Introducing in-service English language teachers to corpus-assisted academic writing pedagogy: A Hong Kong case

Laurence Anthony (Waseda University, Japan), Meilin Chen (City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong), and John Flowerdew (Lancaster University, UK)

There is now a consensus that machine-readable corpora have revolutionised language teaching in different ways (Boulton, 2011; L. Flowerdew, 2008; Sinclair, 2001; Yoon, 2011). Remarkable progress has been seen in the indirect corpus application in language teaching (e.g. numerous corpus-informed dictionaries, grammar books and textbooks in the past 15 years or so). The direct use of corpora in language teaching (also known as data-driven learning, [Johns, 1991]), on the other hand, has been relatively rare, despite considerable progress in the academic community (Charles, 2011, 2012, 2015; J. Flowerdew & Wang, 2016; L. Flowerdew, 2015; Lee & Swales, 2006; Poole, 2016; Tono et al., 2014; Yoon & Jo, 2014; see Boulton & Cobb, 2017). Surveys have shown that it is not a common practice for in-service English language teachers to use corpora directly in classrooms at different levels (Mukherjee, 2004; Tribble, 2001, 2005, 2008, 2015).

This presentation demonstrates how the authors, introduced the data-driven learning (DDL) approach in the research writing context to over 60 English language educators from eight Hong Kong public universities. A three-hour workshop was delivered respectively to two groups of teachers, who volunteered to participate. During the workshop, acting as English language learners, the teachers were introduced to different types of corpora through hands-on activities and interactive discussion, and finally learned how to build their own corpus. In the first part of the workshop, basic concepts about corpora and data-driven learning were introduced. During the second part, teachers learned how to use online free corpora, such as the BNCweb, to help students improve different aspects of their writing, such as better cohesion, greater linguistic variation, and more appropriate collocations. The third part focused on the use of discipline-specific corpora of research articles. Participants were first guided through the process of creating their own corpora for specific purposes. They then used a discipline-specific corpus of research articles built by the authors, with AntConc (Anthony, 2016), to further explore how home-made corpora could be used to facilitate the teaching of academic writing. Taking the genre- and corpus-based dual approach, the authors showed step-by-step how certain discourse strategies in research articles and their linguistic realisations could be analysed using AntConc.

All the examples and activities used during the workshop were chosen from those that had been used multiple times by the presenters in their own teaching of academic writing with both undergraduate and postgraduate students and were considered successful. After the participants completed each task, the presenters shared their observations of students' reactions in their own teaching, which may help the participants better predict the teaching outcome if they plan to use similar activities in their future teaching. At the end of the workshop, the participants were given around 15 minutes for reflective discussions and raising any further questions they had about implementing corpus-based activities in the English classroom.

In advance of the workshop, teachers were invited to complete a questionnaire, which helped the authors to understand university teachers' familiarity with the DDL approach.

Immediately after the workshop, participants completed a post-workshop questionnaire that investigated their evaluation of the workshop and perception about the value of the DDL approach in the teaching of English academic writing.

The pre-workshop questionnaire showed that the majority of the participants (74%) were experienced university English language teachers with at least six years of teaching experience. In general, they were not familiar with corpus linguistics or data-driven learning prior to the workshop. Around 68% of the participants indicated that they were not familiar with data-driven learning and never used corpora in their teaching prior to the workshop. Among the 32 per cent who had used corpora before, 94% of them used corpora from time to time or once in a while, while 6% used corpora only once or twice during teaching. In other words, no teachers used corpora regularly in their teaching. The findings are in line with those from previous studies (Mukherjee, 2004; Tribble, 2001, 2005, 2008), i.e., the application of corpora into English language teaching has not been a common practice despite the considerable progress in the academic community.

Participants' self-selected post-workshop evaluations indicated that they found the workshop very useful (4.56 out of 5: 1 = not useful at all; 5 = very useful). They indicated that it is very likely that they would use or continue to use corpora in their teaching in the future. The participants also firmly expressed their willingness to recommend the workshop to their colleagues. However, the teachers' mixed perceptions about the application of corpus into teaching were also revealed. While they spoke highly about the benefits of the DDL approach in aspects such as being able to provide "authentic" language materials and promoting discovery learning, they also agreed that preparing corpus-based materials is time-consuming (3.24 out of 5: where 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). More conflicting opinions were identified regarding the preparation and implementation of corpus-based activities in teaching. On the one hand, the teachers agreed that it is easy to prepare corpus-based materials (3.15 out of 5). On the other, they suspected that having corpus activities in class is time-consuming (3.32). The findings show that university teachers could immediately see the value of corpus resources in the teaching of English academic writing after a three-hour introductory workshop. They were enthusiastic about experimenting with the new tools and resources they learned during the workshop. Amid their enthusiastic embrace of the new approach, however, the teachers also showed their concern about the difficulty and the amount of time to be invested in preparing and using corpus-based materials. Long-term training and support may be helpful for getting teachers to be more familiar with the approach and form the habit of using corpus resources. On the other hand, short-term introductory workshops can be a rather effective and efficient way of spreading the new teaching approach among English language teachers.

