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Demystifying Corpus Linguistics for English Language Teaching (Book Review)

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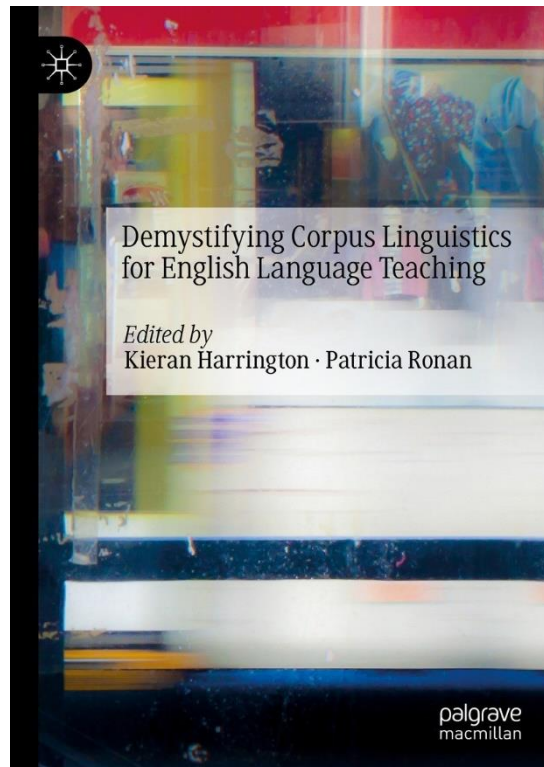
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Book Review

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Introduction

Corpus linguistics is a methodological approach that is utilized to analyse a body of language to draw conclusions on linguistic features (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). When language teaching context is concerned, it holds the capacity to impact it through two principal dimensions. Firstly, the examination of authentic language usage can offer valuable insights for developing teaching materials, including learner dictionaries, wordlists, and course books. Secondly, corpus linguistics can be applied pedagogically in the classroom, known as “data-driven learning” (DDL). In this approach, students analyse and explore naturally occurring language data, drawing their own conclusions about usage (Harrington & Ronan, 2023).

This book explores diverse approaches to implementing corpus methodology in language teaching. It encompasses a total of 13 chapters, with contributions from a collective of 17 authors. The opening chapter, authored by the editors Kieran Harrington and Patricia Ronan, provides working definitions for corpus linguistics and data-driven learning as an addition to key concepts such as corpus tools, concordances, and word frequency lists are elucidated.

Chapters

Chapter 1 “**Demystifying Corpus Linguistics for English Language Teaching**” begins with an invitation to language teachers with an interest in authentic data to explore the book. As the introductory chapter, it gives a concise definition of corpus linguistics and reviews background by naming some developmental landmarks. Then, it names some tools and software that can be utilized when carrying out corpus-based research, through which keywords and concordances can be examined. The chapter lastly provides some insight into how corpus linguistics can be used in different language teaching contexts.

Chapter 2 “**Learning to Teach English as a Foreign Language with Corpus Linguistic Approaches: A Survey of Teacher Training Students’ Attitudes**” investigates the perspectives of teacher training students regarding making use of corpora in their classrooms upon their graduation. Collecting data from German and Swiss teacher training students, the research aims to identify the challenges and benefits in using corpus linguistics methodology. Overall, the students express positive attitudes to utilizing corpora mentioning the ease of access to authentic materials and the encouragement it would give students about conducting empirical work. However, they also underline their concerns about the potential increase in teachers’ workloads and their struggle to envision the practical adaptation of corpora in teaching.

Chapter 3 “**A Flexible Framework for Integrating Data-Driven Learning**” explains how data-driven learning (DDL) been facing criticism in the educational context, namely how the approach puts a heavy emphasis on inductive learning, which may not be suitable for all learners, as well as its tendency not to entail communicativeness. Giving a compact literature review that focuses on DDL, the chapter further discusses the major benefits and its potential application into the language learning context. The authors highlight pre-service programs and note that, even when these programs introduce DDL to their prospective teachers, many remain hesitant about applying it in real classrooms. To address these issues, the authors suggest “flexible framework,” which includes teachers introducing learner DDL techniques to use when relevant with the long-term goal of establishing autonomy in learners in terms of utilizing DDL.

Chapter 4 “**Speaking and Listening: Two Sides of the Same Coin**” utilizes corpus-based data to illustrate the interdependence of listening and speaking, often described as confluence. The key argument is that these skills are intricately connected and should not be treated in isolation. Through examples drawn from speaking transcripts, the chapter provides compelling evidence that listening is an active skill harmoniously intertwined with speaking. Taking this into account, the authors suggest implementing these skills in unison as a “fifth skills” in the curriculum.

Chapter 5 “**Corpus Linguistics and Writing Instruction**” presents a summary of recent corpus-based studies that focus on writing in a second language. In the chapter, special attention is given to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and how comparative analyses are conducted using corpus-based data. Additionally, it also displays how corpora use can be applied to curriculum design and material development. Finally, the chapter emphasizes the significance of instructing language learners in the independent utilization of corpora to explore elements of writing in the target language.

