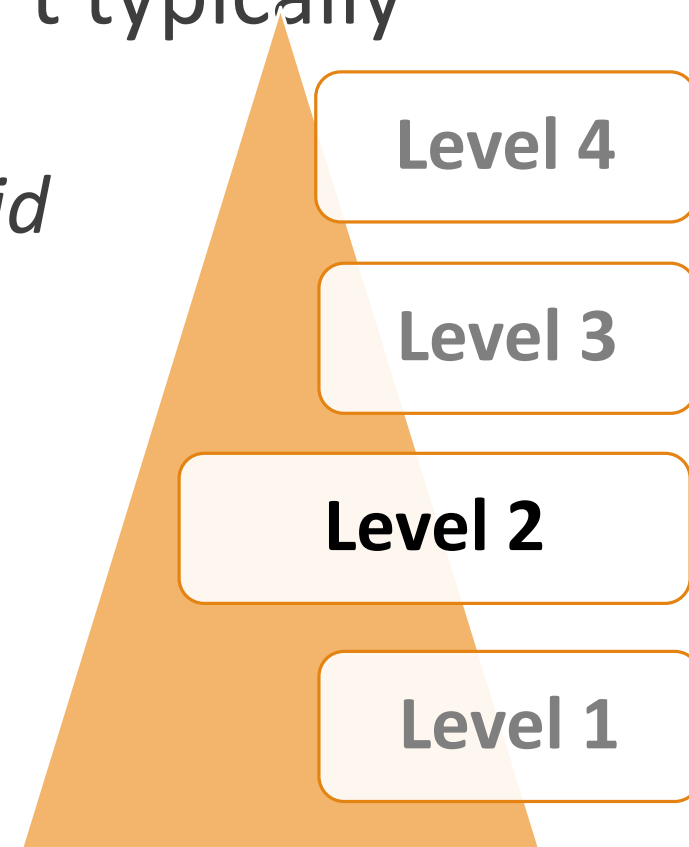# Level 1: Productive Vocabulary

- Foundational lexis; typically includes top 2,000 most commonly used words, some specialized
  - *population, interesting, society, economic, empty*

- able to use synonyms to paraphrase simpler vocab
  - *get better → improve*
  - *hard → difficult*
  - *good → effective*

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

Level 2: Receptive Vocabulary

- words students can comprehend, but don't typically use in production
  - For example; *potential*, *gradual, damage, avoid*

- some words on the AWL
  - For example; *available, process, occur*

Level 4
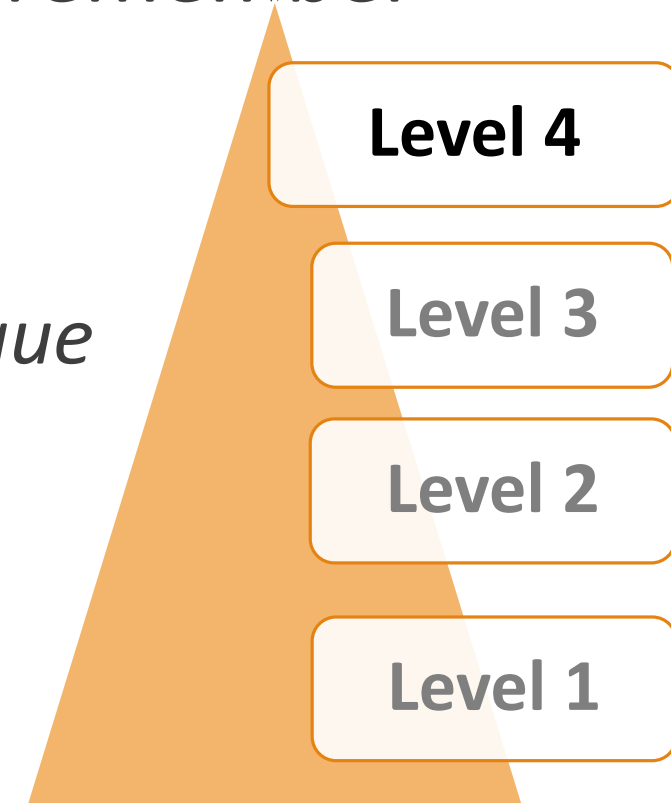
Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

