

CONCORDANCE TOOLS FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS STUDENTS

Why and How

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OUTLINE

- ◉ My background as concordance user
- ◉ How I tried to teach my students
- ◉ How (well) it worked
- ◉ Suggestions

MY CONCORDANCER JOURNEY

- ◉ Impetus 1: 2008, international student -
“Teacher, how do I know which preposition to use with a given verb?”
 - ◉ Impetus 2: 2012, MA TESOL student -
assignment on corpora
 - ◉ Impetus 3: 2013, EAP practitioner - a workshop on using IntelliText
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- Effective use requires knowledge!
 - (e.g. Yoon, 2011)
 - “emic” (user) and “etic” (teacher) perspective

CONTEXT - WHO?

- First-year business students on a pathway programme
 - “Advanced-level students”?
 - Charles (2014:31): “Level of English and the extent of training and support available”
- 2 groups (15 students each)
 - Group 1: IELTS 6.5-8.0
 - Group 2: IELTS 6.0

HOW?

- ⊙ Input session - demo on PowerPoint (Lextutor and IntelliText)
 - “Reference tools”, rather than “Research tools” (Hyland, 2003:170)
- ⊙ Handout with slides and space to record results
 - “learning of individual items” (Charles, 2014:30)
- ⊙ 2 computer lab sessions
- ⊙ Follow-up questionnaire

INPUT -

WHY USE CONCORDANCERS?

- ⊙ more information than a dictionary
- ⊙ see words in context
- ⊙ examples of grammatical structure
 - “assert” plus *that*-clause or noun phrase?
- ⊙ prepositions in phrasal verbs
 - “consist in” or “consist of”? Difference?
- ⊙ collocations
 - Which verb with “problem”?

INPUT - COMPARISON OF INTERFACES

◉ Lextutor:

- Quick and easy
- For single-word queries
- To **confirm** immediate collocations

◉ IntelliText:

- Takes a bit of clicking to access the corpus
- For more **sophisticated** queries
 - Two-word queries; non-immediate collocations; to check prepositions
 - Access to the full BNC (British National Corpus) -> much broader basis for the search

COMPUTER SESSIONS

- Students brought own texts (assignments due a few days later)

2 problems:

- Formulating appropriate search queries
- IntelliText does not like Internet Explorer

QUESTIONNAIRE - WHY?

- To determine reasons for (non-)uptake
- To see if there were differences between the levels
- To see which tool students found more useful

QUESTIONNAIRE - OUTCOME

- ◉ Uptake higher in Group 2
- ◉ Generally happy with materials but more practice/guidance (“more opportunities to practise under teacher’s instruction”)
- ◉ Most students said “useful”, esp. for collocations; “a fast and accurate tool for checking my grammar”
- ◉ “searching for other words that can fit a purpose”

QUESTIONNAIRE - OUTCOME

- Interface too complicated/confusing (esp. IntelliText):
 - “These tools are not user-friendly”
 - “not convenient”
- Use of other tools (e-dictionaries)
- “These tools can’t help to me at this stage of academy.” (Group 1)
 - English language level?
 - Do First-years not have to write “perfect” assignments?

EVALUATION - “PROS”

- ⦿ Use in classroom (ad hoc or planned)
- ⦿ Give for homework
- ⦿ Remind students that they can find out for themselves

EVALUATION - “CONS”

- The wrong kind of students?
 - Would it work better with research graduates?
 - Most studies on graduate students (Yoon, 2011)
 - Level?
- earlier in the course “so students will have the habit”
- Takes planning, class time and teacher experience

SUMMARY

- ◉ Concordance use takes perseverance (teachers AND learners)
- ◉ User-friendliness (or lack thereof) seems to be the main issue preventing uptake
 - Smartphone app?
- ◉ Also possible with first-years
- ◉ Worth it, even if just for a few students or with delayed uptake:

GROUP 2 STUDENT:

“Actually I found Compleat Lexical Tutor is quite useful, as I use it very often. From my previous assignments, I used it for checking my grammar. For instance, I use it when I am not sure what preposition is followed after the verb. I use Lexical not only for my assignments, but also emails. Moreover, I use it in many ways, and I think that it is a useful tool for making my writing more accurately. Lexical is a fast and accurate tool for checking my grammar.”

THANK YOU

References:

- ◉ M. Charles (2014). “Getting the corpus habit: EAP students’ long-term use of personal corpora”, *ESP* 35 (1), 30-40.
- ◉ C. Yoon (2011). “Concordancing in L2 writing class: An overview of research and issues”, *JEAP* 10 (2), 120-139.
- ◉ K. Hyland (2003). *Second language writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.