CONCORDANCE TOOLS FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS STUDENTS

Why and How

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OUTLINE

- My background as concordance user
- How I tried to teach my students
- How (well) it worked
- Suggestions
MY CONCORDANCER JOURNEY

- Impetus 1: 2008, international student - “Teacher, how do I know which preposition to use with a given verb?”
- Impetus 2: 2012, MA TESOL student - assignment on corpora
- Impetus 3: 2013, EAP practitioner - a workshop on using IntelliText

- Effective use requires knowledge!
  - (e.g. Yoon, 2011)
- “emic” (user) and “etic” (teacher) perspective
First-year business students on a pathway programme

- “Advanced-level students”?  

2 groups (15 students each)

- Group 1: IELTS 6.5-8.0
- Group 2: IELTS 6.0
HOW?

- Input session - demo on PowerPoint (Lextutor and IntelliText)
- Handout with slides and space to record results
  - “learning of individual items” (Charles, 2014:30)
- 2 computer lab sessions
- Follow-up questionnaire
more information than a dictionary
see words in context
examples of grammatical structure
  “assert” plus *that*-clause or noun phrase?
prepositions in phrasal verbs
  “consist in” or “consist of”? Difference?
collocations
  Which verb with “problem”?
**INPUT - COMPARISON OF INTERFACES**

- **Lextutor:**
  - Quick and easy
  - For single-word queries
  - To confirm immediate collocations

- **IntelliText:**
  - Takes a bit of clicking to access the corpus
  - For more sophisticated queries
    - Two-word queries; non-immediate collocations; to check prepositions
    - Access to the full BNC (British National Corpus) -> much broader basis for the search
Students brought own texts (assignments due a few days later)

2 problems:
- Formulating appropriate search queries
- IntelliText does not like Internet Explorer
QUESTIONNAIRE - WHY?

- To determine reasons for (non-)uptake
- To see if there were differences between the levels
- To see which tool students found more useful
QUESTIONNAIRE - OUTCOME

- Uptake higher in Group 2
- Generally happy with materials but more practice/guidance ("more opportunities to practise under teacher’s instruction")
- Most students said "useful", esp. for collocations; "a fast and accurate tool for checking my grammar"
- "searching for other words that can fit a purpose"
Interface too complicated/confusing (esp. IntelliText):
- “These tools are not user-friendly”
- “not convenient”

Use of other tools (e-dictionaries)

“These tools can’t help to me at this stage of academy.” (Group 1)
- English language level?
- Do First-years not have to write “perfect” assignments?
Use in classroom (ad hoc or planned)
Give for homework
Remind students that they can find out for themselves
EVALUATION - “CONS”

- The wrong kind of students?
  - Would it work better with research graduates?
    - Most studies on graduate students (Yoon, 2011)
  - Level?
- earlier in the course “so students will have the habit”
- Takes planning, class time and teacher experience
SUMMARY

- Concordance use takes perseverance (teachers AND learners)
- User-friendliness (or lack thereof) seems to be the main issue preventing uptake
  - Smartphone app?
- Also possible with first-years
- Worth it, even if just for a few students or with delayed uptake:
“Actually I found Compleat Lexical Tutor is quite useful, as I use it very often. From my previous assignments, I used it for checking my grammar. For instance, I use it when I am not sure what preposition is followed after the verb. I use Lexical not only for my assignments, but also emails. Moreover, I use it in many ways, and I think that it is a useful tool for making my writing more accurately. Lexical is a fast and accurate tool for checking my grammar.”
References: