Gerry's Vocabulary Teacher (Version 2 Release 4 Build 1)

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Language: English

Level: Teachers of English, intermediate to advanced EFL/ESL learners

Media format: Exe file (4.2 MB) (available from the following links)

http://www.ctmd.demon.co.uk/download/gerryvoc20.exe

http://www.cict.co.uk/download/gerryvoc20.exe

Operating System: Windows 98, ME, NT4, 2000, or XP

Hardware Requirements: The program and its database occupy less than 5Mb disc space on hard drive. No memory requirements. Any computer running on the Windows versions above can run this software.

Supplementary software: It does not require any software to run, but to be able to edit any created *rtf* file, it requires word-processing software and also to be able to use and create an interactive activity using *jmatch* or *jcloze* file, it requires HotPotatoes (available from http://hotpot.uvic.ca/setup_hotpot_6209.exe) or any similar software.

Shareware restrictions: The evaluation version works without any problem and all the features of the software can be used. However, there are two restrictions: (1) only the first half of the headwords is available, and (2) an exercise cannot contain more than five sentences.

Price: Single-user $50

       Gerry's Vocabulary Teacher Extra Seat $24

              1-10 seats: £12 each

              11-25 seats: £11 each

              26-50 seats: £9 each

50-100 seats: £7 each

Gerry's Vocabulary Teacher CDROM + Single-User Registration $70

Introduction

Gerry's Vocabulary Teacher, as the name itself indicates*,* is intended to provide teachers of English and their students with a tool to create vocabulary review exercises through exposure to vocabulary in context. *Gerry's Vocabulary Teacher* is different from its rivals (*Quiz-buddy*, *Vocaboly*, *Wordflash* and *Vocabulary Trainer* - please see references) since it includes a list of keywords (over 2,500 words which have been chosen from the headwords that are most frequently used in academia and the Academic Word List, AWL, compiled by Averil Coxhead at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand) and a list of sentences (more than 50,000), each linked to the keywords. These sentences show how the words are used (in the forms of verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs etc.). Moreover, they can be edited to create more sentences of representing new keywords. A list of keywords and related sentences can be chosen and built into a hard-copy for classroom use, matching or cloze activity for the Web, intranet or CD applications (see Figure 1 below for the main window of the software).
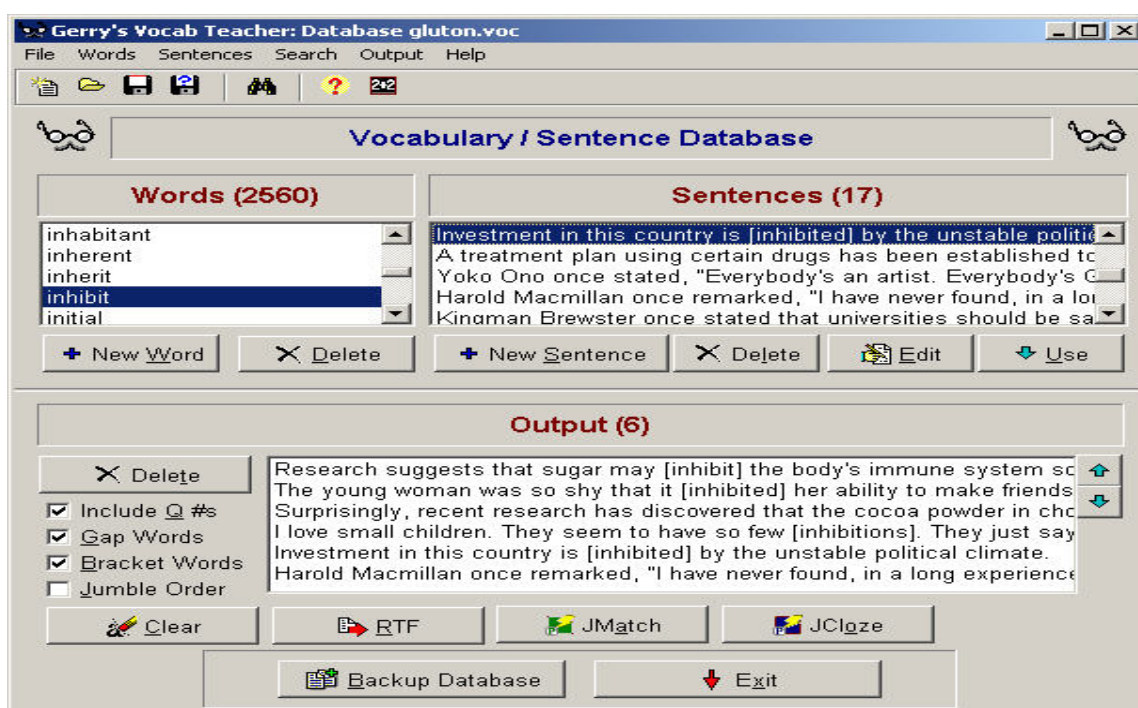

Figure 1. The main screen of *Gerry's Vocabulary Teacher*.

Description

Installation procedure

The setup file is 4.2 MB and when it is installed, it takes up just 21.3 MB drive space. It is installed in less than 1 minute and ready to use. However, with this new release and build number, there is a problem with the database. Upon following the installation steps, an error message appears stating that the program has failed to install its database and the 'file may be corrupted or missing' A database can however be opened by clicking on 'file', 'open database', 'db' and then choosing a choice of Australian, American or Britsh English. However, if 'db' does not appear, it is necessary to trackdown the file by going to the C-drive (It is installed in the folder "C:\Program Files\GerryVoc) and pointing to the database 'db' file. This will solve the issue of 'missing or corrupted database'. The author of the software has been notified about the issue.

When the software is run, the window in Figure 1 appears. Words are listed on the left side of the window while the sentences are listed on the right.
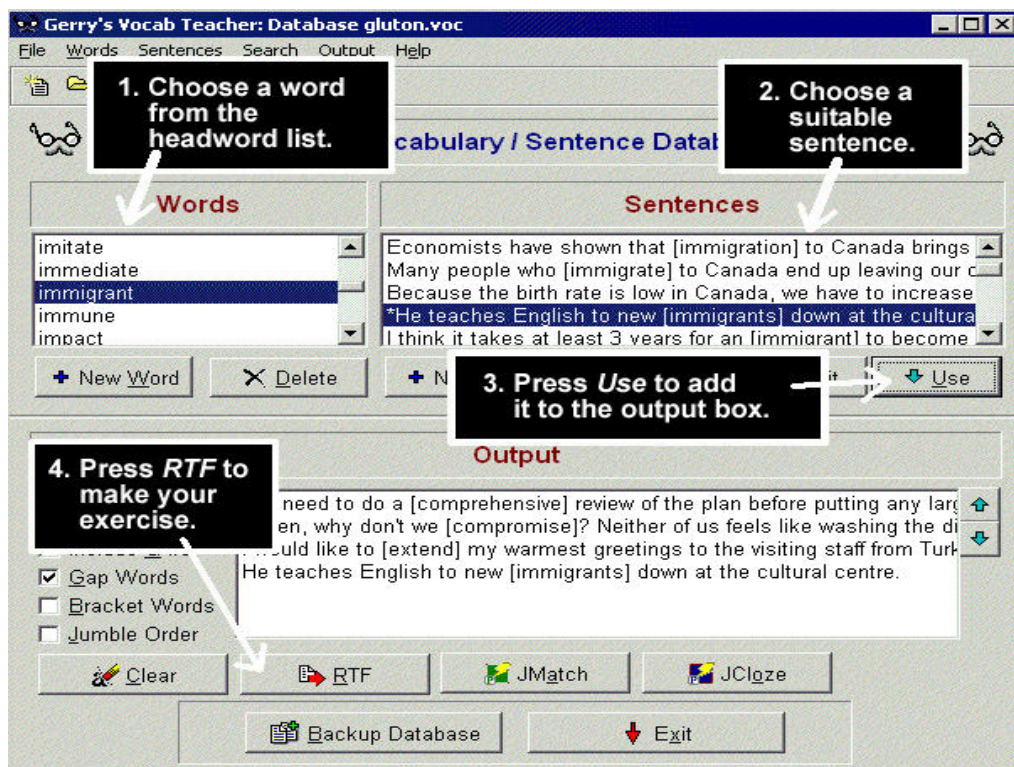
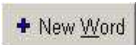**Exercise Authoring (RTF Format)**

Figure 2. Creating an rtf file with *Gerry's Vocabulary Teacher*

First, the word(s) that is/are to be reviewed are to be chosen. Upon clicking on the word, the sentences related to the word chosen appear on the right side of the window. In order to add

the sentence to the Output section of the software, it is necessary to click on the ⬇ Use button. It is immediately copied to the Output section. The same process may be repeated to include as many sentences as wanted. Any sentence in the *sentences* section can be edited by clicking on the 🖼 Edit button. In the window there appears a sentence that is to be edited and any part of it can be changed. Besides, adding a new sentence to the related word is possible by clicking on the ✚ New Sentence button and writing a new sentence or any sentence from any online dictionary or a text book. Using the ✚ New Word button, it is possible to add a new word to the database and enter new sentences for this new word.

