Andrew Dickinson (unaffiliated), Gill Francis (unaffiliated), and Jane Bradbury (King's Norton Boys' School, Birmingham)

Skylight and CALA: Classroom resources for teachers and language learners

The workshop will have two main parts: the Skylight part and the CALA part. Each will consist of an introduction followed by hands-on audience participation.

Part 1: Skylight: an online classroom corpus resource.

Andrew Dickinson will first demonstrate the use of Skylight, a program that provides online corpus access for teachers and students in the classroom. Users select a particular corpus or corpora from the Skylight home page; for example, a teacher could direct students to a corpus of Shakespeare's plays, a corpus of Wikipedia text, or a large general web corpus.

The interface has been designed to be very clear and easy to interact with. Users can make all the familiar types of query, entering either a single word or a phrase, and viewing returned concordance lines or collocate lists. However, the range of operations is more limited, for the sake of simplicity; for example alphabetical sorting is limited to 1, 2, or 3 words to the right or left, and collocates are shown in order of significance, but without statistics.

Participants will then be free to explore Skylight themselves for a short time; we will have suggestions for words and phrases that anticipate the activities in Part 2. After this we move on to some specific activities, all of which are examples from our growing store of ideas to be developed both in CALA and in an as-yet-untitled collection of resources for ESOL and EAP classrooms. This leads into Part 2.

Part 2: Corpus awareness activities

Gill Francis and Jane Bradbury will talk about CALA, the working title of a corpus-based workbook for teachers and students, which we first introduced in a paper at the BAAL/CUP seminar in Birmingham, June 2010. The activities are based on sets of concordance lines and/or collocation lists which focus on the use of language in different text-types. CALA is aimed at the upper secondary levels of UK schools, though we are also working on ideas for an ESOL resource along similar lines.

Gill will then present and invite participation in a range of activities, covering as many different types as time allows. Most of these are aimed at the ESOL classroom, and include items focusing on the uses of very common 'grammar' words like 'it' and 'that'. One activity, for example, shows how each of the more frequent uses of 'that' is identifiable by its lexical collocates. She also presents an activity addressing the issue of non-standard pronoun use, intended for a GCSE English class. This is entitled "Is it 'Sam and I' or 'me and Sam'?". The search results illustrate the flexibility of pronoun use in different types of text.

Finally, Jane will give examples of how Skylight can be used to aid teaching and learning in line with the new AQA GCSE English specifications. This will lead into hands-on activities in which participants can try a range of activities for themselves.

To conclude: through these resources, we aim to help get teachers and students into the swing of working with corpus evidence, and prepare them for developing their own ideas through the use of the Skylight program online on a day-to-day basis. Ideally we'd like to see Skylight as somewhere to turn to in class when any sort of query or observation about language comes up.

Technical requirements: one internet-access workstation per two participants.