References

Anthony, L. (2016). *AntConc 3.4.4*. [Computer Software]. Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University. Available from http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc

Boulton, A. (2011). Bringing corpora to the masses: Free and easy tools for language learning. In N, Kubler. (Ed.), *Corpora, Language, Teaching, and Resources: From Theory to Practice* (pp. 69-95). Peter Lang, Bruxelles.

Boulton, A. (2012). Corpus Consultation for ESP: A Review of Empirical Research. In A. Boulton, S. Carter-Thomas & E. Rowley-Jolivet (Eds.), *Corpus-Informed Research and Learning in ESP: Issues and Applications* (pp. 261–292). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Boulton. A & Cobb, T. (2017). Corpus use in language learning: A meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 67(2).

Charles, M. (2011). Using hands-on concordancing to teach rhetorical functions: Evaluation and implications for EAP writing classes. In A. Frankenberg-Garcia, L. Flowerdew & G. Aston (Eds.), *New Trends in Corpora and Language Learning* (pp. 81-104). London/New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Charles, M. (2012). 'Proper vocabulary and juicy collocations': EAP students evaluate do-it-yourself corpus building. *English for Specific Purposes*, 31(2), 93–102.

Charles, M. (2015). Same task, different corpus: The role of personal corpora in EAP classes. In A. Leńko-Szymańska & A. Boulton (Eds.), *Multiple Affordances of Language Corpora for Data-driven Learning* (pp. 129-154). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Flowerdew, J., & Wang, S. H. (2016). Teaching English for research publication purposes with a focus on genre, register, textual mentors and language reuse: a case study. In J. Flowerdew & T. Costley (Eds.), *Discipline-Specific Writing: Theory into practice,* Routledge.

Flowerdew, L. (2008). Corpus linguistics for academic literacies mediated through discussion activities. In D. Belcher & A. Hirvela (Eds.), *The Oral-Literate Connection: Perspectives on L2 Speaking, Writing and Other Media Interactions* (pp. 268–287). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Flowerdew, L. (2015). Using corpus-based research and online academic corpora to inform writing of the discussion section of a thesis. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 20, 58-68.

Johns, T. (1990). From printout to handout: grammar and vocabulary teaching in the context of data-driven learning. *CALL Austria,* 10, 14-34.

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

Leech, G. (1997). Teaching and language corpora: A convergence. In A. Wichmann, S. Fligelstone, T. McEnery & G. Knowles (Eds.), *Teaching and Language Corpora* (pp. 11–23). Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman.

Leńko-Szymańska, A., & Boulton, A. (2015). Introduction: Data-driven learning in language pedagogy. In A. Leńko-Szymańska & A. Boulton (Eds.), *Multiple Affordances of Language Corpora for Data-driven Learning* (pp. 1-14). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Mukherjee, J. (2004). Bridging the gap between applied corpus linguistics and the reality of English language teaching in Germany. *Language and Computers*, 52(1), 239-250.

Poole, R. (2016). A corpus-aided approach for the teaching and learning of rhetoric in an undergraduate composition course for L2 writers. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 21, 99-109.

Sinclair, J. M. (Ed.). (2004). *How to Use Corpora in Language Teaching* (Vol. 12). John Benjamins Publishing.

Tono, Y., Satake, Y., & Miura, A. (2014). The effects of using corpora on revision tasks in L2 writing with coded error feedback. *ReCALL*, 26(2), 147-162.

Tribble, C. (2001). Corpora in ELT. Paper presented at *the 22nd ICAME conference*, Louvain-la-Neuve.

Tribble, C. (2005). Language corpora: Using electronic texts in language education. Plenary paper presented at the *LearnTec* conference, Karlsruhe.

Tribble, C. (2008). Corpora in ELT: Preliminary results from an internet survey. Paper presented at *Teaching and Language Corpora 8*, Lisbon. Retrieved on 11 December 2015 from http://www.ctribble.co.uk/language/TALC8_SURVEY.pdf.

Tribble, C. (2015). Teaching and language corpora: Perspectives from a personal journey. In A. Lenko-Szymanska & A. Boulton (Eds.), *Multiple Affordances of Language Corpora for Data-Driven Learning* (pp. 37-62). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Yoon, C. (2011). Concordancing in L2 writing class: An overview of research and issues. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 10(3), 130-139.

Yoon, H., & Jo, J. W. (2014). Direct and indirect access to corpora: An exploratory case study comparing students' error correction and learning strategy use in L2 Writing. *Language, Learning & Technology*, 18(1), 96-117.