Corpus linguistic methods in a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program

The purpose of this session is to describe the embedding of corpus linguistic methods in a TESOL master's program.

Despite efforts to encourage corpora in classrooms (Aijmer, 2009; Bennett, 2010; Braun, 2009; O'Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007; Reppen, 2010; Römer, 2011) the use of corpora by teachers "is still a rare occurrence" (Granath, 2009, p. 47). There are corpus-informed reference books and textbooks (Bennett, 2010; Huttner, Smit, Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2009) and the use of corpora in curriculum design (O'Donnell, 2013), but there is "some resistance toward corpora from students, teachers, and materials writers" (Römer, 2011, p. 206).   It has been argued that "Many in-service teachers feel overwhelmed by the task of learning to access online corpora, conduct successful searches …, understand the output, and translate that information into useful and effective teaching materials" (Heather, and Helt, 2012, p. 418-419).

Obstacles that may prevent teachers from using corpora include a lack of knowledge about corpora and corpus methods. Corpus methods needed by teachers include the ability to choose an appropriate corpus; formulate inquiries; use corpus syntax, including parts of speech tags, wildcards, and symbols; and interpret corpus data such as relative frequencies, concordances, and patterns in KWIC searches (Braun, 2009; Frankenberg-Garcia, 2010; Heather & Helt, 2012, p. 415).

One step to promote corpora in the classroom is the use of corpora and corpus methods in teacher education programs (Huttner et al, 2009; Römer, 2009). General guidelines for teacher training in corpus methodology were proposed by Guichon & Hauck (2011, p. 192):

- Embed corpora use all along the training program
- Anchor technology training in a specific setting
- Focus on development of transferrable competencies
- Develop basic technical skills rather than skills in a specific program
- Put pedagogical objectives before technological ones
- Adopt constructivist or socio-constructivist approaches to language learning
- Develop collaboration skills

The presenter will describe how the use of corpus methods, primarily with the freely available Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies, 2008), has been embedded into a TESOL master's program so that use of corpus methods are an expected part everyday language teaching and learning. The presenter will describe incidental uses of corpus methods that arise as part of normal graduate classroom activities as well as a deliberate series of assignments that develop the skills for corpus literacy – "the ability to use corpora … for language analysis and instruction" (Heather & Helt, 2012, p. 415).

Specific corpus methods addressed in this presentation include keywords, word frequency levels and lists, POS tags, collocations, KWIC searches, n-grams, and common corpus statistics. Throughout the presentation it will be emphasized that corpus linguistics methods complement traditional linguistic analysis, and the study of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and language acquisition in a teacher education program. The role of corpus methods in the classroom is to inform intuitions about language and to determine what is probable so that teachers are able "to manipulate language corpora for their own pedagogic ends (O'Keeffe & Farr, 2003, p. 412). That is, they are able to use corpus methods for practical classroom purposes.

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