

# Identifying CEFR Levels of Words in the Hirodai Standard 6000 Vocabulary List (HiroTan)

Yuka TAKAHASHI  
Global Education Center  
Tokyo Kasei University

The Hirodai Standard 6000 Vocabulary List (HiroTan) is used in undergraduate English language courses at Hiroshima University, Japan. Developed by the university's Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education (FLaRE) in 2010, HiroTan consists of 6,000 words, divided into 4,000 Standard-level words and 2,000 Advanced-level words. The list is intended to support English language instruction, particularly in terms of vocabulary acquisition. Given the widespread adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Japan, this study aims to identify the CEFR-J levels of the words in HiroTan to assess their alignment with internationally recognized language proficiency standards. In this study, the 6,000 words in the latest version of HiroTan (3,000 from HiroTan Book 1 [2021] and 3,000 from HiroTan Book 2 [2020]) are aligned with specific CEFR-J levels using CEFR-J Wordlist Version 1.6 (Tono Laboratory, 2020). Words not found in the CEFR-J Wordlist were further analyzed using the English Vocabulary Profile C-level word list (Tono Laboratory, 2019). This process allowed the authors to understand the contents of HiroTan as well as the following: (1) whether the words in the list are at an appropriate level for learners at Hiroshima University from the perspective of the CEFR-J (A1–B2 levels) and the CEFR (C level); (2) whether the word segmentation between the Standard and Advanced levels is appropriate; and (3) which words are not included in either the CEFR-J or the CEFR (C level).

## AIMS OF THE STUDY

The Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education (FLaRE) developed HiroTan as an English language learning material for undergraduate students at Hiroshima University, aiming to enhance students' overall vocabulary acquisition. Faculty members used their intuition to select 6,000 words—4,000 in the Standard and 2,000 in the Advanced levels—drawing from several existing word lists. Therefore, to evaluate the content of the list objectively, this study used the CEFR-J Wordlist Version 1.6 (Tono Laboratory, 2020) and the CEFR C-level word list (Tono Laboratory, 2019), which serve as frameworks for assessing international English proficiency, to examine the degree of alignment. It did so to determine whether the vocabulary is appropriate for students at Hiroshima University. Accordingly, this study aimed to address the following three research questions (RQs):

RQ1: Are the words in the list at an appropriate level for learners at Hiroshima University from the perspective of the CEFR-J (A1–B2) and CEFR (C level)?

RQ2: Is the segmentation of words between the Standard and Advanced levels appropriate?

RQ3: What kinds of words are not included in either the CEFR-J or the CEFR?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: the second section reviews relevant literature, the third describes the methods used in the study, the fourth presents the results, the fifth discusses the findings in relation to the three research questions, and the sixth concludes the paper.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The CEFR has six levels. The Council of Europe (2001) defines the A level as “Basic User,” the B level as “Independent User,” and the C level as “Proficient User.” It breaks down these levels further into six stages: A1 (Breakthrough), A2 (Waystage), B1 (Threshold), B2 (Vantage), C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency), and C2 (Mastery). The B1 “Threshold” level indicates that the learner is an independent user of the language, while the C levels designate a proficient user of the target language.

The CEFR-J is a proficiency benchmark designed specifically for English education in Japan. Tono (2013) affirms that approximately 80% of Japanese English learners fall under the A level. As a result, CEFR-J focuses on these levels, further subdividing the A and B levels into more specific subcategories. The CEFR-J vocabulary list currently includes four levels: A1, A2, B1, and B2. These lists materialized from analyzing primary and secondary school English textbooks from Asia, such as Korea, China, and Taiwan (Tono, 2019).

According to Enokida et al. (2018), the words in HiroTan were developed for undergraduate students at Hiroshima University. The 6,000 words were selected based on vocabulary lists such as the following: (1) the Academic Word List (AWL; 570 words; Coxhead, 2000); (2) the Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET) list of 8,000 basic words (JACET 8000; 8,000 words; Aizawa, 2005); (3) a portion of the TOEIC® Test High-Frequency Vocabulary List (TOEIC® Test *hinsyutsu goi* list; 2,526 words; Mizumoto, 2004); and (4) the essential vocabulary list extracted from the textbook used for undergraduate English classes, namely *Communication IB/IIB, Power-Up Practice for the TOEIC® Test* (1,400 words; Enokida, Hiramoto, & Fraser, 2008). Furthermore, the authors stated that referring to multiple lists ensures that the vocabulary required for both general daily communication and academic settings is covered.

