

Text, Genre, Corpus – Course Development for Technical Writing & Translation

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As electronic data have become more easily accessible, and as free corpus analysis tools such as Antconc (Antony, 2011) have become more robust and more sophisticated, it has become possible for students in advanced programmes to both develop and exploit highly focused micro-corpora.

This paper gives a comprehensive account of a new course for Master's level students on a technical writing and translation programme in a French university. Although corpora have been drawn on extensively in previous courses at this university, the emphasis has been, in the main, on terminology and phraseology. The course which we report on is innovative as it starts from texts and moves to corpus analysis. Drawing explicitly on Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1973, 1989, 1994), Genre Analysis (Swales, 1990) and Vygotskian Scaffolding (Daniels *et al.*, 2007) our aim has been to help students gain insights into narrowly focused technical texts such as software manuals and operating instructions, and then move to practical applications of these insights. While these approaches have been widely used in English for Academic Purposes courses, it is unusual for them to be part of a teaching programme in the French system, especially in translation and technical writing programmes. By adopting an approach which *starts* from texts and their contexts before moving to corpus analysis, the authors show how students can be helped to develop systematic accounts of specific genres, and to draw on these accounts to prepare clear guidelines to technical writers or translators who are approaching such genres for the first time.

The paper begins with an account of the rationale which informs the programme, the syllabus which has been developed, and examples of teaching and learning materials. As the course is now in its second cycle of delivery we will also be able to discuss some of the challenges which students have faced in creating their own micro-corpora, and to present student work which has resulted from those programmes. We will also be able to report on student evaluations of the approach which has been used and the contribution which they feel it has made to their appreciation of genres in technical domains.

References

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