Once the word(s) and the sentence(s) are chosen, it is time to move on to the next step: creating RTF (for word processing software). When the ⬆ RTF button is clicked on, the program will prompt to name a file. Upon giving the name and agreeing to open the file, the default word processing software will open up a new document including the words and the sentences chosen. The following is what an rtf document created by the software includes:

Title

incurred inhibit expired cure extended

1. You will be liable for any debts [_____] if you sign this agreement.

2. Our teacher has [_____] the due date for our essay by a week because so many people said they wouldn't be able to finish on time.

3. While traveling, I met a guy who had been living in Israel for more than 2 years after his passport [_____].

4. Scientists around the world are working hard to try to find a [_____] for cancer.

5. Research suggests that sugar may [_____] the body's immune system somewhat.

Web-based Exercise Authoring (JMATCH and JCLOZE) and Hot Potatoes

In order to create Web-based exercises, you should have Hot Potatoes installed on your computer (downloadable from http://hotpot.uvic.ca/setup_hotpot_6209.exe). Using the [JMatch] and [JCloze] buttons, matching and cloze activities can be created to use them on a webpage. The process is very similar to creating RTF files (for word processing software). When the JMatch or JCloze button (or the appropriate Export item from the Output menu) is clicked on, the software will ask for a location and a filename for the saved file. Then A Hot Potatoes JMatch or JCloze file is created and saved. When these files (*jmatch* or *jcloze*) files are created, they will be opened by Hot Potatoes and changed into an interactive activity (See the interactive version of the above words and sentences as a *jcloze* test here). More exercises (Academic Vocabulary List) created as *jcloze* test can be found at http://web.uvic.ca/~gluton/awl/index.htm).
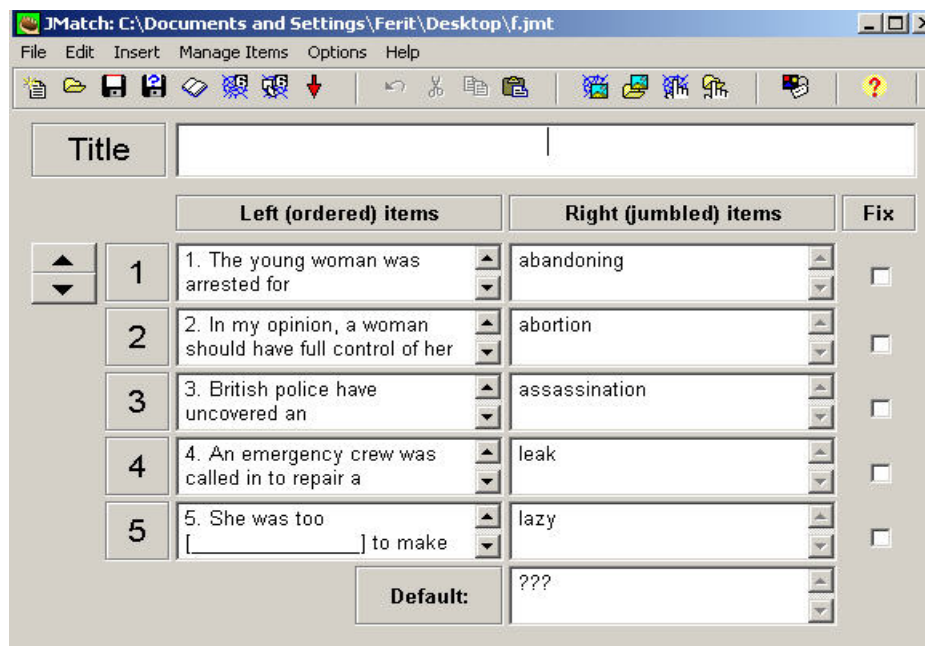

Figure 3. The main screen of the Hot Potateos for the JMatch exercise

At this point, the work with Gerry's Vocabulary has finished. The next step is to create the web page and post the page on the Web. It is very easy to work with Hot Potatoes, but if the software is new to the user, the tutorial of Hot Potatoes is very detailed and helpful.
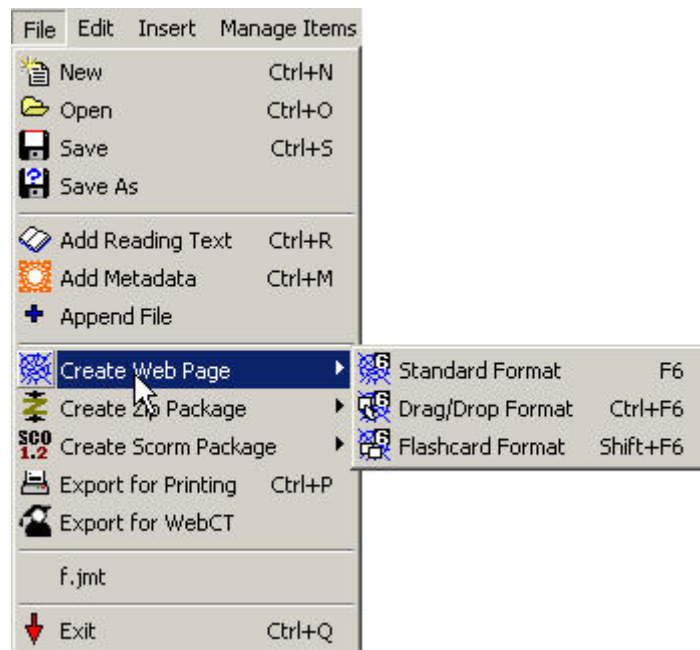
Figure 4. Creating a web page with Hot Potatoes

