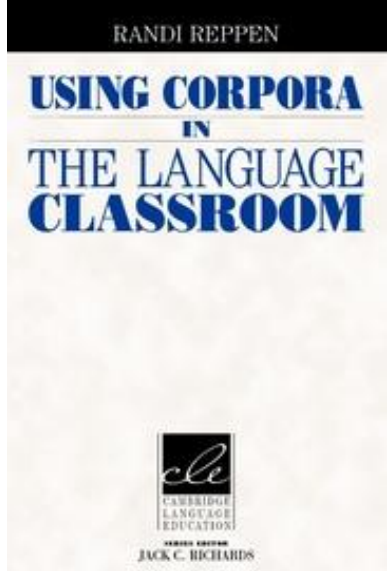


## REVIEW OF *USING CORPORA IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM*

<p><b>Using Corpora in the Language Classroom</b></p> <p>Randi Reppen</p> <p>2010</p> <p>ISBN: 9780521146081</p> <p>US \$35.00</p> <p>118 pp.</p> <p>Cambridge University Press</p> <p>New York, NY</p>	
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### Review by **Jacqueline Mull**, **Research Institute of English Language Education**

Corpus Linguistics has been shedding light on language for the last forty years. With the advent of the personal computer, researchers have been able to analyze and describe real language use and compare language use across genres. Beyond its usefulness for research, corpus linguistics has been growing in popularity among language educators as an additional tool for the classroom. Not all language educators are aware of the benefits of corpus linguistics, however, and those that are may feel intimidated by the technology or may simply not know how to incorporate it into their classroom. In her new book, *Using Corpora in The Language Classroom*, Randi Reppen invites language educators, whether they are familiar with corpus linguistics or not, to consider the value of this language tool and to learn about a variety of ways it may be useful in the language classroom.

The first chapter introduces key terms of corpus linguistics in a simple and approachable way and is targeted at educators who may be unfamiliar with terms such as corpora, concordancers or “Key Word in Context” (KWIC) searches. In addition to describing these terms and tools, Reppen uses the first chapter to argue for the importance of corpus linguistics and the value of using it in the classroom. She briefly describes how corpus linguistics is being used to inform commercial textbooks and suggests several classroom activities that can be easily incorporated into teaching. These classroom activities are addressed in an almost skeletal format, intended to generate interest in the technology and to show a place for it in the classroom without overwhelming a new user.

Chapter Two continues the case for using corpus-informed materials and provides greater detail on a variety of readily available printed books and resources for investigating the target language. It highlights specific examples of general language features, lexical bundles and register comparisons from these resources that can be exploited by language educators when designing materials for their students. Reppen brings awareness to resources that are available as a result of previous corpus research and illustrates how to incorporate that information into teaching materials. Some brief examples of possible classroom lessons are shared in this chapter, though elaborate materials development is largely left as the responsibility of the educator. Chapter Two ends with a reference list for further reading about corpus-based research findings concerning English vocabulary, expressions, lexical bundles, and formulaic sequences.

Chapter Three makes the jump from providing general information about corpus linguistics and its classroom application, to detailing practical steps for exploring free online resources. The book outlines some resources that are designed for language educators and others that can be approachable for students as well. Reppen begins this chapter with a discussion of how to assess the quality of online resources so that educators may feel free to explore the Internet—and the wide variety of resources available to them—with a critical eye. From there, she introduces several approachable corpus-based online resources that educators and students can use to learn about English. Finally, she introduces three online corpora (Michigan Corpus of Contemporary American English; Corpus of Contemporary American English; and the Time Corpus) by describing their composition (spoken English, multiple register English, and academic English), as well as the resources that are available on their associated webpages. After providing a checklist of points to keep in mind when developing materials from corpus information, Reppen then highlights the strengths of each of the three corpora by leading readers through searches that highlight teachable points for classroom materials.

By the fourth chapter, readers are aware of a number of both non-technical and technical methods for finding corpus-based materials. While Reppen briefly lists several types of lessons that can be created for students and offers some guidelines for making materials, she quickly turns the focus toward building a personal corpus. This chapter explains a number of decisions that need to be made when building a personal corpus and how to go about collecting and preparing texts. Language educators will also find information not only for corpora of written language, but advice and useful software for creating spoken corpora as well.

While the first four chapters introduce educators to resources they can use to inform their lesson plans and activities, Chapter Five puts the corpora in the students' hands. This chapter makes the case for student use of corpora in the classroom by presenting five specific classroom activities that target a variety of English proficiency levels and topics. The activities are laid out in step-by-step form, much like mini lesson plans, and are designed with the assumption that students have access to computers and are prepared to do their own simple searches. Reppen emphasizes the need to have a back-up plan whenever asking students to access anything online, so a lesson is not ruined by a faulty link or site crash. If educators are not in a teaching context that allows students to do their own searches in class, activities could be adapted into handout-based lessons by the instructor. Reppen finishes the chapter by describing several ways that corpora and corpus-based materials are being used in a variety of different teaching contexts and offers some additional food for thought on how these resources may be of use to both students and educators.

Further information is available in the appendices and warrants reading. Appendix A includes a handful of photocopiable pages that were referenced in the first chapter and that can be used directly in a classroom. Additional activity ideas for using corpora in the classroom are tucked in here as well, including information about MonoConc Pro, a specific concordancer that can be used to search any corpus of text files. The tutorial for MonoConc Pro will only be of value for educators who own a copy of the software or are willing to acquire a copy. The book gives solid and easy-to-follow instructions for doing a variety of tasks using MonoConc Pro and is well worth the read for anyone starting out with the software. Appendix B includes a list of trusted online resources that language educators can explore. Resources range from highly educator-centered corpus-informed materials, to more research-centered materials that encourage independent corpus searches and evaluations.

In addition to the materials in the book, *Using Corpora in the Language Classroom* offers a companion website that, while very slow, is worth a visit. Users will have to register on the Cambridge website with an email address before accessing any materials. The website offers a handful of additional lessons and worksheets. While the majority of them are geared toward high-level learners of academic English, they do offer some insight into how activities might be designed and how corpus-based information may be presented as a worksheet. The website also offers access to the KWIC results for three words in a readily

printable format, though it may be more valuable to look the same words up in one of the corpora described in the book as a way of familiarizing oneself with the resources.

As with any book that relies on technology, and especially one that relies on online links, resources may not be reliable. For example, at the time of writing this review, one of the resources described in the book, the Birmingham Kibbitzers, was not available, though a subset of the Kibbitzers could be found hosted on another site after a brief Internet search. Also, several screen shots in the book no longer match the most updated website. The ever-changing nature of the Internet demands that educators be prepared for hiccoughs when reading a book, such as this one, that relies so heavily on web-based links. Links may change or move, sites may crash, and information may be taken down. Reppen appears to be aware of this and does offer the list of links from the book on the book's companion website. At this time, the list is identical to the list in the book, but one might hope it will be updated periodically as sites inevitably change. Many of the websites described in the book are hosted by universities. These sites have been available for some time and are still being maintained and expanded. These links, therefore, appear to be fairly stable and hopefully will continue to be available for some time to come.

A troublesome point that Reppen fails to discuss in her book is the increasingly strict protections being placed on these bodies of language. Many of the hosting sites generously provide a concordancer to use with their corpus, but several restrict any copying and pasting of language from their sites. Educators may run up against this problem if they try to cut and paste lines from some of the online corpora into their handouts, as suggested in the book. This does not at all limit educators and students in terms of language exploration, and language samples can still be read and hand-typed into handouts, but these restrictions may make things a bit more time consuming when creating classroom materials.

It is also important to note that *Using Corpora in the Language Classroom* is designed with an English language teaching context in mind, so the materials and corpora described in the book are all based only on English. The book does still give an accessible introduction to using concordancers in the classroom that may be of interest to educators of other languages as well, provided they have access to a corpus of their target language or are interested in spending time with Chapter 4 to create their own corpus. Activity ideas are also adaptable to other languages.

In spite of these potential drawbacks, *Using Corpora in the Language Classroom* is an informative read for those who are willing to set the book down periodically to pick up their computer and explore the software being described. This is especially true in Chapter Three, in which many of the corpus searches described are much easier to understand while manipulating them directly. Reppen gives directions that are relatively easy to follow, and new users will almost certainly come away with a better sense of the tool and what can be done with it if they take the time to play with the software online. For educators who need visual reinforcement to make the jump from the text description to the actual online software, there is a PowerPoint presentation available on the companion website that provides visual steps for the educator of several corpus searches using the same corpora described in the book.

The breadth and depth of information that can be gathered from corpora and other corpus-based resources is impressive and is becoming easier for educators to access. This book is designed as an introduction for language educators who are truly starting at the beginning, or who are familiar with corpus linguistics but are not sure how to make the transition to using it in their classrooms. For educators who are already familiar with corpora and/or concordancers and are already using it in their classrooms, the book may be too lightweight to be of much interest. However, the strength of *Using Corpora in the Language Classroom* is the highly approachable tone used to introduce corpora and their uses in classrooms. Above all, *Using Corpora in the Language Classroom* brings together a wealth of interesting websites for language educators and their students to explore further.

**ABOUT THE REVIEWER**

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