

A combination of learning medical specialized words from a wordlist and incidental vocabulary learning

What this research was about and why it is important

Current specialized word lists for students learning English for academic purpose are developed from written materials, but spoken vocabulary may differ from written vocabulary when students communicate in seminars and lectures. There is no medical spoken word list available and current writing-based wordlists may not be adequate to assist learners in academic medical discourse. This research developed a medical spoken word list to assist learners in academic medical discourse. The research also investigated the effectiveness of incidental learning of the technical vocabulary in the field of medicine through TV programs. The result showed that medical TV programs are potential sources for incidental learning of specialized vocabulary if these programs are watched regularly and in a sequential order.

What the researchers did

- The researchers created a list of spoken technical vocabulary based upon a review of the transcripts of lectures and seminars of medical classes. They then investigated the efficiency of incidental learning of the items in this list through viewing fictional medical TV programs, such as *The Good Doctor*.
- Firstly, a corpus-driven study was conducted with a Medical Academic Spoken Corpus.
- Then items selected from the corpus analysis were checked in 2 medical dictionaries, Merriam-Webster's medical English dictionary and Taber's Cyclopedic medical dictionary. Words appearing in neither dictionary were removed.
- Two experts in the medical field were invited to rate the remaining items. Words rated as not relevant to medicine by both experts were removed from the list.
- Then the Medical Spoken Word List (MSWL) was set as the base word list in the RANGE software program that can measure how frequently MSWL words occur in the TV programs. The occurrences of MSWL words were for appearance in: (a) 1 episode; (b) season 1 of each program; (c) each program; (d) each program group in which each program has the same lexical requirement for full understanding; and (e) all 37 programs.

What the researchers found

- A total of 895 words were included in the MSWL. Most of these words were of high-frequency: 27.15% of the words were at the first 1,000-word level of Nation's British National Corpus (BNC)/Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA, 27.6% at the second 1,000-word level, and 24.47% at the third 1,000-word level.
- The results revealed that by watching a single episode, a very tiny number of MSWL word types are likely to be learnt. Most of the MSWL word types appearing in a single episode occurred fewer than five times (87.76%). However, the effect of incidental vocabulary learning is likely to remain prominent when learners have around 20 encounters of a new word.
- Even so, the findings also show that approximately all of the words in the MSWL appeared at least twenty times across all programs when all 37 programs were analyzed

Things to consider

- No intervention studies were conducted. Empirical experiments can offer further evidence to prove the power of incidental learning of specialized vocabulary by viewing medicine-related television programs.
- Multiword collocations are also an important part in spoken English in medical field, so the potential for incidental learning of commonly used multiword expressions in the medical field through watching medical topic television programs should also be examined.
- It is necessary to investigate specialized vocabulary in other speech occasions such as labs and tutorials because seminars and lectures are not the only occasions to use medical English.

Materials available from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/tesq.552>

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