

6. Academic vs. discipline-specific vocabulary

Creating a discipline-specific wordlist

Academic Word List

Before we begin, discuss the following questions about the AWL with a partner.

1. What do you know about the AWL?
2. Do you use/refer to it in class? How?
3. How important do you think it is for students to know it/know about it? Why?
4. What are its advantages? What are its disadvantages?

Advantages of students knowing the AWL

1. Words students need in wide range of academic texts
2. Exercises incorporated into Academic English lessons
3. Free online sources available (PC & Smartphone):
 - Flashcard maker
<http://orangeorapple.com/Flashcards/Default.aspx>
 - Exercises
<http://www.englishvocabularyexercises.com/>
 - Test maker
http://www.phonetain.com/Phonetain_Software/Products.htm
 - AWL highlighter
<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/alzsh3/acvocab/awlhighlighter.htm>

Time to reflect

- Do you think you spend enough time teaching academic vocabulary in the classroom?
- Do you think you will focus more on teaching your students the AWL in the future? Why/Why not?

Practical Suggestions

Problem: Does not address discipline-specific vocabulary

Solutions: (1) Buy a vocabulary book which tackles your discipline e.g. there are books/online glossaries for social scientists, lawyers, etc. (but these are rarely up to date as new words are invented and used) or (2) Create your own discipline-specific word list.

- What needed?
 - Discipline-specific texts.
 - Concordance software programme e.g. Antconc (free), Sketch engine, Wordsmith Tools.
 - Time!

6 Steps to creating a discipline-specific word list

1. Save discipline-specific journal articles as txt docs.
2. Open the txt docs in Antconc.
3. Click on create 'Word List'.
4. From top 100 most frequent words, make a list of discipline-specific vocab.

Rank	Freq	Word
1	1236	the
2	986	of
3	783	and
4	607	in
5	509	a
6	442	to
7	403	that
8	327	RNA
9	274	A
10	265	by

5. Run list through AWL Highlighter

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/alzsh3/acvocab/awlhighlighter.htm>

6. Create exercises using target language in context.

Time to reflect

1. What types of exercises could you create?
2. How useful do you think creating a discipline-specific word list would be for your students?
3. Often students find it difficult to remember new words. Can you think of different ways in which you can help your students remember the words?

List of references

- Coxhead, A. (2000). A New Academic Word List. *TESOL Quarterly* , 213-238.