Level 3: Out-of Reach Vocabulary

- words that students cannot comprehend and have to guess from context

- For example; *analogy*, *proliferate, indigenous*

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

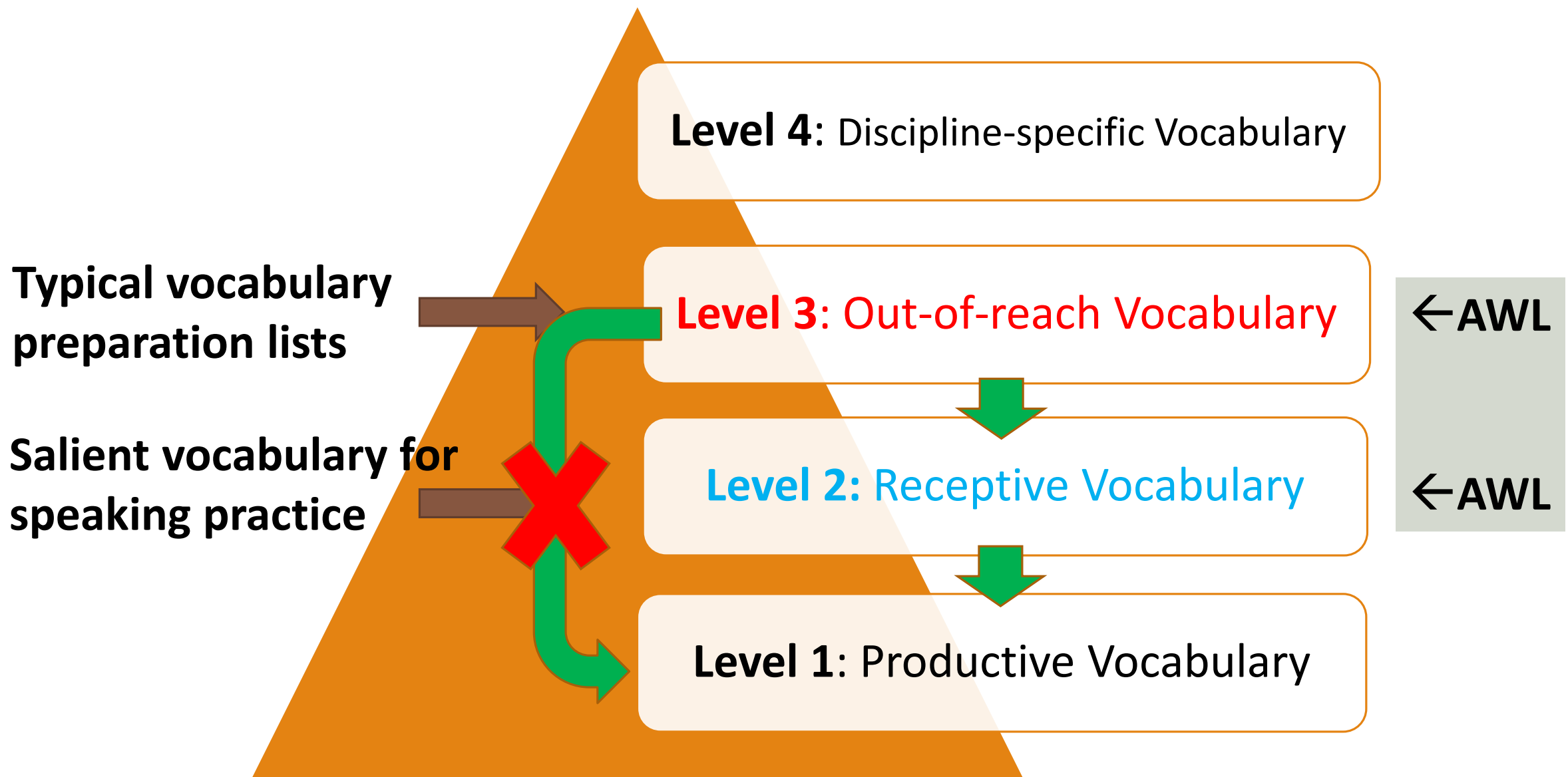# Level 4: Discipline-Specific Vocabulary

- words that are not important to learn or remember for comprehension or production

  - For example; *dilyxic oxide, petri dish, arabesque*

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

Level 3 vocabulary: out of reach

One interesting common thread has to do with, in many cases, the rapidity of collapse after a society reaches its peak. There are many societies that don't wind down gradually, but they build up, get richer and more powerful, and then within a short time, within a few decades after their peak, they collapse. For example, the classic lowland Maya of the Yucatan began to collapse in the early 800s, literally a few decades after the Maya were building their biggest monuments, and Maya population was greatest.

Or again, the collapse of the Soviet Union took place within a couple of decades, maybe within a decade, of the time when the Soviet Union was at its greatest power. An analogy would be the growth of bacteria in a petri dish. These rapid collapses are especially likely where there's a mismatch between available resources and resource consumption, or a mismatch between economic outlays and economic potential. In a petri dish, bacteria grow. Say they double every generation, and five generations before the end the petri dish is 15/16ths empty, and then the next generation's 3/4ths empty and the next generation half empty. Within one generation after the petri dish still being half empty, it is full. There's no more food and the bacteria have collapsed. So, this is a frequent theme that societies collapse very soon after reaching their peak in power.

