

Can Students Use Corpora to Enhance Their Writing?

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This poster presentation is based on the research conducted at the Faculty of Economics, University of Split, Croatia. The research was carried out on the sample of 42 second year students who major in tourism and take the course 'English in Tourism' as an obligatory part of their study programme.

The research consists of several parts and this poster presentation will concentrate on the part which studies how students approach improving their original texts using corpora. This stage in the project was preceded by training students in the use of corpora because they need help in order to get familiar with the technique (Stevens, 1995). The tasks and exercises used in the process of training were presented as a poster presentation at TaLC9 in Brno in 2010. We believed it was necessary to train the students in the use of corpora in order to raise their awareness of certain phenomena that underlie a successful use of language as well as to draw their attention to some of the language items that can be accessed and studied using corpora.

Keeping in mind that large corpora can be difficult to handle for a group of non-linguistics students who, above all, encounter this kind of linguistic tool for the first time, we opted for a small corpus. It was also decided that the corpus should be specialised to add to the authenticity of the task, i.e. along with the type of exercise it was meant to meet the requirement of triple authenticity according to Johns (Johns, 1988). Namely, one of the main aims in teaching a language for specific purposes is to motivate the students by helping them to realise the relation between the object of their studies and the language use (Donna, 2000:39). There is no one corpus that would suit all situations. The one we decide to use should be the one that best suits our needs at a particular time (O'Keeffe *et al.*, 2007).

The students were asked to write a text to be included in a destination brochure following several guidelines. The small specialised corpus compiled for this specific project was therefore called "Mediterranean Europe tour guide corpus". It consists of 446 481 tokens (400 022 appear in the word list) and 28 596 types.

It is important to emphasise that the students were not required to correct their work because they could not identify the errors they made and the instructor did not intervene into their original work at this stage. They were simply asked to apply some of the skills acquired during the training process to make use of the language contained in the corpus and thus enhance their texts.

The poster presentation will focus on the results of data analysis in which we concentrated on defining two main groups of student strategies: search strategies and data analysis strategies. The first one refers to how they searched the corpus, what regular expressions they used, and the second refers to what use they made of the data they accessed. In the first group we were able to identify and group students' attempts in 8 different

strategies, whereas in the second there are 12 strategies identified, some broken down into substrategies. The analysis also looks into, and gives examples of unsuccessful searches and tries to make conclusions about the reasons of failure.

References

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