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Developing an intuitive screen design for a learner-centred concordancer

While learners and teachers may be using more materials based on patterns from corpora, the impact of corpus applications on self-study and in the classroom has not been as great as the shift in the academic or publishing fields. Indeed, it would seem that of the vast numbers of language teachers working around the world, only a relatively small number attempt to motivate learners to use concordancers, often finding that learning to navigate the user interfaces requires a deep understanding of linguistic jargon and that learners only experience a limited amount of success in being able to process snippets from authentic sentences which have been decontextualised.

Factors which may be holding teachers back from learning to use and teach corpus tools are:

- a) traditional KWIC concordance output is almost completely cut away from its context (Hunston, 2002).
- b) the amount of detail which concordances can provide to a learner can be confusing (Kennedy, 1998).
- c) interpretation of grammatical patterns is not easy (Gaskell & Cobb, 2004).
- d) exploration using carefully selected concordance lines seems to take too long (Thurstun, 1996)
- e) software is not usually designed specifically with learners in mind (Anthony, 2004)

This presentation of work in progress will outline some research into how manipulating visual elements of the screen can improve learner understanding of concordance output and improve performance of scanning and matching tasks. Elements such as context window size, window shape, the formation of windows, and font colour and size will be tested.

References

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