Chapter 6 “**Corpus Affordances in Foreign Language Reading Comprehension**” focuses on how data-driven learning potentially be applied to foreign language reading to improve comprehension. Firstly, the authors explore possible pedagogical issues that would be regarding ESP, EFL and corpus advancements. Additionally, the chapter provides a thorough analysis of two ESP courses which are taught utilizing corpus and non-corpus technologies, to display how corpus can be applied in the classroom to enhance student performance. The chapter especially underscores the effectiveness of lexical behaviour activities with concordances for learning improvement, particularly when applied to authentic texts. It also emphasizes the importance of user-friendly interfaces, mobile adaptability, and pre-training learners in inductive skills for successful implementation of Data-Driven Learning (DDL) strategies, calling for further longitudinal studies and tailored adaptation to specific teaching and learning conditions.

Chapter 7 “**Corpus Linguistics and Grammar Teaching**” delves into how corpus linguistics can be utilized in grammar teaching, especially helps teacher when faced with questions from learners if a structure is grammatically accurate. The author displays how corpus linguistics can play a role in two sample methodologies, namely text-based and data-driven learning. Additionally, he expresses that corpora use can deepen teachers’ comprehension of frequency in various genres. The chapter underlines the importance of context in holistic understanding of language and how running corpus-based analysis inform teachers on instructional practices and material design.

Chapter 8 “**Corpus Linguistics and Vocabulary Teaching**” illustrates how corpus tools can be utilized by teachers to address practical needs of language learners. The author argues that vocabulary teaching can be improved using corpora, where learners are introduced to operate such tools to investigate single-word utterances and their frequency. Subsequently, learners can move on to exploring multi-word units or chunks. The author provides suggestions that can be adopted by teachers with material design and lesson planning purposes. The chapter underscores while there is a lack of corpus-based lists combining both frequent and highly frequent multi-word units, the availability of online corpora and various tools provides teachers and students with the means to mine big data for vocabulary learning.

Chapter 9 “**Culture in English Language Teaching: Let the Language Do the Talking**” presents how data-driven learning can be utilized in the integration of culture within language education. The author demonstrates how certain words can be investigated via concordancing and how corpus tools can help explore the use in authentic language. Utilizing the Compleat Lextutor Tutor, he demonstrates how such platforms can be used by both teachers to improve their classroom practices and students to achieve their individual language learning goals.

Chapter 10 “**World Englishes and the Second Language Classroom: Why Introducing Varieties of English Is Important and How Corpora Can Help**” focuses on the integration of diverse linguistic perspectives, including the study of English as a global language, English language teaching, and corpus linguistics. The authors aim to explore the pedagogical implications of World Englishes research and corpus linguistic approaches in teaching English. Advocating for exposing students to various English varieties, they argue that incorporating corpus linguistic-oriented methods enhances linguistic diversity comprehension and provides practical skills in exploring different pedagogical implications in the educational context.

Chapter 11 “**Annotating VOICE for Pedagogic Purposes: The Case for a Mark-up Scheme of Pragmatic Functions in ELF Interactions**” explores the topic of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and how ELF users strategically and pragmatically utilize language resources. As author elaborates, corpus annotation as a means to make aspects of pedagogic significance in ELF interactions should be more accessible for English language education. Emphasizing a shift from a normative approach to a functional orientation, the chapter outlines the theoretical foundation for an annotation system for VOICE data, aiming to strengthen the connection between ELF corpora and English language teaching (ELT).

Chapter 12 “**Detecting and Analysing Learner Difficulties Using a Learner Corpus Without Error Tagging**” explores learner errors and areas of difficulty faced by language learners while using corpora. The author explores the pedagogical implications of this approach, particularly in developing learning materials that expose students to correct forms and help them avoid direct translations. The study concentrates on prevalent errors in determiners and prepositions, considering them challenging aspects for language learners. It compares a learner corpus, the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE), with a native speaker reference, the British National Corpus (BNC), and proposes an indirect corpus use approach to facilitate the compilation of teaching materials, especially for students who find direct corpus use challenging. By doing so, the chapter aims to identify how learner corpora can be used to effectively identify errors and areas of difficulty for the benefit of both learners and teachers.

Chapter 13 “**The Potential Impact of EFL Textbook Language on Learner English: A Triangulated Corpus Study**” aims to investigate the potential impact of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook language on the output of EFL learners. The chapter explores the input dependent Second Language (L2) acquisition hypothesis, suggesting that EFL learners’ use of specific constructions is influenced by the distributions in their main source of L2 input, namely their textbooks. The findings propose that EFL teachers can enhance instruction by incorporating data from English Native Language (ENL) corpora to expose students to underrepresented constructions and by utilizing learner corpora to address common difficulties faced by learners of specific first languages. The chapter concludes by highlighting how Sketch Engine, an online corpus tool, can be utilized by textbook authors and teachers to explore variations in constructions across different registers, such as academic writing versus conversation.

Evaluation

This book review provides a comprehensive overview and analysis of the book “Demystifying Corpus Linguistics for English Language Teaching.” While illustrating the application of corpus linguistics in ELT, it covers a range of topics, from defining corpus linguistics and data-driven learning to exploring specific applications in grammar and vocabulary teaching, speaking and listening activities, culture integration, and the impact of EFL textbooks on learner output.

Overall, the book presents a well-organized and informative exploration of corpus linguistics in ELT, making it a valuable resource for language educators, researchers, and teacher training programs. The varied perspectives and practical applications ensure that readers gain a layered understanding of how corpus linguistics can be effectively integrated into language teaching contexts.

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