

Title of Project:

A comparison of computerized and traditional techniques for learning academic vocabulary

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Summary Statement:

The proposed project explores the role of computer mediation in developing knowledge of vocabulary on the Academic Word List (AWL), a list of 570 English word families that occur frequently in academic texts across a wide variety of disciplines. Research shows that adding knowledge of this subtechnical vocabulary to a basic English lexicon of 2000 frequent words positions second language (L2) learners well for comprehending and producing university-level texts in English. Students in English for Academic Purpose (EAP) classes at two universities –one in Canada and the other in Britain --will study AWL items using a course text and take regular quizzes. Study materials to prepare for the quizzes will be offered in three formats: concordance-based activities on paper, concordance-based activities on-line, and definitions-based activities on paper.

The condition with concordance-based activities on paper generalizes to resource-poor settings where teachers may have access to on-line computers but most learners do not. The study will compare performance on tests of words studied in the paper concordancing condition to performance on words supported by concordancing activities available only on-line. This addresses an important question: Can the benefits of data-driven learning be made available to L2 learners without the large investment required to equip them with computers? The inclusion of a third activity type that is neither computer generated nor computer delivered (traditional definitions-based on paper) adds the crucial element of experimental control; the research will be able to shed light on how vocabulary learning proceeds –with and without technology.

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