IMPROVING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF STUDY-RELATED VOCABULARY

ETAS 34th ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND AGM, January 2018 - ZOFINGEN

Dr. Caroline Hyde-Simon, Zurich University of Applied Sciences

hyde@zhaw.ch

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

- Introduction
  - Context
  - Why is the selection of study-related vocabulary (SRV) such an issue?
  - Methods used at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW)

- Example of a Biotechnology (BT) text

- Small group analysis of a text from Food Technology (LM) and Facility Management (FM)

- Feedback in plenary

INTRODUCTION - Context

- UGs
- L1 CH-DE
- All content classes – in German (trend towards modules in ENG - EMI)
- But...many texts in English – as is the norm in science
- Our role: to support content modules, expand SS vocabulary

INTRODUCTION – why is this an issue?

- We are English language lecturers, not subject-specialists

- How do we choose vocabulary items which are meaningful for the study programme?

- What does 'meaningful' actually mean? Subject-specific lecturers: how to use terms in a sentence in English (= *application* is important)

- If we get it wrong ➡ dissatisfaction among both students and study-programme lecturers.

INTRODUCTION – The situation at the ZHAW

- School of Life Sciences and Facility Management – Biotechnology/Chemistry (BT/CH), Food Technology (LM), Environmental Engineering (UI), Facility Management (FM)
- Ensure meaningful selection through:
  - Collaboration with subject-specific lecturers
  - Research into the study-programmes
  - Speaking to experts in the commercial field
  - Student contributions
  - Combining SRV with EAP
- Which is the best method? Is there a 'best' method?

EXAMPLE 3rd semester text – BT

1. Read the abstract

2. Choose 10-12 'meaningful' SRV items

3. Compare your choices with a partner – do you agree?

4. Discuss – what governed your choice?

5. Study the items chosen by 2 colleagues from the ZHAW (A & B; L1 English), and by 2 ZHAW BT lecturers (C & D; non-native). How do the choices differ? Why do you think they made these choices?

EXAMPLE TEXT – BT – FEEDBACK FROM THE LECTURERS

- Text A: academic vocabulary selection
  - Prior expectations (SS should know the BT words already)
  - **Usability** value

- Text B:
  - **Usefulness** in BT

- Text C:
  - the most difficult (in the topic)
  - differentiates those who can write 'scientifically' from those who only know the **words in isolation**.

- Text D:
  - only makes sense if you learn BT words if you also explain what they mean
  - specific BT words are very **similar** in DE and ENG

OVER TO YOU…

- LM: Getting emotional about food choices
- FM: Confined spaces

1. Select your words/items (approx. 12- 15).
2. Compare your selection with the other group members.
3. Compile a list of criteria which have governed your choices as a group.
4. Prepare to feed back in the plenary.

FINAL THOUGHTS / FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- SRV item selection varies from lecturer to lecturer!

- SRV item selection varies according to the semester in which the students are studying

- Will it vary also according to text medium (i.e. spoken vs. written)?

- Is there any merit in choosing usability over usefulness? Or vice versa?

- For whom are we improving accessibility? Students? Ourselves as lecturers? Or are these inextricably linked?

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