Teaching and Language Corpora: Quo Vadis?

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Recent survey articles (Römer, 2011) have mapped out a history of where we have come from and where we might be going to in the application of corpus research in English language teaching. When this work is set alongside other recent publications such as Nesi & Gardner (2011), Reppen (2010), O'Keefe *et.al.* (2007), or Biber (2006), you might feel that we had arrived at a point of maturity in the field of Teaching and Language Corpora, and that there were few problems left to be solved.

In this paper, I will attempt to map out the resources for corpus applications in language teaching that we have built up since the 1980s, the tools which are currently available to language teachers, the success stories which we might want to build on, and some of the challenges we still face. In doing this I will attempt to situate corpus applications in language teaching within a tradition of empirical linguistics, and within an educational framework which has been profoundly influenced by the foundational descriptive work of Michael Halliday and of educational theorists working in a Vygotskyan tradition. I will also report on findings from a recent wide survey of corpus use in language teaching, hoping to give a snapshot of current practices and practitioners in the area.

Having been involved in corpus applications in language teaching since the 1980s I will illustrate some of this argument with examples from my own practice. This journey has taken me from early explorations using home cooked concordancers built on Word Perfect and Word macros or Snobol routines, through early dedicated corpus analysis tools like the Oxford Concordancing Program, Longman Mini Concordancer, and Micro Concord, and eventually to modern applications such as WordSmith Tools 6, MonoConc, AntConc, Sketch Engine and others. In this journey I have been influenced by the work of pioneers like Tim Johns, Douglas Biber, Ken Hyland and others, and I will review their contributions to current practices as well as consider some of the exciting possibilities which are now open to us as tools and corpus data become more widely available, and more closely integrated into the practice of language teaching.

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