Vocabulary—its meaning

A vocabulary is a list of words appearing in some particular context as we find in one book or in a dialect. The investigator has tried to bring out the correct interpretation of 'vocabulary' consulting the different dictionaries. Chamber's Dictionary means by vocabulary, a list of words explained in alphabetical order; a dictionary; a list of words; the words of a language; the words known to and used by, e.g. a particular person. The Oxford English Dictionary defines vocabulary as- 1) a collection of list of words with brief explanations of their meanings, now especially a list of this kind given in an elementary grammar or reading book of a foreign language, 2) The range of language of a particular person, class, profession or the like, 3) The sum or aggregate of words composing a language. According to the Children's Dictionary it is a list of words and sometimes phrases alphabetically arranged with synonyms or explanations in the same or an other language, a small dictionary, the stock or range of words used in any specific department of human activity, or by a social group or individual person. These meanings of vocabulary makes it clear that vocabulary is one of the most important assets of human being. The effective communication depends to a great extent on this asset. As the child grows into an adult, the
stock of vocabulary also increases. The investigator thinks it proper to show how vocabulary develops in the individual.

It is a thrilling experience for the parents to hear the first words of their baby, but it is difficult to determine as to when a word is first known. The exact age of its occurrence may range from eight months for babies of high socio-economic status to twenty months in cases of pathological retardation. On the average, however, the first intelligible word usually is spoken by the age of ten or eleven months. Crow and Crow asserts that generally the first word is a monosyllable that may be duplicated, such as 'ma-ma', 'da-da', or 'bye bye' tends to be imitations of adult made sounds accompanied by gestures that put meaning into the word for the baby. (5)

Growth of Vocabulary:

The first known words characteristically are nouns or interjections. The baby may use a noun to connote various meanings or emotional reactions. For example, the vocalizations of the word 'milk' accompanied by voice intonation and gesture may imply "Where is the milk?" "I want milk" or "There is the milk." A single word functions as an expression of the child's immediate need, wish or feeling. (6)

After the child has learned enough nouns to apply names to people and objects in the environment, he begins to learn
verbs especially those which designate action, such as 'give', 'take', 'hold', and so on. Common observations show that the increase in the vocabulary is rather slow at first but later increases rapidly during the pre-school years. Throughout the period, increase in the number of vocabulary may partly be due to the fact that members in the family directly teach the words and partly due to the child's curiosity about word meaning. Elizabeth Hurlock states that in the development of vocabulary the child in effect learns—1) a general vocabulary consisting of words such as 'man', 'beautiful' and 'go' which can be used in a variety of different situations, and 2) special vocabularies consisting of words with specific meanings which can be used only in certain situations.

Because words of the general vocabulary are more useful they are learned first. At every age, the general vocabulary is larger than the special vocabulary.

Types of Vocabulary:

Vocabulary development proceeds in different directions according to the setting in which vocabulary is used as well as the means to be employed in development.

Hearing Vocabulary—A child learns to understand the meaning of certain words and phrases before he can speak in words. Hearing vocabulary develops earlier than *speaking vocabulary*
and throughout life the number of words to which a person can react appropriately when he hears them is larger than the number which he can employ correctly in his own speech or writing. (10) It is well known that primary grade children understand many words which they hear even though they might not be able to read those same words. Hearing vocabulary is an important factor in language development. (11)

**Speaking Vocabulary** includes those words which we use in speaking. It may also include those words which we know so well that we may use them in speaking if the occasion presented itself. It is through the speaking vocabulary that we first communicate our thoughts to others. (12)

**Reading Vocabulary** is the kind of vocabulary to which schools have ordinarily devoted major attention. It has always been considered "basic" as it has been popularly been assumed that development of it would insure development of all types of vocabulary. It has been assumed by certain people that there is virtually no difference between reading vocabulary and other types. Although there is great overlapping there are still differences. There are many words which the more matured persons can read with understanding, which he would never use in conversation. (13)

**Writing Vocabulary** is the vocabulary with which we are concerned when we teach spelling. It includes the words we
write or could write if the occasion arose. It is obviously different from reading vocabulary and it is different from speaking vocabulary. We by no means write all of the words we can read. (14)

When children start to read they begin to acquire a **sight vocabulary**. Gradually they begin to learn the meanings of words which occur in their reading. They also learn through composition and spelling to use a large number of words in their writing; these words are always fewer in number than the speaking, hearing or reading vocabularies and are called **writing vocabulary**. A child's total meaningful vocabulary is the sum of all the words which he can understand or use correctly whether in listening, speaking, reading or writing. (15)

**Active and Passive Vocabulary**

Since the vocabulary conveys meanings it can be further divided into active and passive vocabulary. The words that are used by the child are active vocabularies. Passive vocabularies are those that the child understands but cannot command the words for active use. The number of passive vocabulary always exceeds active vocabulary at every stage of development. Even at sixteen weeks an infant will turn his head to the sound of a human voice and seems to recognise his mother or nurse, perhaps smiling delightedly at her approach. By six or seven months he is familiar with a mass of situations and objects, the names of which he begins to recognise. By a year, he has
a fairly extensive passive vocabulary which from that time forward continues to develop even more rapidly than his active vocabulary. (16)

Through proper use, repetition and maturity of the child, many of the passive vocabulary transform into active vocabulary of the particular child. But in proportion passive vocabulary always remain higher than the active vocabulary.

