

Driven by Words: Lexical Coverage of ‘Drive to Survive’ and its Potential for Incidental Vocabulary Learning

“Drive to Survive” (DtS) – a successful Netflix Original Series on Formula 1, pinnacle of motorsport – exhibits a unique blend of scripted (e.g., prearranged commentary), and unscripted (e.g., radio communications during races) texts. Given this mixture, DtS can be deemed semi-scripted, albeit leaning more towards the unscripted end.

Some studies have investigated the vocabulary demands of scripted texts like movies (Webb & Rodgers, 2009a) and television programs (Webb & Rodgers, 2009b) and of unscripted texts like spoken language (Nation, 2006) and YouTube trending videos (Candarli, 2023), as well as overall vocabulary profile of scripted and unscripted television programs (Shahriari & Motamedynia, 2022). However, the vocabulary demands of semi-scripted television programs and their potential for incidentally learning low-frequency and academic spoken words remain unexplored.

To this end, 50 episodes of DtS consisting of 236,543 tokens were analyzed with AntWordProfiler (Anthony, 2021). Knowledge of the most frequent 2,000 word families plus proper nouns, transparent compound nouns, marginal words, abbreviations and foreign words lists accounted for 94.61% lexical coverage in the corpus, comfortably surpassing the 90% threshold, sufficient for good viewing comprehension (Durbahn et al., 2020). 95% coverage was reached at the 3,000 word families level plus supplementary lists.

Furthermore, DtS holds some potential for learning low-frequency words as 12% of them are encountered at least 5 times in the series, thus aligning with figures found in television programs (Webb & Rodgers, 2009b). Finally, the extent to which DtS holds potential for incidentally learning academic spoken words was examined, too. The results indicated a relatively promising potential for learning academic spoken words these/them. These findings altogether suggest that L2 learners can rather easily follow DtS and that they can incidentally gain knowledge of low-frequency and academic spoken words. Overall, the present study has implications for vocabulary development through extensive viewing.

Keywords: audiovisual input; extensive viewing; informal language learning

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