Enokida et al. (2018) explained the word selection process as follows: In total, 12,500 words were evaluated by four English lecturers who worked at FLARE. They evaluated the words on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = too difficult and 5 = too easy for first-year students at Hiroshima University. Words that received average scores in the range of 1.75–4.25 were selected; thus, 4,000 words were selected for the pilot operation in 2009, while 6,000 words were selected for full-scale use from 2010 onward, of which 2,000 were classified as Advanced and 4,000 as Standard. One feature of HiroTan is that only one part of speech is selected for each word, with one translation along with an example sentence provided (p. 113, translated by the author). Yamamoto (2012) stated that, due to limitations such as the focus on learning efficiency, content of qualification exams, textbooks used, tests conducted in class, and integration with online learning systems, the definitions of the listed words are kept to a minimum (p. 153, translated by the author). Enokida et al. (2021) explained that this vocabulary list focuses on enhancing receptive vocabulary through so-called “list learning” (Webb & Nation, 2017), and that the goal of the list of 6,000 words is to facilitate more efficient comprehension of English texts through ensuring that learners can understand the meaning of these words when they encounter them in context. To this end, each word is generally assigned only one Japanese meaning as a rule. The vocabulary in HiroTan has been continually revised and updated (p. 113, translated

**TABLE 1. Word List Referenced in the Revision**

Vocabulary List	Explanation	Word Count
New General Service List 1.01 (NGSL) Level 3	A list of basic words used in common situations	801
New Academic Word List 1.0 (NAWL)	Together with the NGSL, this list covers 92% of the Academic English Corpus (283 million words)	963
TOEIC Service List 1.1 (TSL)	Together with the NGSL, this list covers 99% of the TOEIC Corpus (1.5 million words)	1,259
Business Service List 1.01 (BSL)	Together with the NGSL, this list covers 97% of the Business English Corpus (64 million words)	1,757
TOEIC® Listening & Reading official vocabulary book	Frequently occurring words from past TOEIC® Listening and Reading Tests are extracted	1,156

*Note.* Adapted from Enokida et al. (2021) and translated by the author.

by the author), and Enokida et al. (2021) have made some revisions based on the vocabulary list in Table 1.

Both Book 1 (3,000 words) and Book 2 (3,000 words) of HiroTan are divided into two sections: Standard and Advanced. A total of 2,000 words are Standard level and 1,000 words are Advanced. The words are divided into 200-word sections, with the Standard edition ranging from a01 to a20 and the Advanced edition from b01 to b10.

## METHODS

In this study, HiroTan Books 1 and 2 were aligned with the CEFR-J Wordlist (Version 1.6) using Microsoft Excel. In the CEFR-J Wordlist, a single word is often assigned multiple parts of speech (POSS), each of which has a different CEFR-J level. By contrast, HiroTan assigns one POS and a translation to each word. This discrepancy makes it impossible to match words based solely on their surface form. To address this problem, the POS labels written in Japanese in HiroTan were converted into English, which corresponded to the CEFR-J list's POSSs. This allowed for the identification of which CEFR-J levels the words and their POSSs corresponded to in the HiroTan lists. In the CEFR-J Wordlist, HiroTan words with the same surface form and POS were looked up; then, the words that matched from among multiple CEFR-J POSSs were manually extracted.

## RESULTS

Of the 6,000 words, 14.0% of them were classified as A level, 51.4% as B level, and 34.6% as N/A. Books 1 and 2 exhibited a similar breakdown of the words in terms of CEFR-J level. In both books, 2.3–2.9% of the words were A1, 10.9–11.9% were A2, 26.3–25.4% were B1, and 23.9–26.2% were B2. In addition, 34.1–35.0% were classified as N/A. A possible reason for N/A being the largest category might be that these words are more advanced and could be classified into C level because they include academic and business-related words. Table 2 presents the classification results:

Since words classified as N/A account for large portions of the HiroTan books (34.6%), while the

**TABLE 2. Numbers and Percentages of Words in HiroTan by CEFR Level**

CEFR-J	2021_book 1		2020_book 2		Total		Total (A, B, N/A)
<b>A1</b>	69	2.3%	86	2.9%	155	2.6%	14.0%
<b>A2</b>	328	10.9%	358	11.9%	686	11.4%	
<b>B1</b>	792	26.4%	789	26.3%	1581	26.4%	51.4%
<b>B2</b>	787	26.2%	717	23.9%	1504	25.1%	
<b>N/A</b>	1024	34.1%	1050	35.0%	2074	34.6%	34.6%
<b>Total</b>	3000	100.0%	3000	100.0%	6000	100.0%	100.0%

CEFR-J Wordlist only contains words up to B2 level, the levels of the N/A words were further investigated. The EVP CEFR C-level word list (Tono Laboratory, 2019) was used to align them.

