

Using Online Corpus Tools and Other Reference Resources as Writing Assistance: A Mixed Methods Study of Korean ESL Graduate Students' Academic Writing

Choongil YOON

Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

University of Toronto

Toronto, Canada

Choongil.yoon@utoronto.ca

Research has shown that L2 writers, even those at advanced levels, need support in their writing in terms of vocabulary and grammar (Hinkel, 2002; Yoon, 2008). However, writing support in these areas is not readily available in North American universities: faculty feedback on lexical and grammatical features in L2 writers' papers can hardly be expected in content courses and even in academic writing courses and writing centers, linguistic aspects tend to be neglected in favor of idea development and text organization under the influences of process-oriented writing pedagogy (Hegelheimer, 2006).

Learner concordancing has been suggested as a useful writing assistance that helps learners to independently solve those lexical and grammatical problems that arise while writing in an L2 (Hyland, 2003; O'Sullivan & Chambers, 2006). By producing concordance lines of a given linguistic item, concordancing provides learners with, among others, its typical and frequent lexico-grammatical patterns as used in a given domain or discipline. However, existing research on concordancing as a reference tool has been largely confined to one-time error correction tasks conducted in language/writing classroom settings, providing little insight into learners' independent corpus consultation for writing outside of the classroom, which is a more authentic and typical setting for many of university students. How the advantages of concordancing can be put into practice in the everyday lives of students needs more investigation.

The present study will trace how five Korean ESL graduate students in Canada independently use a suite of online concordancers and other Internet-based language reference resources (COCA, Google search engines, Justtheword, and online dictionaries) for solving lexico-grammatical problems encountered while completing authentic writing assignments in English. During the first phase of the study, participants will be provided with training in basic concordancing concepts and skills and explore how they might use these resources to support their English academic writing. The second phase will track the five participants' uses of the reference suite over the entire process of completing a major writing assignment. The study will particularly examine: 1) purposes for which the participants consult the suite; 2) strategies the participants use in query formulation and interpretation of search results; 3) effects of the use of the suite on their attitudes and approaches to English writing; 4) factors that cause individual differences in the interaction with the suite. To increase the validity and trustworthiness of data and inferences from them, the study will use a mixed methods research

design employing multiple methods including surveys, real-time screen recordings of participants' writing, stimulated recalls, a query log, and interviews.

The study is motivated by the desire to help L2 learners to become more autonomous and confident writers. Specifically, findings from the study – such as specific problems that arise while writing in L2, patterns in learners' interactions with the reference suite, and individual differences therein – will offer valuable insights for L2 writing pedagogy, CALL (computer-assisted language learning) tool design, and writing support programs as well.

References

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