



### THE USE OF CONCORDANCE AND CORPORA IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

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#### Annotation

The use of a concordance by the language learner to investigate vocabulary and structure in the target language is unfortunately in its infancy. Some research has attempted to promote this idea, but the potential benefit of concordances and hands-on learning still requires exploration. Although several studies have been conducted in order to determine the effectiveness of corpora on foreign language learning, most of these studies investigated the utility of concordances to practice one specific skill.

**Keywords:** concordance lines, awareness-raising, writing, grammar, vocabulary acquisition, learner-friendly, high frequency, technical, academic.

#### The importance of Concordance Lines in Writing

Writing offers great opportunities for students to reflect on their own language talents and to notice the deficits in their own inter-language. While struggling to produce language, learners need to be supported with scaffolding. Legenhausen (2011) argues that “learners also need to be encouraged to pay attention to formal structures but without being explicitly taught or instructed”. Therefore, there is great need for guidance by the teacher when students are writing. Resorting to authentic data through concordance tools might be a good solution. The studies conducted with an emphasis on writing, mainly aimed to find out whether concordance tools were helpful for learners in the production of their written output. The study conducted by Anthony (2006), who was about the role of concordance in writing, is a good example. In the study, foreign language learners tried to find out the ways in which language was used in natural contexts. In the study it was found that exposing foreign language learners to language via context is more beneficial compared to the out-of-context language. Similarly, Yoon’s (2008) study with six foreign language learners tried to investigate the effect of concordance on foreign language learners’ writings. It was reported that concordance could increase the knowledge of collocations of foreign language learners and support writing development. Ying and Hendricks (2003) conducted a study in which they tried to raise the foreign language learners’ collocation repertoire through collocation awareness raising activities and they investigated its effect on foreign language learners’ writing. They concluded that collocation awareness-raising increased the quality of the foreign language learners’ work. Ying (2009) performed another study with Chinese foreign language learners by himself this time. He examined the relation between collocations and coherence in writing. It was concluded that there is a relationship between the correct use of collocations and coherence in writing. If



collocation knowledge of foreign language learners could be developed with the use of corpus and concordances, foreign language proficiency could rise and the writings of the students would become more fluent, precise, and meaningful because the learners would have background knowledge about the necessary collocations. Teaching collocations as claimed by Cowie (1981) facilitates foreign language writing by making it easier, more precise, and more natural.

### **The importance of Concordance Lines in Grammar**

There are very few studies on the use of concordance in grammar instruction. Mull's (2013) study investigates what learners are able to accomplish when asked to investigate an English corpus with a concordance in order to correct grammar errors in an essay. In the study, participants' reactions to the software and to analyzing the target language autonomously were also examined. The study was conducted with 30 minutes of training on the concordance. The findings of the study have revealed that all participants expressed an interest in using a concordance during their writing process. Therefore, it was suggested that concordance had a potential value for autonomous language investigation.

Vannestal and Lindquist's (2007) study explored advanced proficiency level EFL learners' attitudes towards using concordance in grammar learning. The researchers also tried to determine the effects of corpora on the learners' motivation to learn grammar. To conduct the study, two trials were designed. Vannestal and Lindquist's study (2007) showed that advanced level language learners used the concordance for increasing their motivation for writing texts in English rather than learning some grammar points to improve their knowledge of these grammar points.

### **The importance of Concordance Lines in Vocabulary**

Corpora and concordance tools can be used to determine the collocation relationships among words. Moreover, corpora based research may present more reliable and quantitative data compared to the individual studies (Hunston, 2002).

Sun and Wang (2003) conducted a study in an online environment in Taiwan, with a group of 81 junior high participants. Researchers focused on how vocabulary acquisition was influenced by three different online concordance sites. They focused on verb and preposition collocations. Research findings have suggested that the score was much higher in the experimental group than that of the control group in terms of high-frequency words; however, when low-frequency words were considered there was no discrepancy between the two groups.

Cobb (1997) attempted to find out how it is possible to obtain measurable findings from vocabulary acquisition from concordance output software. He discussed to what extent concordance output software relied on vocabulary learning in an off line setting at the University of Kaboos, in Omman. Koosha (2006) investigated the effect of corpus on the collocation learning of Iranian foreign language learners. The area of investigation was collocations of prepositions. The results of the study were quite positive in comparison with traditional methods.



### How to Teach Vocabulary

What constitutes a “word” varies greatly in the literature (Gardner, 2007). The terms word, vocabulary item, and lexical item are used interchangeably. Using Nation’s (2001) scheme there are four major groups: a) high frequency, b) academic, c) technical d) low frequency word families. When it comes to the question of how to teach these words, the literature says that conceptually difficult words require a different teaching method, with their multiple, but more learner-friendly meanings (Nation, 2008; Stahl, 2005). Learner use of corpora is premised on the fact that exposure to a word in different contexts helps learners develop a greater sense of the meaning and a better retention of vocabulary items via repeated exposure. So, it could be argued that modern corpus linguistics has been highly influential in identifying lexical phenomena by electronic tools for on-the-screen study of the language. As a tool, the concordance allows a key word to be examined in multiple contexts, eliminating the space and time delays between word encounters that normally occur in actual spoken or written language (Gardner, 2013). Indeed, Frankenberg-Garcia (2012) found that multiple examples are more effective than a single one in helping learners understand new words. It takes more than one concordance line to help figure out what a word means on behalf of learners because according to noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990), language input does not become intake unless it is consciously registered. There are two separate processes involved here: first noticing, and second, converting the input that has been noticed into intake. Hereby, the corpus approach does exactly the same thing by provision of an authentic discovery-based learning environment as opposed to the more traditional deductive way of teaching and learning in which learners act as “language researchers” or “language detectives” analyzing and discovering actively lexical and grammatical usages on their own.

### Conclusion

Similarly, Hulstijn and Laufer’s (2001) involvement load hypothesis suggests that if the involvement load is high, the students are more likely to learn and retain vocabulary items. However, the need for particular items should be determined by the learner, not the teacher. So within the current design of this study not only vocabulary learning is facilitated by repeated exposure to words, but also the principles of vocabulary teaching and testing have been justified.

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