Table 3 presents the results obtained through cross-referencing the HiroTan N/A words and CEFR C1- and C2-level word lists:

**TABLE 3. CEFR C-Level Words in HT (2,074 words)**

CEFR	2021_book 1		2020_book 2		Total		Total (C, N/A)
<b>C1</b>	125	12.2%	131	12.5%	256	12.3%	20.0%
<b>C2</b>	82	8.0%	77	7.3%	159	7.7%	
<b>N/A</b>	817	79.8%	842	80.2%	1659	80.0%	80.0%
<b>Total</b>	1024	100.0%	1050	100.0%	2074	100.0%	100.0%

As Table 3 indicates, 256 of the words (12.3%) were classified as C1; 159 words were classified as C2 (7.7%); and 1,659 words (80.0%) remained N/A. Again, the breakdown of words based on their CEFR level was highly similar between Books 1 and 2, as approximately 12% were categorized as C1 and 7–8% as C2, while approximately 80% remained N/A. Since 1,659 words remained unclassified, 27.6% of the words in HiroTan are not included in the CEFR-J (A1–B2) and CEFR (C level) word lists.

As mentioned earlier, HiroTan books are divided into Standard and Advanced sections. Table 4 presents the distribution of the CEFR-J words at levels A1–B2 and CEFR words at C level in the Standard and

**TABLE 4. Classification of Words into Standard and Advanced Levels After Linking With CEFR-J/CEFR C-Levels**

	2021_book 1				2020_book 2				Total				Total (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2)	Total (A, B, C)		
	Standard		Advanced		Standard		Advanced		Standard		Advanced					
<b>A1</b>	69	3%	0	0%	85	4%	1	0%	154	4%	1	0%	155	3%	841	14%
<b>A2</b>	313	16%	15	2%	344	17%	14	1%	657	16%	29	1%	686	11%		
<b>B1</b>	660	33%	132	13%	651	33%	138	14%	1311	33%	270	14%	1581	26%	3085	51%
<b>B2</b>	500	25%	287	29%	445	22%	272	27%	945	24%	559	28%	1504	25%		
<b>C1</b>	66	3%	59	6%	81	4%	50	5%	147	4%	109	5%	256	4%	415	7%
<b>C2</b>	24	1%	58	6%	32	2%	45	5%	56	1%	103	5%	159	3%		
<b>N/A</b>	368	18%	449	45%	362	18%	480	48%	730	18%	929	46%	1659	28%	1659	28%
<b>Total</b>	2000	100%	1000	100%	2000	100%	1000	100%	4000	100%	2000	100%	6000	100%	6000	100%

Advanced sections:

Most of the words categorized as A1 or A2 were found to fall under the Standard level. Furthermore, the number of words at the Standard level tended to increase up to B1 before decreasing at B2. By contrast, the number of words at the Advanced level increased up to B2, increasing significantly between B1 and B2. Considering the number of C-level words, approximately 200 words are included at both the Standard and Advanced levels. In terms of percentages, more C-level words are included at the Advanced level than the Standard level (Standard: 5%, Advanced: 10%). Moreover, more C1 words are included than C2 words at the Standard level (C1: 4%, C2: 1%), while almost equal numbers are included for both C1 and C2 at the Advanced level (C1: 5%, C2: 5%). This tendency was also observed in Books 1 and 2. The largest difference was the rate of N/A words between Standard (130 words; 18%) and Advanced (929 words; 46%). This may indicate that N/A words include more Advanced-level words. Altogether, 4,341 words (72%) were included in the CEFR-J or CEFR C list, while 1,659 (28%) remained classified as N/A.

