A corpus-based lexical analysis of Vietnam’s high-stakes English exams

Abstract:
To date, very few studies could be found on English language testing and assessment in Vietnam as well as on lexical profiles and lexical coverage of language tests even though such studies could provide useful information for involved stakeholders. This study was conducted to analyse 20 English papers for university entrance exams in Vietnam over 17 years (2002-2018), which were also the national high school graduation exams between 2015 and 2018, to shed light on their lexical demands and their coverage of the General Service List (West, 1953) and the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000). A corpus of those exam papers was created and analysed using the RANGE program (Nation & Heatley, 2002). The results showed that 5,000 word families provided 95% coverage of all the exams. The vocabulary size required to comprehend 95% of each exam paper ranged from 3,000 up to 12,000 while the size needed for the exams between 2015 and 2018 was 6,000 word families. In terms of lexical profiles, the GSL accounted for 85.87% of the exams while the AWL covered 5.06% of the exams. In each exam paper, the coverage of GSL ranged from 80.78% to 89.45% while that of the AWL from 1.74% to 7.79%. Together with Vu and Nguyen’s (2019) study that revealed the majority of Vietnamese 12 graders, the target students of these exams, failed to master any levels of vocabulary knowledge, this study calls for more attention to vocabulary in English language learning, teaching and testing in Vietnam.

References: