The New General Service List Test (NGLST)
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The NGSLT is a diagnostic test of written receptive knowledge of the New General Service List (NGSL). It is comprised of 100 items, 20 for each of five approximately 560-word bands of the NGSL. The NGSL was divided into these five bands, and not larger groups of words, for two reasons. First, it is not uncommon for learners in EFL contexts to have large gaps in knowledge of high frequency words, and by testing smaller groups of words, the point at which learners no longer have mastery of the majority of words can be identified with greater accuracy. This enables teachers and students to design plans of study which address individual student needs with more precision. Second, one complete 560-word band is a reasonable goal for a semester of study, especially considering that most non-beginners will have knowledge of some words in each band, which means the learning burden would be somewhat less than 560 words.

The test is designed to the same specifications as the Vocabulary Size Test (VST) (Nation & Beglar, 2007). Briefly, for each item, the target word is provided and then followed by a sentence which uses the word in a non-defining context. This is followed by four answer choices which include three distractors and the correct answer. When the target word has more than one possible meaning or use, the sample sentence and correct answer are based on the more common meaning or use as determined by consultation of concordance lines in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/).

All of the test items were written with high frequency vocabulary. Whenever possible, items testing words in the first three bands were written only with words from the first two of these bands. The only exceptions were the inclusion of the words dirty, bottom, better, and repeat in items which tested words in bands of the same or higher frequency as these words. None of these words were judged to be particularly problematic, even for learners of low proficiency. Items testing words in the fourth band were written exclusively with words from the first three bands, and items testing words in the fifth band were written only with words from the first four bands.

All of the test items have been piloted in several colleges and universities in Japan and have gone through preliminary Rasch analysis. No problems were detected with item fit, and reliability for the full 100-item test is consistently over .90.

Suggested Use
For diagnostic purposes, one way to use the test is to examine each learners' scoring profile in order to identify the point at which they no longer have mastery of around 80 to 85% of the words in a band. This threshold is based on Milton (2009), who found that it is common even for highly proficient learners to achieve average scores of about 85%, and not 100%, in tests of high frequency words. Because high frequency words are of such importance, it is probably beneficial for learners scoring less than 80% or so on a band to review a list of the complete word band and to highlight unknown words in that band for further study. There are now useful self-study materials for the NGSL on Quizlet.com which are divided into 50-word sets according to frequency level, and with these test results, teachers and students can identify the most appropriate groups of words to study.

Further Development
Because repeated diagnostic testing is done with students in our institution, parallel versions of the test are currently being developed and will be made available over time. Similarly, a bilingual English-Japanese version will also be available in the future. Finally, we would deeply appreciate anyone who is willing to share anonymous test results with us for the purposes of ongoing item refinement. Kindly contact either of us at the email addresses listed above.

References