Strategies for incorporating findings from corpus linguistics studies into the teaching of spoken English for business

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Corpus linguistics studies have shown the importance of interpersonal and pragmatic markers in spoken discourse (Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Handford, 2010; Koester, 2006, 2010). When interacting with people in the workplace, business English learners need to be aware of the relational and attitudinal functions performed by these markers (Chan, 2017). However, these markers and their functions are not adequately covered in published teaching materials for business English learners (Chan, 2009a, 2009b; Williams, 1988). To sensitize learners to features of workplace discourse and the role that some interpersonal and pragmatic markers play in mitigating face threats and showing solidarity in the workplace, findings from corpora of spoken business English, such as those from the Corpus of American and British Office Talk (ABOT) (Koester, 2006, 2010) and the Cambridge and Nottingham Business English Corpus (CANBEC) (Handford, 2010), can be applied to the teaching of spoken English for business. What business English teachers need are ideas for effectively incorporating findings from corpus studies into learning activities.

While various ideas that make use of written corpora in business English teaching have been suggested (see, for example, Chan & Frendo, 2014), there is a paucity of ideas for using spoken corpora or findings from corpus studies in the teaching of spoken business English. In light of this, I suggest some ways to integrate classroom learning activities with corpus-based or corpus-informed materials on spoken business English. In particular, I give examples of tasks and activities that raise learners' awareness of the functions of interpersonal and pragmatic markers, such as language analysis tasks that put together findings from different studies and peer observation tasks that help learners compare their own language with findings from corpus linguistics studies. Data collected through questionnaire surveys and role-plays are presented to show the effects of these tasks on learners' motivation and the language they produce. Overall, the findings suggest that effectively incorporating insights from corpus linguistics studies into classroom teaching entails not merely presenting learners with frequency lists, concordance lines and extracts from texts, but also understanding where learners need most help and finding ways to relate the insights from corpus linguistics studies to learners' language needs. This would help learners to appreciate the value of corpus data and encourage them to learn from authentic language.

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