After EAP courses, what next? Students' independent use of corpora

Maggie Charles
Oxford University Language Centre
maggie.charles@lang.ox.ac.uk

Definitions

- **Independent use** refers to students' use of their DIY corpus on their own after the end of the corpus course

- **Do-it-yourself (DIY) corpora** are corpora built individually by students using research articles in their own field

Phases of the Research

1. Introduction of corpus work on Academic Writing Course for international graduates

2. Administration of on-line questionnaire 12 months later

3. Data aggregated for 5 years 2009 – 2013

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Corpus Course

- 1 weekly 2-hour session

- Course duration of 6 weeks

- 5-7 parallel multidisciplinary classes

- 10-16 students in each class

- Open access and not assessed

- Taught by 3 tutors

UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Aims of the Corpus Course

- Explore disciplinary discourse

- Individualise academic writing instruction

- Foster student autonomy

- Provide a resource for future independent use (Charles 2012, 2014)

UNIVERSITY OF **OXFORD**

Corpus Course Programme

1.	Problem-solving with hands-on concordancing	Preposition patterns, collocation	Concordancing
2.	Building your corpus and referring to the literature	Citation patterns	Corpus-Building
3.	Investigating self-reference	First person forms (I, we)	Clusters
4.	Making and countering arguments	Linking adverbs	Word List
5.	Making and modifying claims	Reporting verbs, adjectives, adverbs	Collocates
6.	Defending your research against criticism	Subordination and Co-ordination	Context Searching

Students' Corpus Experience

- Students built corpora from research articles in their own fields (Charles 2012; Lee & Swales 2006)

- Software: AntConc (e.g. Anthony 2014)

- Tools: Concordancer, Word List, Collocates, Clusters

- Students retrieved, interpreted and discussed their corpus data (Charles 2007, 2012)

UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Research Questions

- To what extent do learners use their DIY corpus independently after the course?

- What is the main purpose of independent use?

- What are students' attitudes to DIY corpus-building and use?

UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Data for this Study

- On-line survey

- Questions on corpus use, purpose, future intentions, attitudes etc.