Size of Vocabulary:

The child increases his vocabulary not only by learning new words but also by learning new meanings for old words. For example the word 'orange' may be known only as a type of fruit first. Later, the child discovers that this word also refer to a colour.

There are marked individual differences in size of vocabulary at every age. Differences in size of vocabulary appear as early as eighteen months of age and become increasingly greater as children grow older. While differences in intelligence is partially responsible for differences in size of vocabulary environmental influences, opportunities to learn and motivation to learn are also factors that play roles of major importance. Girls as a general rule have larger vocabularies at every age than boys. (17) Studies made by Gassel and Smith show a gain of 500 to 600 words yearly between ages two and six. (18)
Increase in the vocabulary still continues rapidly after school entrance. Cuff gives us figures for grades three through eight as follows (19)

**Table II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>No. of words in vocabulary</th>
<th>Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7,425</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10,395</td>
<td>2970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12,460</td>
<td>2065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>13,965</td>
<td>1505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>14,910</td>
<td>945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>16,800</td>
<td>1890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other studies do not show quite such rapid gains, since they credit high school seniors (approximately 18 years old) with 15000 to 18000 words. This in turn exceeds Terman's estimates as based upon samplings of vocabularies. It also exceeds the general estimates of the average population vocabularies as measured by Army tests of Intelligence in the World War of 1914-18. It is seen however, that with proper teaching vocabulary continues to increase throughout the school year's. (20) Prof. Terman, whose findings are
based on sound observational data gives 3600 words as the
vocabulary of an average child of eight, and 9000 words as
that of the average child of fourteen. An average adult has
a knowledge of 11,700 words and a superior adult of 13,500. (21)
An interesting feature of Prof. Terman's findings is related
not only to the size of a chief vocabulary but also to the
rate at which that vocabulary grows. According to the
findings, between the ages of eight and fourteen, a child
increases his store of understood words at the rate of 900
words per annum. That is to say, the ordinary child learns
the meaning of two or three new words every day. (22)

Importance of Vocabulary Size:

Size of vocabulary is very important to a child's
social and emotional development. In order to become an
active participant in the social group, a child must be
able to communicate with other children in terms which they
can understand. The child whose vocabulary is inadequate is
forced to remain an outsider. Children of all ages feel
frustrated when they want to say something but cannot do so
either because they lack the necessary words or because they
cannot make themselves understood in the words they can
use. When their vocabularies are inadequate, to meet their
communication needs, they become angry at the person who
does not understand them. (23)
To be more precise and clear an adequate number of vocabularies is needed. A limited number of vocabularies may express one's thought, but that depends not only on the person who uses them, but also those for whom the words are used. Educated men and women must be able to choose words which are appropriate for a particular listener or reader or audience. The personality of an individual is reflected through the vocabulary he uses.

A person who relies upon a few words or phrases is handicapped in several ways. In speaking, this kind of equipment does not lend itself to convincing speech, persuasive speech or convincing speech. Because a speaker so prepared relies upon the same words and phrases to express all of his ideas, it is obvious that precision is impossible. He must frequently depend upon intonation or facial expression or gestures, rather than upon words.\(^{(24)}\)

As regards effective writing, words which are clear, precise, and lucid are most important for forceful expression. The writer has to rely upon style, upon construction and above all upon the choice of words. He has the advantage, however, of being able to re-write.\(^{(25)}\) The child's writing is affected by the size of his vocabulary just as his speech is. Success in school work is greatly influenced by how well the child can express himself in writing and how well he writes in examination.\(^{(26)}\)
"In every sphere of knowledge vocabulary is of great importance. Not only it records and conveys and communicates and expresses the ideas, thoughts and emotions, but it also measures the amount of achievement a person gains in a certain sphere of knowledge. Many items to test the general ability are composed of vocabulary and that is why the better command the child has on his vocabulary the better result he obtains in his achievements Garrison also laid emphasis on the significance of vocabulary in these words, "the number of words a child knows determines in a large measure his social progress, and failures to progress normally has far-reaching significance. Words are means by which the child learns about his world. If his knowledge of words is grossly inadequate, the interpretation of his environment will be correspondingly so." Extent of Vocabulary:

Degree of intelligence as well as the kind and amount of environmental stimulation afforded to the child determine the extent of vocabulary growth. The number of words which the child has at command is constantly increasing, but not uniformly as the increase is affected by the child's health and the new experiences which life presents to him. In the beginning it is easy to count the words the child uses later it becomes more difficult as there are times when his command of speech grows with astonishing rapidity."
Vocabulary weakness is one of the important drawbacks in the individual's achievement in life. Lack of intellectual stimulation and practice in the use of language causes vocabulary weakness. Words have meaning to a child only when they are related to things he has experienced or knows about. A child who likes to read enriches his vocabulary continually with words and ideas that he gains from reading. When a child has made a poor start in reading he usually dislikes to read and thus gives up one of the best opportunities to expand his vocabulary. (30)

To overcome this weakness, the child's difficulty with the word must be determined. While in reading, a child comes across a word and says that he does not know it, there are three possible explanations given by Herricks and Jacobs. (31) 1) He may be able to pronounce it but has no understanding of what it signifies. 2) He may know the meaning of the word if presented orally but be unable to recognise it, and 3) He may be both unable to pronounce it and ignorant of its meanings. If a child has difficulties of the first type he needs to have his meaningful vocabularies built up. If his difficulties are of the second type he needs training in word recognition. If he is weak in both word recognition and meaningful vocabulary, both kinds of training are to be given simultaneously.