Level 2 vocabulary: receptive

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Receptive Vocabulary

"It is clear that learners need to know more in order to produce a word than they do in order to recognise it. So, for speaking, learners require greater lexical knowledge than they do for reading."

(Michael McCarthy, 2010)

Level 3: Out-of Reach vocabulary

- words that students cannot comprehend and have to guess from context

- For example; *analogy*, *proliferate, indigenous*

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

Aspects of Vocabulary:

FORM

- pronunciation

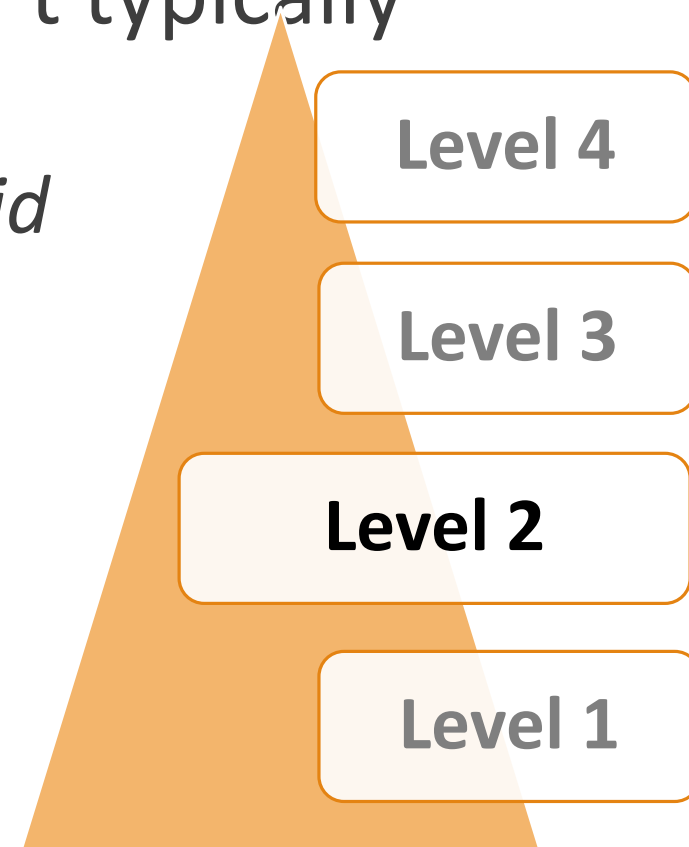- spelling

- affixation

MEANING

- definition

- word class

USE

- collocation

- connotation

Level 2: Receptive vocabulary

- words students can comprehend, but don't typically use in production
  - For example; *potential*, *gradual, damage, avoid*

- some words on the AWL
  - For example; *available, process, occur*

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

For example: *available*

FORM

- pronunciation
- spelling
- affixation – *able*

    un-

    -ability

MEANING

- definition – *"can"...*

    - able to be used
- word form – *adj*

    - n

USE

- collocation – "is"
- connotation

Choosing Level 2 Vocabulary

- Choose words that have some frequency in speaking; when did you last use this word?

  For example; *potential, available, damage, avoid*

- Choose words that cross over to other topics easily.