- Sent 12 months after completion of the course

- 134 replies

Participants
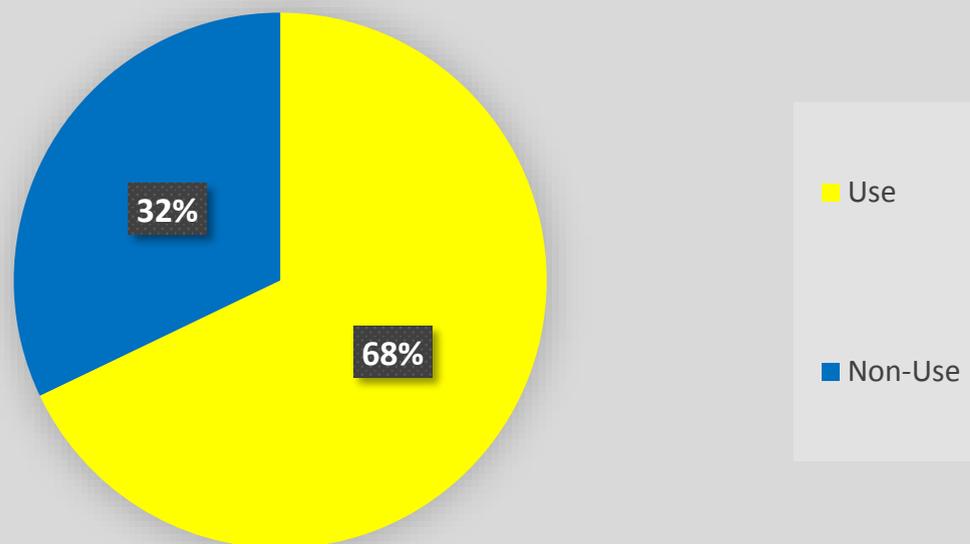
Degree Level

Doctoral 60%
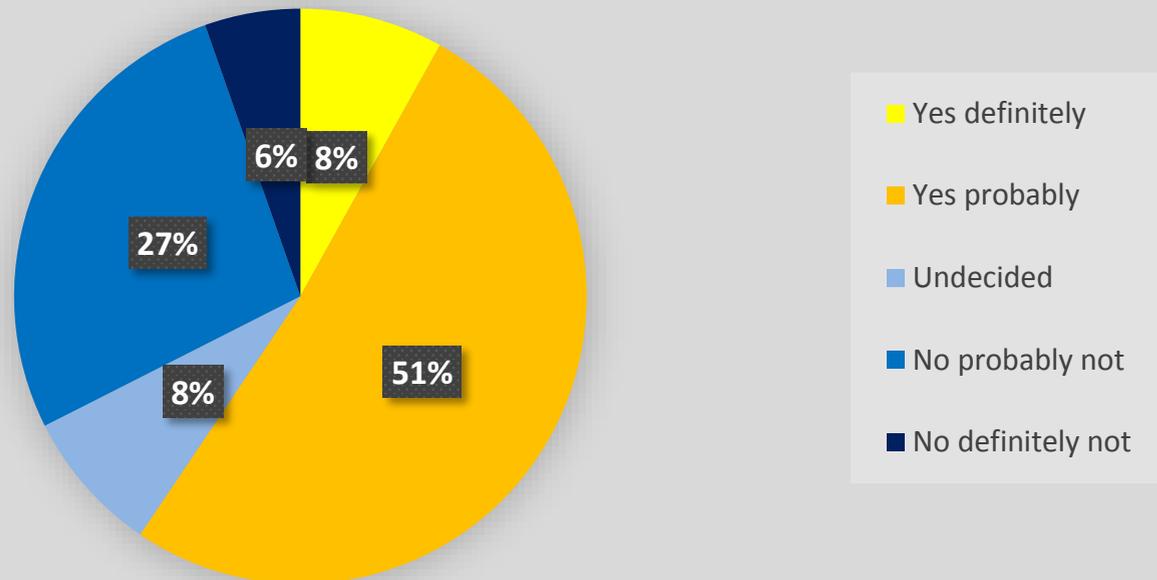
Master's 30%

Other 10%

Field
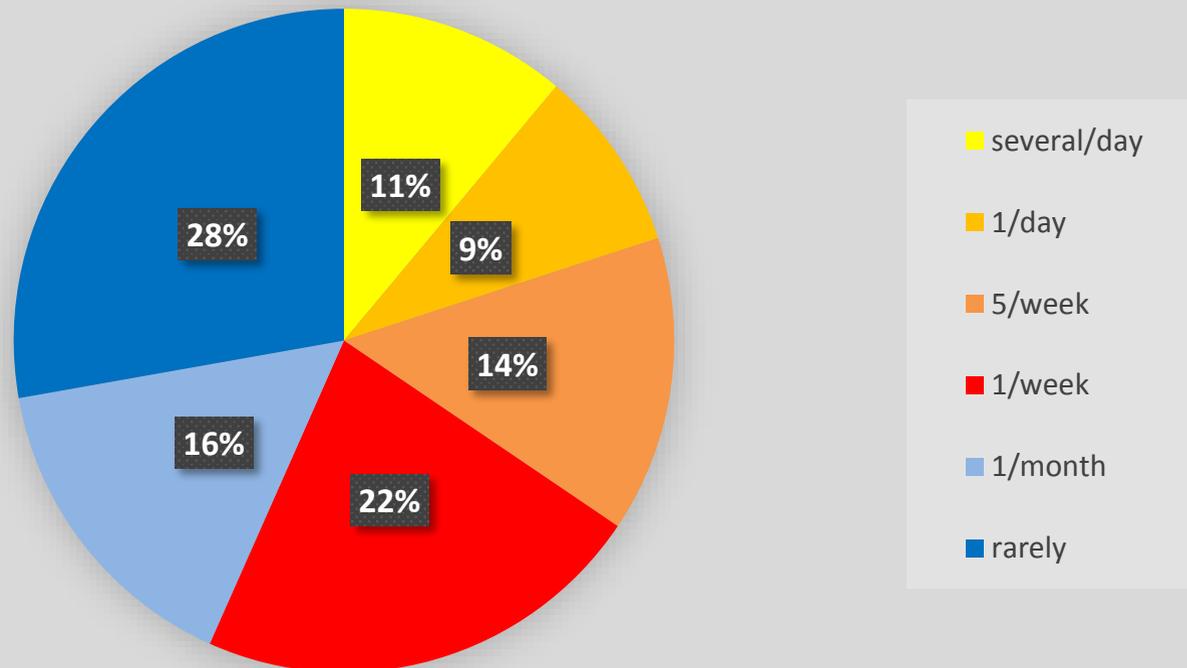
Natural Science 55%

Social Science 30%

Humanities 15%

Have you used your DIY corpus at any time since the course ended? (*n* = 134)

32%

68%

Use

Non-Use

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Non-Users: Do you intend to use your DIY corpus in the future? (n = 39)

Legend:
- Yes definitely
- Yes probably
- Undecided
- No probably not
- No definitely not

6% 8%
27%
8%
51%

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Users: How frequently do/did you use your DIY corpus? (*n* = 90)

Legend:
- several/day
- 1/day
- 5/week
- 1/week
- 1/month
- rarely

Pie chart values: 11%, 9%, 14%, 22%, 16%, 28%

Frequent and Infrequent Users

Frequent users: 1 per week or more

51 (57%)

Infrequent users: 1 per month or less

39 (43%)

UNIVERSITY OF **OXFORD**

Has the use of your DIY corpus helped to improve your academic writing? (*n* = 90)

