

Chinh Ngan Nguyen Le

Piloting SemiMed – a mini semantic visualization dictionary of semi-technical medical vocabulary: a response to semantic deficiencies in a medicine-related wordlist

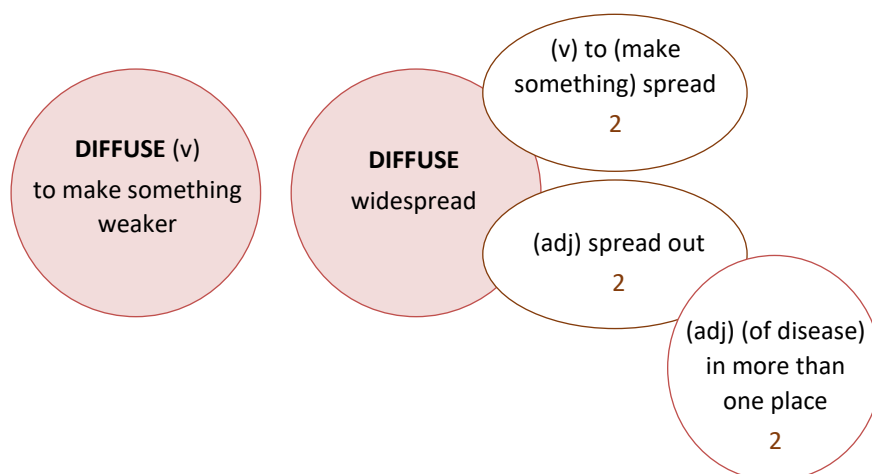


A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

Chinh Ngan Nguyen Le, a PhD student at the University of Adelaide, Australia, designed and trialled a set of pilot entries for a visual dictionary of semi-technical medical vocabulary, SemiMed, aimed at L2 English medical students.

Why? Chinh identified that one of the trickiest areas of vocabulary for medical students is not specialized technical terminology, but semi-technical vocabulary which often has both everyday, lay uses and more specific meanings used in medical contexts. Feedback from users suggests that existing learner's dictionaries often don't give enough detail about medical uses and general reference and medical dictionaries are typically difficult for English learners to navigate and understand, especially for highly polysemous words with both general and specialist meanings.

How? Chinh used an existing frequency-based medical wordlist (MWL, Hsu, 2013) as her starting point. She used corpus analysis techniques looking at both a specialist medical corpus and a corpus of general English to divide 40 words from the list into their different meanings based on key collocations. She also ranked each meaning as general or medical based on its frequency across the two corpora. She then created visual representations of each word showing its core and related meanings, along with a score, 1-3, to indicate how specialized each was.



Trial and feedback: A group of 18 EFL medical students at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Vietnam, Chinh's home country, took part in medical role plays with an existing learner's dictionary, a specialized medical dictionary, and the SemiMed entries to refer to for help. They then gave feedback on each of the resources in post-task focus groups.

Much of the feedback about SemiMed was positive with participants appreciating the simple definitions, the visual format that helped them see how general meanings interacted with medical meanings, and the technicality level scores. They also made a number of suggestions for improving future revisions, such as adding pronunciation information, illustrations, and example sentences showing the words used in context.

Future plans: Chinh hopes to develop SemiMed further, expanding the number of entries and taking into account the findings from the pilot study. She also concludes:

"This methodological approach may pave the way for future studies which attempt to improve word form frequency-based wordlists."
