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Looking at paragraphs in academic writing: Corpus and pedagogical perspectives

Corpus linguistic methodology is beginning to move beyond a central focus upon words/phrases and their local contexts (through KWIC and collocational analysis) to consider lexical patterns at the level of larger discourse units. Hoey (2005) expands the notion of colligation to include the possibility that words and phrases have associations with specific text locations. Römer (2010) combines this insight with corpus-driven phraseology analysis to reveal the uneven distribution of n-grams and phrase-frames across academic book reviews.

Using a new corpus of student academic writing, the Michigan Corpus of Upper-level Student Papers (MICUSP), we created a phraseological database that records the position of each word in its sentence, paragraph and text and allows us to extract frequency and text-positional information for words, n-grams and phrase-frames. In this paper we focus on phraseological items where the majority of occurrences are in paragraph-initial (e.g. *in addition to*) or paragraph-final positions (e.g. *in the future*).

To gauge the educational validity of the results from our corpus analysis we constructed an online questionnaire presented to experienced EAP instructors. We asked them to rate items identified as paragraph-initial and paragraph-final as to whether they consider them worth teaching and might call attention to their functions as discourse structuring devices. Based on the instructors' feedback we then created revised lists of academic phrases which relate items to text structure. We believe that these lists will be of relevance in the context of teaching and learning academic writing.

References

Hoey, M. (2005). *Lexical Priming: A New Theory of Words and Language*. London: Routledge.

Römer, U. (2010). Establishing the phraseological profile of a text type. The construction of meaning in academic book reviews. *English Text Construction* 3(1): 95-119.