Using language corpora for academic writing

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Workshop Goals

- to get new information about the structure of academic / specialized English

- to enhance own language and writing skills

- to understand how we can use online tools to help us producing academic texts

Introducing Language Corpora

Look at the following sentences. Are they correct or incorrect in terms of grammar / style? Use any tools you want to find out.

- If the sun is too hot perhaps you would like to sit in the shadow?

- The amount of accidents is very increasing.

So, what about this *corpus*?

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Language Corpus

- a set of texts that have been electronically pre-processed and can be used for further language querries

- stucture of each corpus is directly related to its overall purpose and specific research aims

- types of corpora:

  - general x specialized

  - mono- x multilingual

  - small-scale x large-scale

How can a corpus help me?

- dealing with specific language-related issues
- dictionaries are insufficient when dealing with questions about specific use and style
- source of inspiration for my own writing
- model language
- enhancing my own writing skills

So, how does English actually work?

- English is largely phraseological / fixed/ prefabricated / language

- academic writing could be thought of as putting these prefabricated units one after another

- functional language blocks are important:

  - make production and understading easier

  - make texts more idiomatic

  - important markers of field-related style

It is important to realize that the meaning of most of the single words in English is not fixed, but highly context-dependent.

The meaning and use of a word or phrase cannot be separated from one another.

If we want to understand the differences between pairs of words with very similar meaning we have to search for other clues – context, style, collocations etc.

Typical Corpus Queries

- What is the usual use of an academic word? (*significant*)

- Which of the similar words should I use? (*therefore* x *thereby*)

- What is the appropriate preposition? (*the main idea ___ this approach*)

- Is the word / phrase used correctly in the context of academic English? ('lots of' *evidence*)

Corpus Tools

basic outcomes:

frequency

phraseology

collocations

Irresistable Terminology

- search string, simple search
- lemma, word (form), phrase
- KWIC concordance
- context
- text-type

- noun, adjective, verb, adverb, preposition

Basic Query Types

increase

- increase OF or IN
- typical collocations
- difference between *increase* and *go up*?

Basic Query Types

research

- typical types of research
- typical phrases

Problematic Areas of Language Use

Think about the areas of language that you struggle with (prepositions, academic words, verbs, nouns, etc) and the ways you could use corpus tools to deal with them.

Problematic Areas

words similar in meaning

pretty, quite and rather

- usual types of texts
- typical phrases / collocations

Problematic Areas

prepositions

deal, focus and study

- typical prepositions for these words
- how can prepositions change meaning

Probematic Areas

text structure

on the other hand, however, though

- position in sentences
- how do we use come with these
- usual text types

Problematic Areas

hidden meaning

cause

- how do we use the word *cause*
- what words does it usually go together with
- what is the meaning of the phrases

Thank you for your attention! :-)

Wish you best of luck with your writing tasks!

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