

Automating the Preparation of Corpus-Based EFL Activities with Song Lyrics

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Abstract

This presentation will report on the development of an online program for automatically creating EFL activities out of song lyrics. The program generates a range of pre-defined exercises, including concordances, matching and other types of question-answer items, following Lewis (1997). It is powered by a 360,000 word corpus of contemporary pop lyrics. Lyrics were used because they represent a natural and enjoyable way for non-native speakers to get in touch with the language they are learning. In addition to the lyrics main corpus, the activities also draw on two other corpora, namely the online version of Cobuild and the whole Web. This initiative follows the widespread evidence that corpus-based materials are effective sources of learning a foreign language (Biber, 1995, Halliday, 1991; Johns, 1994; Kohonen, 1992; Lewis, 1997). In addition, it tries to tackle the problem that preparing corpus-based materials is normally a very time-consuming task, which can be off-putting for teachers with large teaching loads. We believe the task of preparing corpus-based materials can be automated to some degree, leaving teachers with time to adapt the activities.

The activities were also based on Tim Johns' DDL (1991) – Data Driven Learning – which means learning using the computer as the central information element in a process where the student is motivated to develop discovery learning skills (Granger and Tribble, 1998) inductively searching for evidence in the data.

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