

LEARNING STRATEGIES IN MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY

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Abstract: *This study is concerned with the learning of medical terminology by foreign students in Medical institutions. It aims to investigate the use of learning strategies in relation to medical vocabulary use. The subjects under study included 14 Indian students in Medical Academy . Participants' mid-term scores and medical terminology learning strategy questionnaire were used to inquire learners' use of learning strategies. The results of this study indicated that students in general prefer to use written repetition, verbal repetition, bilingual dictionary strategies. In addition, the students most proficient in medical terminology used various kinds of strategies more often than the less proficient students. Implications of these and other findings are discussed and suggestions are made regarding the teaching of learning strategies in medical terminology courses.*

Key Words: *medical terminology, bilingual dictionary strategies, L2 vocabulary learning strategies*

Introduction

Of interest for the present study is the learning of medical terminology by foreign students in Medical academy. We are particularly interested in learners' strategy use in the learning of medical terminology. Medical language is the language employed by medical students in writing medical records and communicating with each other. Medical students need to learn to read and write medical terminology in L2 to complete hospital admission notes, diagnosis, and orders, which, later on, physicians must read, follow in order to carry out nursing interventions and take care of their patients. For these medical students, their first step to access medical language is to learn medical words. In Medicine, students are required to take the course "Medical Terminology" to meet the demands of their future jobs. In order to help teachers to overcome the challenge of teaching medical terminology and help nursing pre-professionals learn medical terminology more effectively, the researcher is motivated to explore the learning of medical terminology. Medical terminology is a specific terminology which is used to achieve the purpose of communication in the health care field efficiently and precisely, such as in writing diagnosis and nurses' notes. Basically, medical terminology has two characteristics. First, except for the one-syllable words, most medical words are made of roots and affixes. The affixes can be classified into prefix and suffix. Any single medical term has at least one root determining its meaning and one or more prefixes or suffixes to change the part of speech or change the meaning of the word. Teachers generally use this specific word

formation to help students deal with these words. But, recognizing the word parts used to build medical terms still seems to be a major obstacle to students' learning medical terms. Moreover, using word parts occasionally has pitfalls in guessing word meaning from context.

Second, medical vocabulary is an open system with a large number of low-frequency words and newly created words. Teaching and learning all the words seem to be an impossible task. Teaching learners' vocabulary learning strategies for inferring the word meanings is more efficient than teaching every vocabulary item encountered.

Research Questions: The primary purpose of this study is to explore the learning of medical terminology by Indian students. It focuses on the frequency of use of strategy by Indian students in learning medical terminology and to identify the strategies related to success or failure in learning the target. The secondary aim was to describe the strategy use pattern by different proficiency levels.

In brief, this study attempts to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the strategies used most and least frequently by the learners in the study?
2. Which strategies are used most often by the students who are the most proficient in medical terminology?
3. Does the overall medical terminology learning strategy use vary across different proficiency levels?
4. Does the use of six categories of medical terminology learning strategy vary across different proficiency levels?

5 Literature Review

In order to get more insights on the study of medical words learning strategies, this section will first review two recent studies of L2 vocabulary learning strategies and then studies of individual medical terminology strategies.

Subjects : Medical terminology is a required subject in this first-year students , so all of these participants were taking Medical Terminology course. The class met four hour a week.

Instrument :The test for evaluating the subjects' proficiency level in the current study was the Medical Terminology mid-term exam made by teachers in the academy. This is a curriculum-specific achievement test, rather than a general proficiency test. There were 50 questions in total in the test. Subjects were required to write medical words on the basis of the English definitions of each test item.

The instrument employed for collecting data on strategy is the medical terminology learning strategies questionnaire developed by the researcher. The categories of medical terminology were based on Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy for studying vocabulary strategies. Section one contained five questions, the purpose of which was to collect such background information as subjects' English proficiency, mid-term score of medical terminology. Section two included 42 items grouped into six categories of medical terminology learning strategies:

Discussion : This section will discuss the medical terminology learning strategies of Indian students, the strategies found to used most often and least often by the foreign students who were most proficient in medical terminology.

In the present study, results indicate that there are major differences in patterns of strategy use among students of different proficiency levels. High-level learners are better at gaining knowledge of a new word; they remember more effectively; they control and evaluate their own vocabulary learning better than low-level learners. However, neither the high-level learners nor the low-level learners are good at employing social strategies to discover new meanings and learn vocabulary. These social strategies involve asking for clarification or verification, cooperating with peers, and interacting with native speakers of the target language. Since teacher-centered approach is employed by most of the teachers, students rarely have chances to discuss and cooperate with peers.

Moreover, very few students have courage to ask questions in class. This behavior might be influenced by the Indian educational system. Furthermore, in an EFL context like Indian, few chances are available for students to interact with native speakers or foreign medical staff.

When strategies used by high-level learners are compared to those by low-level learners, it is found that written repetition and verbal repetition were the most and the second most popular strategies among both high-level and low-level learners.

Conclusion : The study sought to provide valuable information concerning the strategy use of foreign students when learning medical terminology and to explore what kind of relationship exists between strategy use and proficiency in medical terminology. Findings of the study revealed that foreign students in general prefer to use written repetition, verbal repetition, bilingual dictionary strategies. In contrast, asking teacher for a new sentence including the new medical word, listening to tape of word list, and discovering new meaning from group activity are the strategies least used by learners. Like previous researchers, we found significantly greater overall use of learning strategies among more successful learners and significant differences by proficiency level in students' use of four strategy categories: determination, memory, cognitive and metacognitive. However, neither the high-level learners nor the low-level learners are good at employing social strategies to discover new meanings.

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