Using Concordances in the Classroom: a hands-on workshop

Jenny Kemp & Glynis Scaramuzza, University of Leicester
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Here are some free online concordancers (you may also know of others).

These are from corpora of General English:
http://www.lextutor.ca/concordancers/concord_e.html
http://www.just-the-word.com/
http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/using/index.xml?id=simple
    / http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/index.xml

The following have Academic English:
http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc  (also general)
http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/c/corpus?c=micase;page=simple
(US spoken academic)

These search the web:
http://webascorpus.org/searchwc.html
http://www.netspeak.org/
http://www.webcorp.org.uk/wcadvanced.html

Now try them out. Work through the following, remembering to make a note of your findings. There is ‘Noticing Key’ to help you if you need it.

Student Questions

1) How can I use the purpose in a sentence?
(Use the first of the above concordancers, LexTutor: http://www.lextutor.ca/concordancers/concord_e.html)

Type the purpose (with a space) into the keyword box. Then select corpus ‘All of the above (3m+)’. Choose ‘150’ for line width and ‘100’ for number of lines. Click ‘get concordance’.

Make a note of the main patterns, remembering to look both before and after the ‘node’. Include one or two useful examples. The default is sort left, i.e. the word immediately right of the node are in alphabetical order. But you can take a look at them sorted right, too, by changing ‘left’ to ‘right’ in the drop-down box.

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2) What nouns are used with economic?
(Use LexTutor again. This time type economic into the keyword box. Sort right.)

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How does its usage differ from financial? (Look at the noun collocates and also the topics/context. To see the full context, click on the key word.)

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3) In written English, where does probably go in relation to the verb? (Use LexTutor. Select the ‘1K Graded corpus’ (graded readers).

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4) Is *especially* used at the beginning of a sentence in written academic English? 
   (go to http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc: type the target word in the search box; select KWIC; tick 'show'; from the 
   left-hand drop-down box (which is directly underneath) select 'academic'; and click search.)

5) Can I say *problematic consequences* or *During the last years,* ?

6) *When do we use* utter *as an adjective?* (Look in lextutor, and sort one word to the right. Then try the byu-
   bnc: search for utter.[JJ*] (utter as an adjective). Is the result the same if you look at utter [NN*] (utter plus 
   noun)? Then look at the most frequent collocates in Just The Word http://193.133.140.102/justTheWord/ 
   Enter utter and click on combinations. You can see concordance lines by clicking on a phrase of interest e.g. 
   complete and utter.)

7) *What adjectives collocate with the noun increase?* (In byu-bnc enter [JJ*] increase (adj plus increase). 
   Choose academic. Sort the results in alphabetical order, by (1) the node (2) first left (3) first right: 
   Do you notice any other patterns? Then look at the most frequent collocates –first with [JJ*] 
   increase. Then enter increase.[NN*] in the search box. How do these compare with Just The Word?)

8) *Compare the usage of attribute in Technology/Engineering with its use in the Natural Sciences.* 
   (You may have noticed the byu-bnc has a column showing discipline. You can limit your search further by 
   choosing e.g. only written texts for the natural sciences. If you key in attribute* you will also get attributes, 
   attributed etc.)

9. *Now choose a word you believe is more common in one academic field than any other. Search for it 
   to see if you are right.*

10. *What verbs are used with that in academic English?* (Select ‘list’ this time, not ‘KWIC’. The code for 
    verb is [vv*] )
Guided error correction practice

11) Try out the ‘Corpus Grammar’ link on the Lextutor homepage: http://www.lextutor.ca/

Preparing Classes

12) Look at sort in the 2K graded reader corpus. Identify 3-4 chunks which are useful to teach intermediate students. (Use the first of the above concordancers: http://www.lextutor.ca/concordancers/concord_e.html. Type sort into the keyword box, then select corpus ‘2K Graded Corpus’. Then click get concordance. When you finish, go back and this time select ‘yes’ for ‘gapped’. How could you use this with students?)

13) Take a look at the Lextutor N-grams phrase extractor: http://lextutor.ca/tuples/eng/. Perhaps try it out with a full-length article you use with insessional students, to find useful subject-specific collocations; or paste in a few essays from a student in order to identify recurrent mistakes. How could you exploit this for/with your students? What are its limitations?

Exploring Other web tools

14) Try out Netspeak: http://www.netspeak.org/ Type *it is ? to* in the box, and see what comes up.


a) Shakespeare invented many words. When, for example, did he first use dislocate?

b) Shakespeare uses lets with 2 main meanings: one is the familiar ‘allows’— but what is the other main meaning?