2%

6%

38%

54%

- Yes definitely
- Yes probably
- Undecided
- No probably not
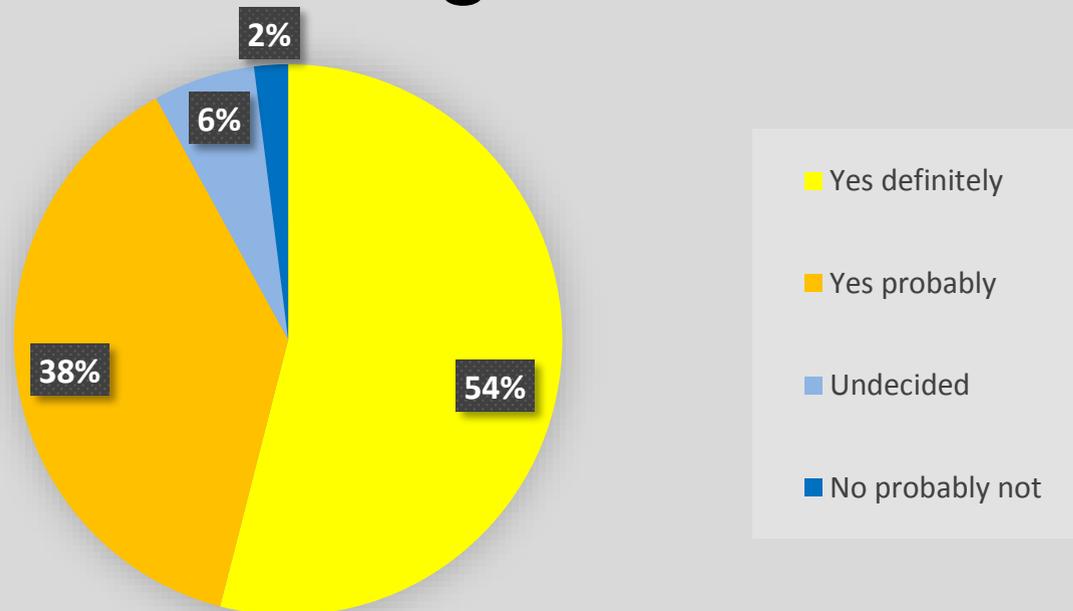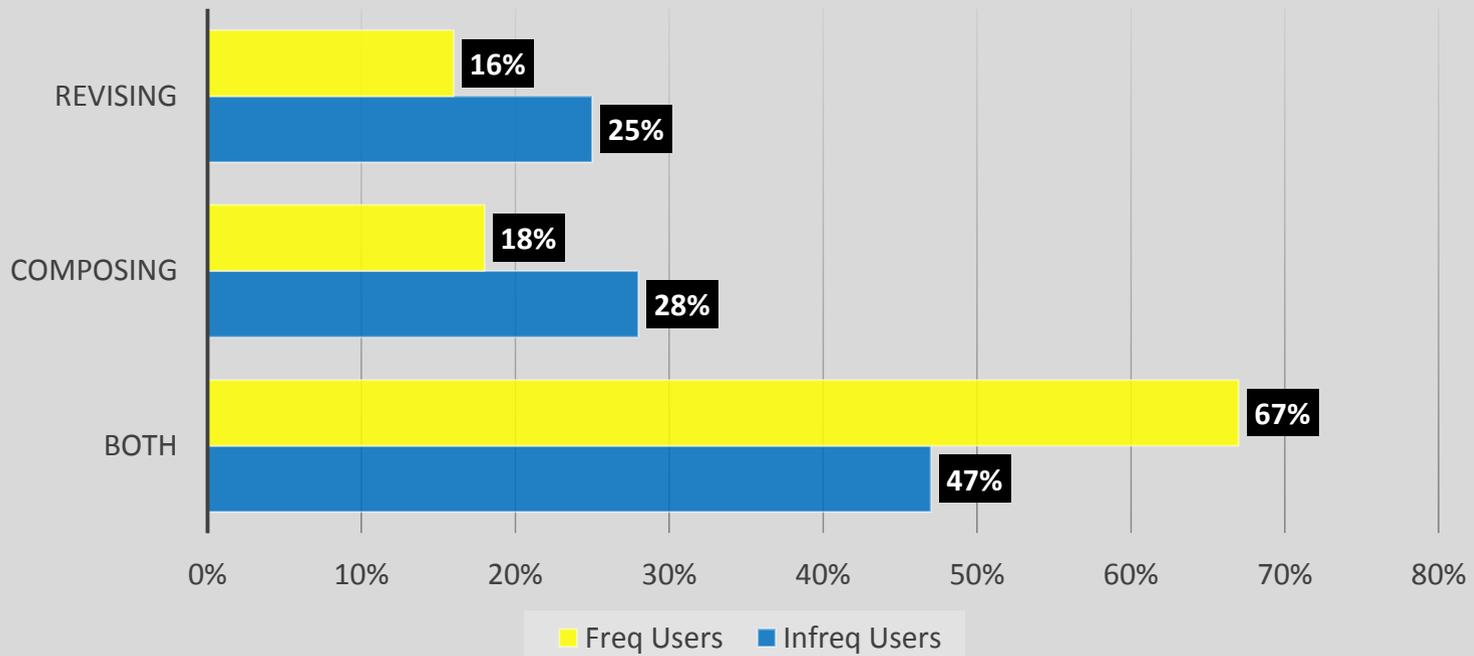
Improvement in Writing: Frequent and Infrequent Users
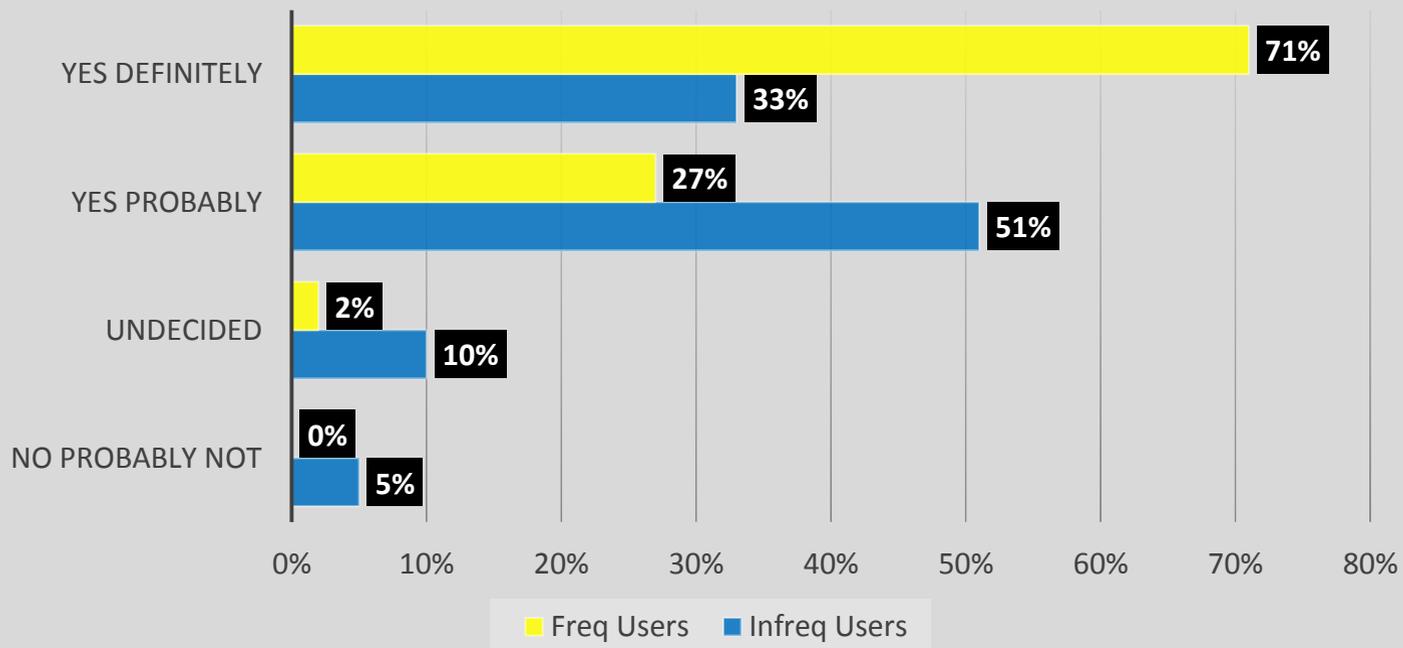
Improvement in Writing: Frequent and Infrequent Users

