The use of corpora

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Corpora have a central role to play in our understanding of language. Over the last three decades we have seen corpus-based approaches take off in many areas of linguistics.

They are valuable for language learning and teaching, as has been shown in relation to the preparation of learners' dictionaries and teaching materials. Some language teachers have used them directly with students, but while there have been some successes, 'corpora in the classroom' have not taken off as corpora in other areas of linguistics have.

Most attempts to use corpora in the classroom have been through showing learners concordances. The problem with this is that most concordances are too difficult for most language learners — they are scared off. However corpora can be used in the classroom in a number of other ways that are not based around concordances. First of all, we say what a corpus is.

A corpus is a collection of texts. We call it a corpus when we use it for linguistic or literary research. An approach to linguistics based on a corpus has blossomed since the advent of the computer, for three reasons:

· A computer can be used for finding, counting and displaying all instances of a word (or phrase or other pattern). Before the computer, there were vast amounts of finding and counting to be done by hand before you had the data for the research question

· As more and more people do more and more of their writing on computers, texts have started to be available electronically, making corpus collection viable on a scale not previously imaginable. The costs of corpus creation have fallen dramatically

Computer programs to support the process have become available. Firstly, concordancers, which let you see all examples, in context, of a search term, as in Fig

Diterranean holiday 'WASTE' of time! Dad had said. No one ever wins those.

As they sit around WASTE lot passing muscatel which warms each in his sour sheAnd so it was WASTE crying over spilled milk. I think this is where we

He thought it was a WASTE of light to have both eyes open; why not save the ligh

Doilng this, then it is a WASTE of money to install it, no matter what attractive

As it was such a WASTE of time, you presumably won't want to come.

because it would be WASTE of a public money to put him on probation

misunderstood is WASTE of time. Until our Moscow experience, I had not

inevitably leads to a WASTE of nursing resources. The Auditor Generals' criticism [1]

The searching task from a corpus may be too overwhelming for beginners or young learners who do not know much about computers. Learners often become demotivated or frustrated because of the enormous data produced by the concordance. However, teachers can still utilize a suitable corpus and create a concordance sheet for students so they do not need to encounter the enormous data by themselves. [2]

After distributing the concordance sheet, teachers can ask students to choose several examples that are meaningful to them and keep those examples in their language diaries. The purpose is to engage learners in exploring and noticing the language contexts; during the process of writing down those examples, learners are expected to undergo a cognitive process of digesting the language input. In some books it is given verity texts, by using this teaching skill, he found his students not only developed their lexical knowledge but improved their writing skill.

Teachers can involve learners in a classroom project. They can choose some interesting stories for students as homework; learners are asked to use markers to write down unknown words on vocabulary cards during the process of reading.

Teachers can prepare two boxes in the classroom: unknown word box and learned word box. Students can put their colourful word cards in the unknown word box anytime when they come to class and teachers can choose at least 10 words from the unknown word box as a classroom weekly project, in which students are asked to search for examples from corpora and share the search result with the whole class.As soon as students learn and retain the target words, teachers can put the word cards into the learned word box or paste it on the classroom wall.

Teachers can design a gap filling task for students to do in pairs. By giving students a learning task, teachers can efficiently control and monitor students' learning. Teachers can use the authentic contexts searched from corpora to compose a gap-filling sheet for students to work on; for example, if the target word for the class is 'medicine', teachers may want to present several collocations such like use medicine, take medicine, and prescribed medicine.

While learning words or collecting data about words, you may use corpora. There are two types of making concordance, one of them searching by on line sites or tools and doing by hand.

Bibliography

1. www.lextutor.ca
2. Sinclair, J. 2003. Reading Concordances. Longman/Pearson, London/New York.