Vocabulary

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Synonyms

[Lexicon](#); [Semantics](#)

Definition

All the words of a particular language, group, or field of knowledge. Most individuals have a larger receptive vocabulary (understanding of words) than expressive vocabulary (use of words). The developmental process begins around 12 months, with most early words containing one or two syllables. By 18 months, a child will have acquired approximately 50 words, a majority of which are nouns (Owens 2015). During the preschool years, it is hypothesized that children can determine the connection between a word and its referent after a single exposure to the word (fast mapping). Vocabulary growth continues through the formative school years with an increase in specificity of definition and enhanced ability to discern all meanings of a word. New words are continually added

throughout the adult years with definitions of words being more abstract and exclusionary (i.e., what an entity is not) and include personal biases and experiences (Hiebert and Kamil 2005).

Receptive and expressive language skills reflect crystallized abilities (i.e., acquired knowledge) and correlate highly with composite cognitive indices. In adults, vocabulary tends to be somewhat more resistant to the effects of neurological impairment than other skills. Thus, vocabulary is used to assess an individual's verbal ability, and performance is often considered to reflect a *rough* estimate of premorbid functioning. It is also important to note that measures of vocabulary are susceptible to intrasubtest scatter in which individuals may incorrectly answer easy items but provide correct responses to more difficult ones. Word-retrieval failure or the indiscriminate loss of learned information may explain inconsistencies in performance.

See Also

► [Lexicon](#)

References and Readings

- Hiebert, E. H., & Kamil, M. L. (2005). *Teaching and learning vocabulary: Bringing research to practice*. Philadelphia: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Owens, R. E. (2015). *Language development: An introduction* (9th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.