Computer-aided research of ESP class materials: vocabulary potential and learning opportunities

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The present study investigates the potential and resourcefulness of teacher-created pedagogical materials for English for Special Purposes (ESP) class taught to Russian undergraduates majoring at Chemical Technology in National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University. Specifically, it focuses on the vocabulary analysis contained in ESP corpus, mainly, its distribution across the corpus for acquisition of basic engineering, academic and specialized vocabulary. The motivation behind the study is concluded in the fact that ESP instructors are linguists, non-native English speaking teachers who teach the language of Chemistry in English and, therefore, they often have to rely on their intuition during the text selection and material development process. Thus, to determine the extent to which the vocabulary contained in the texts is professional and appropriate for ESP class, corpus software has been used to run the analysis (Range program). In the course of the study, the distribution of specialized vocabulary contained in ESP materials was then compared with the corpus of authentic materials used in ESP class. The results demonstrate insufficient level of text materials for professional lexis acquisition and are discussed to highlight the need for pedagogical materials to include texts of varying vocabulary types, and to optimize specialized wordlist.

Keywords: English for specific purposes, vocabulary acquisition, computer-aided research.