If the results from an exercise page are to be sent to the instructor, the CGI panel of the configuration screen can be configured. However, in order to use this feature, a CGI sript on the server should be set up. More information is available about this in the help files of Hot Potatoes.

Interface and navigation

The program's main screen contains the most frequently-used buttons, which enables any user to have a quick idea about the functions. Since the buttons have captions on them their functions are very clear, users are at ease in terms of navigation.

Help Facilities

The documents which are accessible from the website (http://www.cict.co.uk/software/gvd) and from the program's Help menu (indexed and content specific and step-by-step instructions) provide general information about the program features and other details such as downloading, pricing, and purchasing.

Easiness of operation/reliability

The software is user-friendly and it requires little time to be able to use all the functions/features. It almost never crashes and it is not a burden for any computer in terms of

harddisk space or memory requirements. It also has a 'backup database' function which helps users back up their vocabulary items/sentences in case of emergency or data loss.

Evaluation

ESL/EFL learners are said to have difficulty in using the words that they have learned inside or outside the class. Most of them try to keep vocabulary notebooks and review the vocabulary items they've already known or recently learnt. *Gerry's Vocabulary Teacher*, in my opinion, will complement the way students keep their notebooks and help them review the vocabulary any time they want. Any learner with basic computer skills will be able to benefit from this software, as it is very easy to install and use without requiring much hard drive space and computer memory. The most eye-catching feature of the software is its chosen words together with the sentences showing how these words are used. It provides learners with the opportunity to review and reinforce the most frequently used vocabulary items in academic situations in context without memorizing their meanings.

As far as teachers of English are concerned, the software helps them with a practical way of creating vocabulary worksheets for both for the classroom use as a hard copy or for the web as an interactive activity, as well. Since the program stores vocabulary items in word families, teachers can introduce the words with the basic root and move on to the derivational suffixes. Furthermore, using a headword in multiple contexts, teachers also have the chance to enable their students to benefit from use contextual clues to guess word meanings, which is necessary and vital for learners. It should also be noted that much of the vocabulary in the example sentences appears harder than the example words, thus causing difficulties in guessing word meanings. Sometimes it might be necessary to edit the example sentences and the vocabulary items. Also, although the software seems to ease this process, the burden is still on the teachers' shoulders in that how the materials will be integrated into the curriculum/tests/plans depends on them.

Moreover, teachers working with young learners may not find this software useful since it is aimed to teach academic vocabulary through sentences including proverbs from different cultures, quotations etc, not appealing to young learners. On the contrary, older teenagers or adults can benefit from this software by studying their own list of words or any vocabulary item from the units or texts in their coursebook, which is especially valuable for the kind of students who like studying on their own.

As everything has two sides, the software is lacking some features, which will hopefully be added in the upcoming versions. The manufacturer could add a multiple-choice activity option to the software, which will require learners to choose from among the words to best complete a sentence. Moreover, the definitions of the words could be added to the database so that learners can also review the meanings. Another useful feature would be for the definitions to be placed towards the end of any created output. A possible activity might also be created by requiring the learners to choose among the definitions of a given word or vice versa. Similarly, the pronunciation of the vocabulary items can also be added together with a speech engine. Finally, adding reading texts including the words in the database could constitute a challenging feature.

Recommendation

In my opinion, for any EFL/ESL learner and teacher of English, this software is a must-have application that deserves to be considered as the most useful vocabulary software. Teachers can create worksheets as repetitive exercises and meaning guessing from a context. The worksheets created with *Gerry's Vocabulary Teacher* can be used with reading passages in class and given as weekly quizzes. Also, although it is likely that students will work on the materials that are created by their teacher, they can also study their own lists of words or any vocabulary item from the units or texts in their coursebook. It is especially valuable for the kind of students who like studying on their own.

References

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Wordflash&subj=dl&tag=button