- Significant difference between frequent and infrequent users ($\chi^2 = 14.3$, $p = 0.003$)

- Frequent users are more confident that corpus use improved their writing

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

What was the main purpose of your DIY corpus use? ($n = 87$)
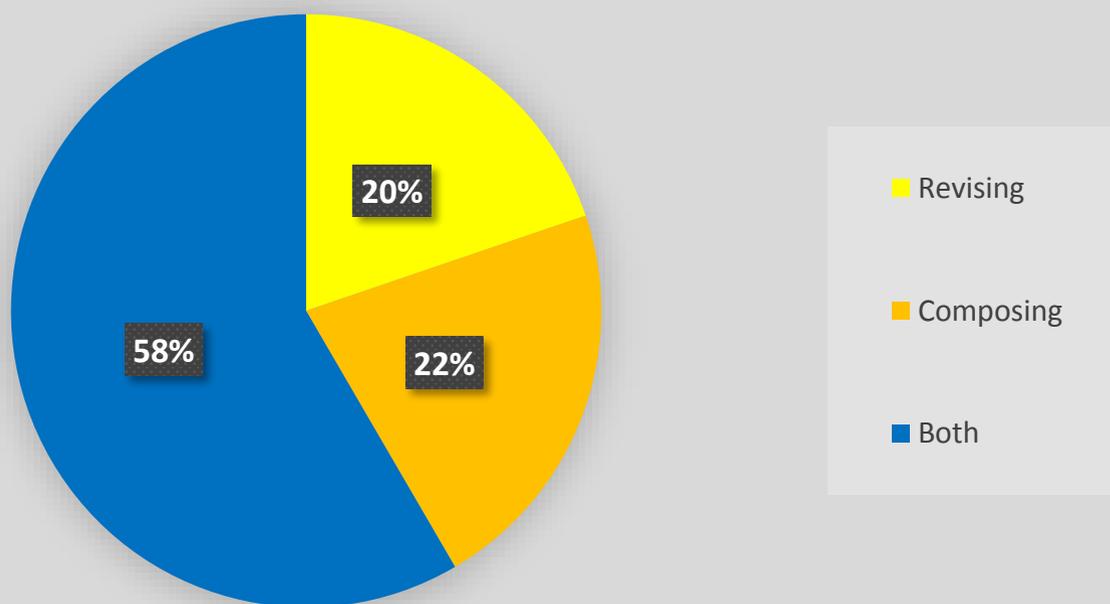
- Revising
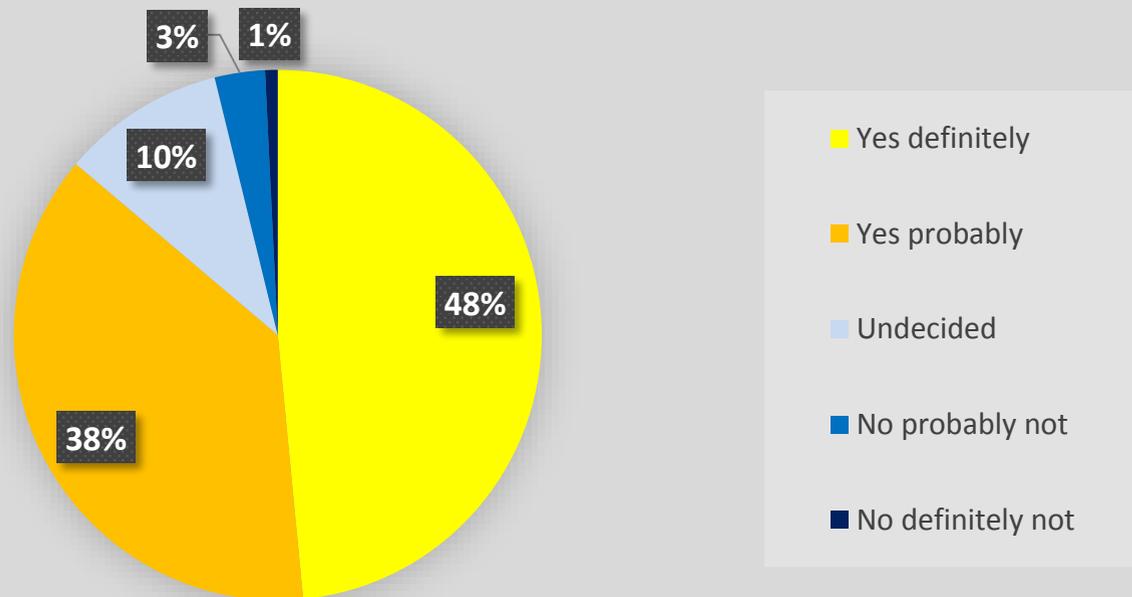- Composing
- Both

