Review of *A guide to using corpora for English language learners*

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As a rapidly expanding area of research, corpus linguistics has had far-reaching impacts in a number of areas ranging from forensic science to media studies (Hyland, Huat, & Handford, 2012). It has also entered the field of language education in the form of data-driven learning, revolutionizing the field in many aspects. Techniques developed for exploiting language corpora have shown that they have great potential to improve the language skills of learners. However, actual integration of corpora into language learning practices has remained limited. One account for this is the scarcity of handy, reliable, and detailed resources guiding language learners in the use of corpora (Łeńko-Szymańska, 2017). The book titled *A guide to using corpora for English language learners* by Poole is, therefore, a timely arrival that addresses this scarcity, addressing many needs regarding how to effectively use corpora for teaching and learning English.

The book consists of five chapters, each addressing a different aspect of language learning through corpora. The first chapter, *Learning the essentials*, is devoted to introducing the basic search functions of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the British National Corpus (BNC), and the Global Web-Based English Corpus. A significant and distinguishing feature of the book is that the author explains search techniques from scratch, making the book appropriate for those having no prior knowledge of corpus use. While introducing search tools one by one, the author also explains the terminology of corpus linguistics (e.g., *frequency*, *concordance lines*, *collocation window*, etc.) without overwhelming the readers with too many technical details. Additionally, the sub-sections in the first chapter include thought-provoking instructions regarding the use of corpora and shows the reader what type of language-related questions could be answered using corpora.

The second chapter is titled *Corpus searches for vocabulary learning*. Vocabulary is, as the author acknowledges, the language domain for which corpus use is the commonest. The tone of the chapter, which could be described as informal, gives readers the impression that they are participating in a classroom training session rather than reading printed instructions. This intimate and reader-friendly language saves the book from being arid. A notable aspect of this chapter is that the author introduces search functions and shows readers ways of expanding their vocabulary in English. Although looking up a word with its meaning, synonyms, and collocations is the first function of the corpus tools that comes to mind, the author goes beyond this, providing readers with alternatives such as learning new words with shared roots and...
learning words with the same endings. These could be stimulating for those wishing to expand their vocabulary. Detailed description of the wordandphrase.info interface—a powerful tool for academic vocabulary learning (Townsend & Kiernan, 2015)—is also mentioned here. By guiding the readers step by step, Poole shows how to do close reading using the wordandphrase.info interface and how to interpret its output screens. The chapter ends with a description of how to create specialized wordlists through corpus query techniques.

The next chapter sets out to demonstrate to readers how to use language corpora to improve writing skills in English. The searches center around the basic functions of correcting errors, learning new forms, reaching sources on a chosen topic, recognizing disciplinary variations in written language, revising an essay, and making register decisions in an informed way. In order to cover this wide range of topics, the author makes use of the News on the Web Corpus, the Michigan Corpus of Upper-Level Student Papers, the Sketch Engine for Language Learning, and the corpus-based FLAX Interactive Language Learning site alongside the COCA and the BNC. Describing all these different corpus interfaces in connection with the same language skill (i.e., writing) illustrates the powerful and multifarious nature of corpus-based language learning. As acknowledged by the author, each of these interfaces has its own advantage for contributing to different aspects of learner writing skills. By including all these corpora, the author manages to address the needs of both novice and more-experienced writers. One remarkable thing in this chapter is the author’s effective use of tips. Poole presents the tips in meticulous detail attracting the readers’ attention to the function of even spaces, square brackets, and periods, ensuring that readers get the same results described in the book and preventing possible frustrations.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the role of language corpora in helping learners with their speaking skills. Considering that both teaching speaking and learning how to speak are areas in which possible contributions of corpora are rarely discussed (Vyatkina & Boulton, 2017), this chapter makes a valuable addition to the field. It presents innovative applications of corpus tools to enrich speaking classes. Entitled Corpus searches for cultural study and conversation topics, the chapter specifically shows how corpora can spark thinking in users and develop insights into the cultures represented by those corpora. In this chapter, two more corpora are introduced to the readers: the Google N-Gram Viewer (a web corpus with a billion words from Google Books) and the Corpus of Historical American English. Along with the corpora introduced in the previous chapters, these corpora are used by the author to present several brilliant ideas that can enrich any speaking activity (e.g., tracking the life cycle of a word, examining the switch patterns of word or phrase pairs, and analyzing changes in concept meanings over time). Each search activity is followed by a brief but thought-provoking discussion of the output screens that can serve as a starting point for corpus-integrated speaking activities. The chapter ends with brief information about two websites that can be combined with corpus tools to expand speaking activities.

The final chapter of the book pertains to building one’s own corpus. The author starts by explaining where a specially developed corpus could be used, inspiring the readers to further explore corpus tools. In a very detailed and clear manner, each step for gathering a specialized corpus is then presented, with no vague points. The chapter concludes with the description of a corpus analysis tool (AntConc) through which users are advised to analyze their own corpora. The succinct explanation of each and every function of AntConc makes this part valuable for those wishing to learn corpus analysis in a short time.

Overall well-written in a practical and accessible manner, A guide to using corpora for English language learners is a valuable resource for interested learners and teachers. It serves particularly well the needs of learners who do not possess a solid background in using corpus tools for language learning. Not only the content but also the ways of presenting the content make the book a successful resource for the users. In particular, the Your turn sections placed after each search function are quite efficacious. In them, the author uses leading questions to encourage the readers to form their own hypotheses and then asks them to check those hypotheses using corpus queries. Appealing to the intuition of the reader and then helping them refute or verify is quite an effective way to create awareness in the reader. This, in turn, has the potential to positively affect the retention of the input obtained as a result (Robinson, Mackey, Gass, & Schmidt, 2102).
Also contributing to the retention of what has been learned through the book is the authors’ effective repetition of the same questions at certain intervals throughout the book. Taken altogether, with its effective content presentation, its comprehensible tone, and its employ of a number of cutting-edge corpus tools, the book accomplishes its goal of “empowering language learners to become independent learners through corpus aided discovery and investigation” (p. 2)

**References**


**About the Author**

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