Next, to identify patterns, the 1,659 words marked as N/A in both the CEFR-J and CEFR C-level comparisons were examined in relation to the word lists available from Enokida et al. (2018) and Enokida et al. (2021). Specifically, the words were checked against the following accessible word lists: the AWL (570 head words, 1,541 “Sublist Families” words; Coxhead, 2000), NGSL 1.01 (2,801 words), NAWL 1.0 (963 words), TSL 1.1 (1,259 words), BSL 1.01 (1,754 words), and JACET 8000 (2003; 8,000 words). Since it was not accessible, the essential vocabulary list extracted from the Communication IB/IIB textbook, *Power-Up Practice for the TOEIC® Test* (Enokida, Hiramoto, & Fraser, 2008), TOEIC® Test High-Frequency Vocabulary List (TOEIC® Test *hinsyutsu goi* list; Mizumoto, 2004), and TOEIC® Listening & Reading Official Vocabulary Book (2019) was not used; furthermore, data from the JACET 8000 (2003) were used instead of the JACET 8000 (Aizawa, 2005). For the AWL, the analysis included 250 base words and their 2,541 word families, for a total of 2,791 words. The goal was to identify which words did not have a CEFR-J or CEFR level assigned to them. Table 5 indicates whether HiroTan words not included in the CEFR-J or CEFR C-level word lists were found in each vocabulary list:

**TABLE 5. Results of the Reference Check for the 1,659 Words in Each Word List**

	AWL & AWL family	BSL	NAWL	NGSL	TSL	JACET 8000	N/A
Words included (duplicates included)	253	466	252	29	257	1352	84
Words included (only in the list)	28	54	15	0	77	716	84
Words included (in more than two lists)				685			

In total, according to the table, 1,352 words from JACET 8000 were observed, followed by 466 from the BSL, 257 from the TSL, and 253 from the AWL word family list. These figures include duplicates. Words that were only observed in particular lists are also displayed, as 716 words from the JACET 8000, 77 from the TSL, and 54 from the BSL. Thus, a large portion of the words not included in the CEFR-J and CEFR lists are from the JACET 8000 or they are business words included in the TSL or BSL. Furthermore, 84

words remained unclassified, likely because they originated from word lists that were unavailable.

## DISCUSSION

This section presents a discussion of the findings based around each research question.

*RQ1: Are the words in the list at an appropriate level for learners at Hiroshima University from the perspective of the CEFR-J (level A1–B2) and CEFR (C-level )?*

This study found that 4,241 (72%) of the 6,000 words are included in the CEFR-J (A1–B2) or CEFR C-level word list. As shown in Table 4, the fact that approximately 50% of the words are at B1–B2 level indicates that the vocabulary list is appropriate for the undergraduate university level, with a focus on Threshold B1–B2 words (3,085 words). Excluding N/A words (2,659 words), the number of B1 words is the highest (1,581 words), which offers support for the emphasis on university-level vocabulary. The A-level words (841 words) follow. The inclusion of C-level words (415 words) suggests that the list also considers the review of A-level words and the future needs of students when they start work, where using C-level vocabulary becomes vital. Since the CEFR-J Wordlist arose from secondary and primary school English textbooks from Asian countries such as Korea, China, and Taiwan (Tono, 2019), the fact that 65.4% of HiroTan words match the CEFR-J Wordlist at A1–B2 indicates it consolidates the words students typically learn before entering university in Asia. The remaining 35% covers advanced words at the C level or those outside the CEFR-J Wordlist. This study concludes that the vocabulary list is well-suited for Hiroshima University students, as it supports university-level vocabulary acquisition, revision, and future academic or career development.

*RQ2: Is the segmentation of words between the Standard level and the Advanced level appropriate?*

Comparing Books 1 and 2, the proportions of words at each CEFR level at both the Standard and Advanced levels exhibit similar figures, which indicates that the selection process was conducted based on consistent criteria. Examining the Standard level, the number of words increased from A1 to B1 on the CEFR scale before decreasing at B2. In contrast, the words at the Advanced level, which were mostly at the B level, continued to increase from A1 to B2. The fact that most A-level words were classified under the Standard level aligns with the CEFR framework well. Regarding the B-level words, the raw number of Threshold B1 words is the highest, excluding N/A words. Among the B- level words, 2,200 words were classified as Standard and 800 as Advanced. This suggests that university-level B1–B2 words are predominantly categorized under the Standard level. As mentioned in the response to RQ1, this classification helps learners to build a foundation of university-level vocabulary, which may later facilitate their transition to using C-level or higher-level words at a professional level. For the C1 words, a greater proportion were classified as Standard, while more C2 words were classified as Advanced. This further supports the notion that the words have been categorized based on a consistent set of criteria.

