

## The building blocks of a *Discipline-Specific Vocabulary Core (DSVC)*

Jenny Kemp (University of Leicester, UK)

University students need to do a great deal of reading. For second language students, this is a daunting prospect due to the vocabulary load. As readers, they need to understand around 95-98% of the words ('tokens') in a text in order to comprehend what they read, and a high proportion of this lexis is discipline specific (Hyland & Tse, 2007; Durrant, 2014).

Reports vary as to the actual amount of discipline-specific vocabulary required, depending not only on the subject but also on the methodology used - such as whether high frequency general English vocabulary (e.g. the *new-GSL* - Brezina & Gablasova, 2013) and general academic vocabulary (e.g. the *Academic Vocabulary List* - Gardner & Davies, 2014) are included or excluded. For instance, should the words *law* and *court*, which are both high frequency items generally understood by a non-expert, be excluded from a list of words for second language law students? It is probably true that for some students, such as foundation students, they should be included, whereas for doctoral students they would be known. Therefore, a word list should not only have a clearly defined purpose (Nation, 2016), but also be clearly interpretable by the user, who is unlikely to have a background in Corpus Linguistics or be an expert in word lists. Furthermore, word lists tend to be single words, *or* collocations, *or* multiword units. However, as a teacher, as well as a researcher, I am interested in all three. For example, the phrase *in (the) light of* is frequently used to connect ideas in text; and although it may be considered sub-technical, general academic vocabulary, it actually has a very specific usage in legal texts. Owing to the specific nature of the lexis under investigation, I am also interested in what the subject experts have to say about the vocabulary their students need.

The innovative idea behind the *Discipline-Specific Vocabulary Core (DSVC)* is that it will consist of separate 'building blocks'. In this way the various lexical items can more easily be incorporated into pedagogical resources. This poster will discuss the methodology being trialled to identify the vocabulary items and also illustrate the different *DSVC* building blocks with data from the *DSVC International Law* corpus, which is under construction.

Existing law corpora (e.g. Williams, 2007; Marín & Rea, 2012) are compiled from primary sources, such as law reports. The *DSVC International Law* corpus consists of a wide variety of both primary and secondary genres from postgraduate Law reading lists and is therefore much more representative of learner needs. While the focus of my research is on the vocabulary these Law students need for reading, I also maintain the view that when a student writes an essay, their main lexical resource is their reading. Thus the *DSVC International Law* corpus is intended to be used to form the basis of a range of teaching materials and other resources, including opportunities for hands-on concordancing.

## References

- Brezina, V. & Gablasova, D. (2015). Is there a core general vocabulary? Introducing the New General Service List. *Applied Linguistics*, 36 (1), 1-22.
- Durrant, P. (2014). Discipline and level specificity in university students' written vocabulary. *Applied Linguistics* 35 (3), 328-356.
- Gardner, D. & Davies, M. (2014). A New Academic Vocabulary List. *Applied Linguistics*, 35 (3), 305-327.
- Hyland, K. & Tse, P. (2007). Is there an "academic vocabulary"? *TESOL Quarterly* 41 (2). 235-253.
- Marín, M. J. & Rea, C. (2012). A corpus-based proposal for the grading of vocabulary teaching materials for the Legal English class. *Journal of Second Language Teaching and Research* 3 (1), 24-36.
- Nation, I.S.P. (2016). *Making and Using Word Lists for Language Learning and Testing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Williams, C. (2007). *Tradition and Change in Legal English: Verbal constructions in prescriptive texts*. (2nd ed.) Bern: Peter Lang.