20%

22%

58%

Purpose of Corpus Use: Frequent and Infrequent Users

UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD
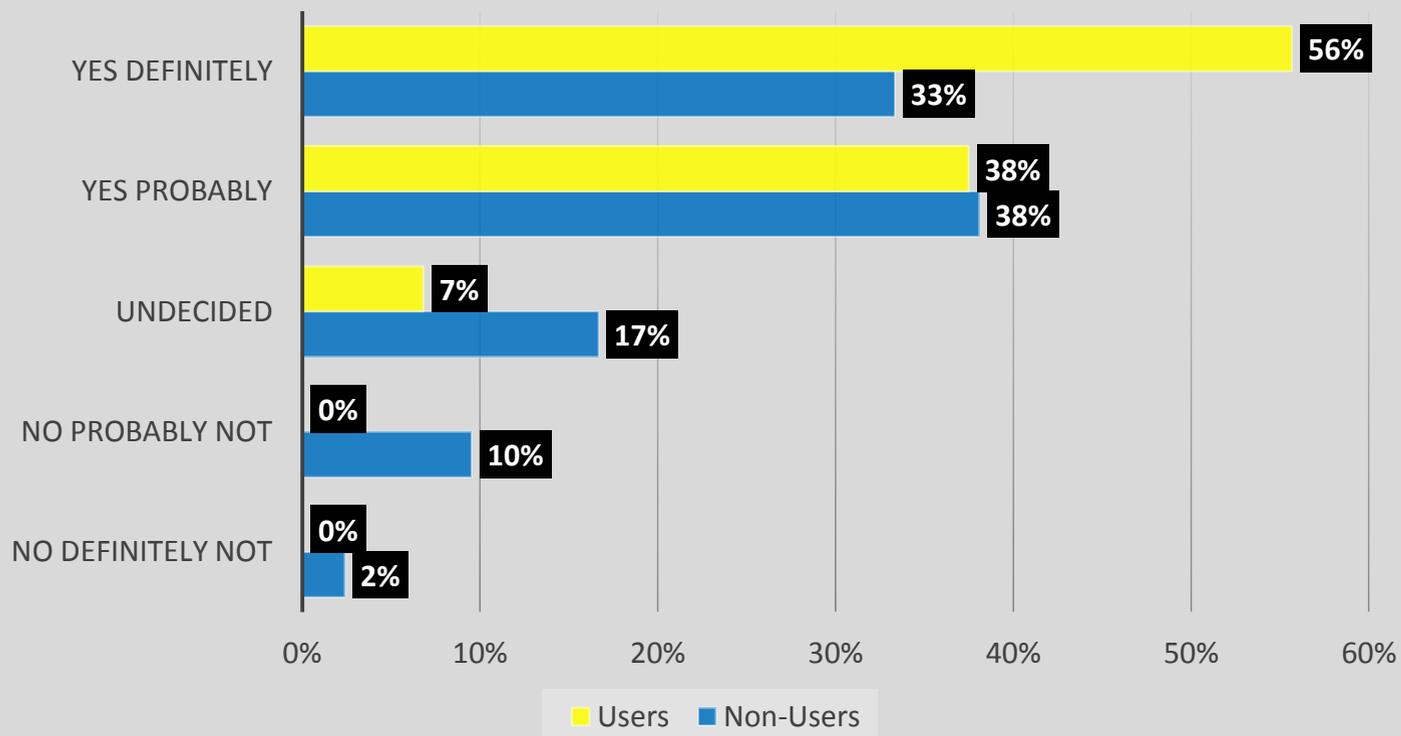
Purpose of Corpus Use: Frequent and Infrequent Users

- No significant difference between frequent and infrequent users ($\chi^2 = 3.29$, $p = 0.193$)

- Frequent and infrequent users have similar purposes of corpus use

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Would you recommend other international students to build a DIY corpus? (*n* = 130)

3% 1%
10%
48%
38%

- Yes definitely
- Yes probably
- Undecided
- No probably not
- No definitely not

Recommend Corpus-Building: Users and Non-Users (*n* = 130)

Recommend Corpus-Building: Users and Non-Users

- Significant difference between users and non-users (x^2 = 16.2, p = 0.003)

- Users are more likely to recommend corpus building

To Sum Up: One Year On

Most learners
- use their DIY corpus independently (68%)

- would recommend DIY corpus building (86%)

Most independent users
- consult their DIY corpus frequently (57%)

Frequent users
- are more confident about their improvement in writing

Implications: Issues, Challenges and Solutions

- Students have long-term and short-term needs

- Corpus competence serves both

- DIY corpora are free, quick to build, easy to consult

- They offer an individualised resource for independent learning

References

Anthony, L. (2014), AntConc (Version 3.4.3) [Computer software]. Retrieved from: http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc_index.html.

Charles, M. (2007). Reconciling top-down and bottom-up approaches to graduate writing: Using a corpus to teach rhetorical functions. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *6*(4), 289–302.

Charles, M. (2012), 'Proper vocabulary and juicy collocations': EAP students evaluate do-it-yourself corpus-building. *English for Specific Purposes 31*, 93-102.

Charles, M. (2014), Getting the corpus habit: EAP students' long-term use of personal corpora. *English for Specific Purposes 35*, 30-40

Lee, D., & Swales, J. (2006). A corpus-based EAP course for NNS doctoral students: Moving from available specialized corpora to self-compiled corpora. *English for Specific Purposes*, *25*(1), 56–75.