*RQ3: What kind of words are not included in either the CEFR-J or the CEFR C-level word list?*

Although it was not possible to access all of the word lists related to the development and revision of HiroTan, based on the materials that could be accessed, the words in HiroTan that were not included in the CEFR-J or CEFR C-level vocabulary lists were most frequently found in the JACET 8000. These were followed by a relatively large number of words observed in the TSL and the BSL. Given that Hiroshima University sets the achievement of high TOEIC scores as a university-wide goal, the inclusion of these words is important. Additionally, acquiring the wide range of vocabulary found in the JACET 8000, which is based on the British National Corpus, is valuable for university students as they prepare to enter and excel in society. Furthermore, 84 words are thought to have been extracted from unavailable vocabulary lists.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to identify the CEFR-J levels of the words in HiroTan to obtain a deep understanding of the words in this list. The findings revealed that 4,341 (72%) of the 6,000 words were included in CEFR-J (A1–B2) or CEFR-J (C level), while 3,085 words (51%) were B1–B2 words. The number of Threshold B1 words was the highest (1,581 words) among A1–B2 words, which implies that this word list is appropriate for the university level. Furthermore, 841 A level words (14%) and 415 C-level words (7%) are also included, which supports students in reviewing basic vocabulary as well as advanced words. Such words are beneficial for university students preparing to enter the workforce. Moreover, the analysis suggests that the classification of the Standard and Advanced levels follows specific criteria. Most A1 words are included at the Standard level, with the word count increasing up to B1, while the Advanced level continues to increase up to B2. Moreover, more C2 words were found at the Advanced level than at the Standard level. In addition, 1,659 words (28%) were found not to be included in the CEFR-J or CEFR C-level word list, and a large proportion of N/A words were found in the JACET 8000 or TOEIC/business-related vocabulary lists. This further supports HiroTan’s usefulness for students of Hiroshima University, who are expected to obtain knowledge of higher-level words for their future. Although it was not possible to access all of the word lists used in HiroTan’s construction, an understanding of which words belong to each list was obtained (except for 84 words). This analysis may help to explain the content to students and teachers while also serving as motivation for students to learn vocabulary.

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## ABSTRACT

### **Identifying CEFR Levels of Words in the Hirodai Standard 6000 Vocabulary List (HiroTan)**

Yuka TAKAHASHI  
Global Education Center  
Tokyo Kasei University

The Hirodai Standard 6000 Vocabulary List (HiroTan) was developed by the Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education (FLaRE) at Hiroshima University. This study aimed to analyze the words in HiroTan and evaluate the segmentation of its Standard and Advanced levels. The words in HiroTan were aligned with specific CEFR-J levels, while the English Vocabulary Profile C-level word list (Tono Laboratory, 2019) was used to further analyze HiroTan words not listed in the CEFR-J Wordlist Version 1.6 (Tono Laboratory, 2020). The analysis confirmed the word selection to be appropriate for undergraduate students at Hiroshima University. The study found that 4,341 (72%) of the 6,000 words are included in the CEFR-J or CEFR C-level word list. The words not included in these lists were partially sourced from JACET 8000 (2003), TOEIC, or business-related vocabulary. By linking HiroTan with the CEFR-J and CEFR (C level), this study confirmed that the word selection for HiroTan has been conducted according to consistent standards, and that the levels of the words are appropriate for students at Hiroshima University.

## 要 旨

### 広大スタンダード6000語彙リスト (HiroTan) 収録単語の CEFR レベルの特定

高 橋 有 加

東京家政大学グローバル教育センター

本論文では、広島大学外国語教育研究センター (FLaRE) が開発した「Hirodai Standard 6000 Vocabulary List (HiroTan)」に含まれる単語について、CEFR-J 語彙表 Version 1.6 (東京外国語大学投野由紀夫研究室, 2020) との紐付けを試みた。CEFR-J 語彙表 (A1-B2) に含まれていなかった HiroTan の単語については、English Vocabulary Profile (EVP) の CEFR C レベル語彙表データ (東京外国語大学投野研究室, 2019) と紐づけた。本研究の目的は、HiroTan に含まれる単語がどのような単語なのかを CEFR レベルの観点から分析し、HiroTan の標準編・発展編が適切に区分されているかどうかを評価するとともに、広島大学の学生にとって適切な単語選定が行われているかを確認することである。結果として、6,000語のうち4,341語 (72%) が CEFR-J および CEFR C レベルの単語リストに含まれることがわかった。また、CEFR の単語リストに含まれていなかった単語の一部は、JACET 8000 (2003) や TOEIC 関連、またはビジネス関連の語彙から採用されていることが分かった。今回 HiroTan を CEFR-J および CEFR (C レベル) に対応付けることで、HiroTan の単語選定が一定の基準に基づいて行われていること、そしてその単語レベルが広島大学の学生にとって適切であるといえることが明らかになった。