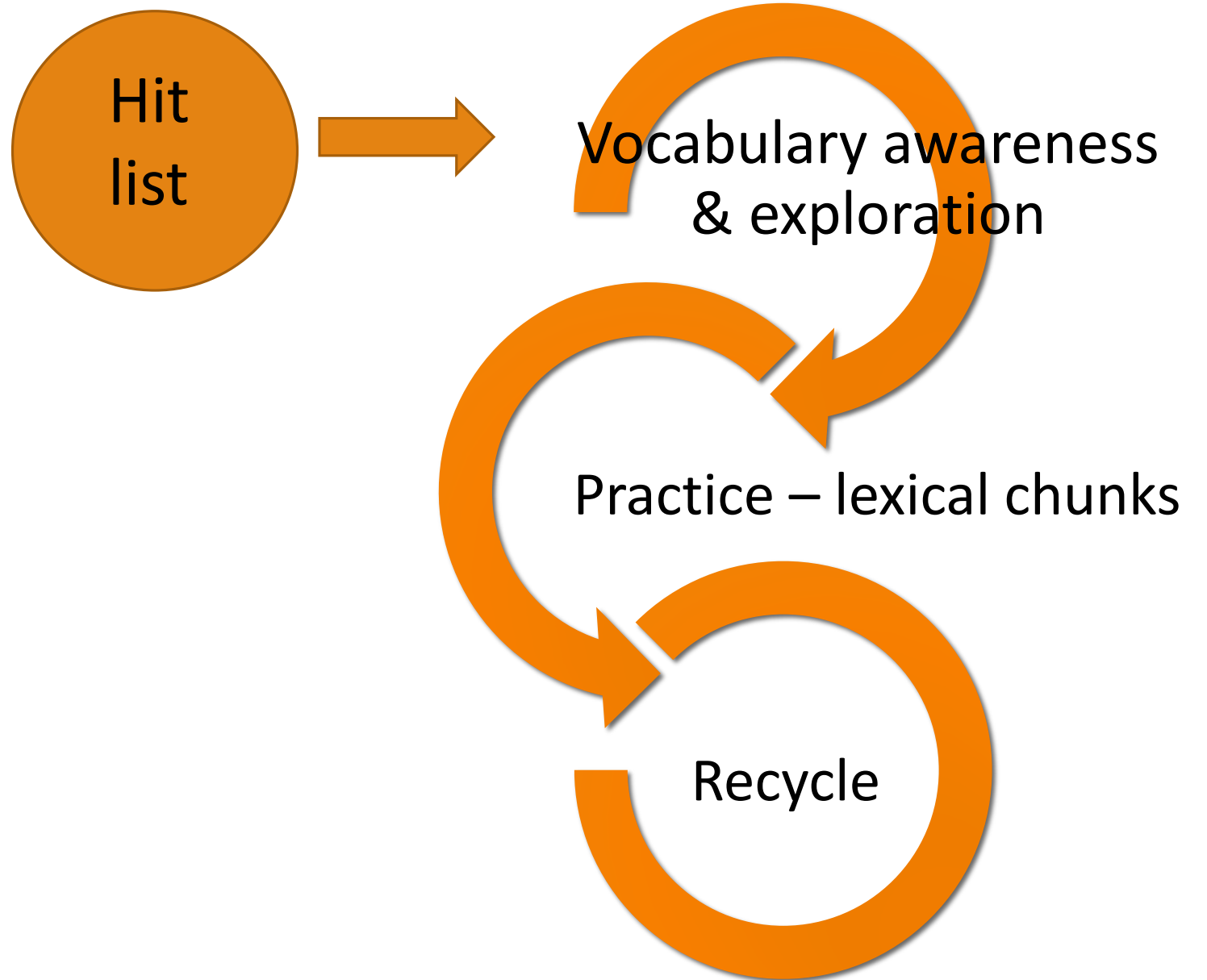 For example; *the earthquake damage, water damage*

Now what?

Once you've chosen the Level 2 vocabulary, what can you do to help students build it into their productive vocabularies?

Example "hit list"

influence	previous	extensive	produce
impact	develop	avoid	potential
outweigh	damage	evidence	origin
process	present	immediate	various
system	discover	consequence	cooperate

Building Productive Vocabulary

Hit list → Vocabulary awareness & exploration

Practice – lexical chunks

Recycle

Hit List: Canada's First Nations

influence	previous	extensive	produce
impact	develop	avoid	potential
outweigh	damage	evidence	origin

How Much Recycling?

The evidence is that learners usually need at least ten meaningful encounters in order to acquire a new item (Webb, 2007).

Mental Lexicon

- Easy retrieval is key

- Anchor words – words which tend to have fixed meanings

- Focus on lexical chunks

(Michael McCarthy, 2010)

Outcomes

The standard of living is improving little by little →
"the standard of living is *gradually* improving"

The possible problems and effects from an earthquake →
"The *potential damage* from an earthquake …"

Many governments decided not to talk about this topic in the past →
Many governments *previously avoided* this topic.

The good results of doing it would be better than the possible bad effects of doing it → "the **benefits** *outweigh* the *risks*"

Summary

- Level 3 vocabulary for listening/reading preparation

- Level 2 vocabulary for speaking

- Build learners' 'Mental Lexicon' by building their productive vocabularies

- Eliminate learner complaints about lack of vocabulary

Canada's First Nations
Controlled Exercise

Legends and Stories

Like every human culture in the world, Canada's First Peoples have stories to explain the _____ of the earth and its animals and people.

First Peoples' creation stories often contain references to specific landmarks, such as mountains or lakes, that give us good _____ about the areas that a group of people lived in, and the routes they followed as they migrated over the centuries to the areas they now live in.

These stories were not written down, but were passed on through their oral tradition. Stories were told over and over, and everyone learned them. Children grew up, and passed the stories from the _____ generation on to their children.

Canada's First Nations
Semi-Controlled Exercise

Rewording:

*Read each sentence and change the underlined words to a suitable **collocation**.*

- *1.* His research findings <u>*make a big difference to*</u> how universities deal with native students.

- 2. This teacher strike could <u>*have bad effects on*</u> the relationship between teachers and students.

Canada's First Nations
Free Exercise

Short Dialogue

◦ **A**: Many young native Canadians have a difficult time adjusting to university life. They leave their families and communities on reserves and come to a crowded urban campus. *(continue using **"potential"**)….*

◦ **B**: (*respond using **"influence"***)

◦ **A: (***respond using any words from the list*)