

**THE COMPILATION OF AN ARTS ACADEMIC CORPUS FOR
SRI LANKAN UNDERGRADUATES**

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Abstract

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Higher education institutions in the Asian region have been moving towards English medium instruction in recent years. Many students have received their basic education in their mother tongue and are now grappling with problems of studying in English at tertiary level. Studies have revealed that the language problems of undergraduate students stem mainly from poor vocabulary competency. Thus it seems essential to identify the vocabulary requirements of undergraduates in order to ease language problems they face. Although the thought of amassing a significant portion of the vocabulary of a language for academic study may seem like a daunting task, research on vocabulary now suggests that 2000 high frequency words given in the General Word List and 570 academic words given in the Academic Word List cover 90 per cent of any academic text. Yet another significant phenomena vital to vocabulary knowledge is that meaning in texts is not derived through the knowledge of individual words alone. Word partnerships that are sometimes tightly fixed and sometimes relatively fixed in creating meaning also merit investigation.

The current study, therefore, examines the validity of the criticism leveled against the Academic Word List questioning the capability of one core list addressing the vocabulary needs of different disciplines. The study also sets out to investigate whether different disciplines have discipline- specific words that may occur frequently in that particular field. The research also looked at word partnerships or collocations that may occur in different subject areas.

The above issues were researched through the compilation of a specialized academic corpus. The findings revealed that 548 of the 570 words occurred in the specialized academic corpus which was compiled for this purpose. It also reveals the occurrence of subject specific keywords and collocations that occurred in the subcorpora that formed the corpus. These findings illustrate the importance of teaching the Academic Word List to students pursuing higher studies. It is recommended that academic words, keywords and collocations that occur in the reading texts of disciplines be identified and taught as a means of helping students to cope with English medium instruction at tertiary level.