



AVIATION ENGLISH AND CORPUS LINGUISTICS: THE EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS TO EXPLOIT CORPORA THROUGH ONLINE CLASSES

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Abstract

This study analyses the opinion of undergraduate students in an aircraft maintenance program about using a concordance to exploit a corpus as a way of studying English by themselves specially because most of students are in front of their computers during classes nowadays. The data were collected through online forms answered before and after the class and the findings demonstrate over 90% of the students think the activity might contribute to their autonomy.

Introduction

Aviation English refers to the language used by all professionals in the aviation industry, such as flight attendants, mechanics, pilots and air traffic controllers, and although there are thousands of professionals whose work depends on understanding different kinds of documents and on the use of English in specific contexts considering aviation world, most teaching materials and studies focus on Aeronautical English that refers to the language used between pilots and controllers over the radio. Considering this scenario, the use of authentic material such as maintenance manuals and reports is extremely important, but it is challenging to decide which grammar aspects and vocabulary to be focused. The teacher can conduct data analysis based on corpora to make those decisions and can also teach students to exploit corpora using a concordance program as a teaching tool since most of students are in front of their computers during classes nowadays. The goal of this poster is to share the experience of teaching undergraduate students to exploit corpora in order to research grammar aspects and specific vocabulary and to report initial results considering their opinion about how this activity may help them to study English, mainly when by themselves.

Methods & Materials

Students were asked to answer some questions on an online form accessed through a link. Questions will be presented along with the results. A total of 36 students were in class and answered before and after the activity questionnaires.

After some explanation about corpora exploitation, a pedagogic corpus [Szudarski 2018] of chapters of an aircraft maintenance manual, already in text format, was given to students so they were able to use Antconc [Anthony 2020] following teacher's instructions. Lee [2011] argues learners and teachers may be better served by relatively small, homogenous, and domain-specific corpora mainly because such corpora can be more relevant to learners' needs.

Results

Before the activity questionnaire

Then students were asked "What do you do when you cannot understand a word in English in technical documentation? (Check all that apply)" and the options were: A. Look it up in Google Translator; B. Look it up in a dictionary; C. Look it up in the same document; D. I look for an English teacher; E. I ask for help from a coworker and F. I ask for help from a classmate.

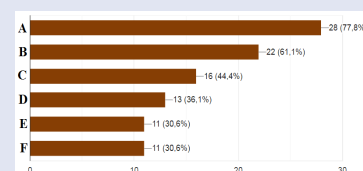


Chart 1. Students' action facing an unknown word

The last question was about autonomy: "Do you consider yourself autonomous (to the ability to understand/learn by yourself) when studying English?" and the results were that only one (2.8%) of the students thinks s/he is never autonomous; 11.1% (4) think they sometimes are autonomous; 58.3% (21) are usually autonomous; 22.2% (8) feel autonomous most of the time and 5.6% (2) is always like that.

After the activity questionnaire

Students were requested to answer some question as soon as they have finished doing the activities guided by the teacher and 97.2% (35) of them judged the information provided and the activities as useful so only 1 (2.8%) thought they were useless. Besides that, 83.3% (30) said they had never thought about looking words/sentences up in the documents to better understand vocabulary and grammar and 72.2% (26) considered exploiting corpus will help them study English.

As a final question, students answered the following question: "Did this research technique using corpus contribute to increase your autonomy (ability to understand by yourself) considering English?" and 34 (94.4%) of them chose the "yes" option.

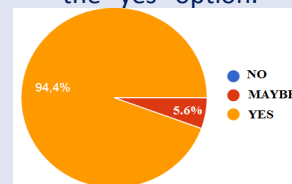


Chart 2. Students' opinion about corpus-based activities and autonomy.

Discussion

Considering findings from the first questionnaire, it's possible to say students consider context when searching for the meaning of a word because most of them use a translator and the document to understand vocabulary. That is important since "what a word means often depends on the context in which it is used" [Nagy 1995: 5]. As Antconc [Anthony 2020] shows concordance lines, it is expected that students consider it useful and that was what happened when they we guided to search for the word inspection because they could notice the difference between "inspection of" and "inspection to".

Students also liked the Clusters/N-grams function as it was useful to search groups of words with check and connectors to find out the correct options were "do a check" and "electrical connectors". This kind of activity may facilitate students' noticing, as stated by Balunda [2009], considering aspects of the word compared to traditional vocabulary learning strategies such as dictionary consultation given that it would be a little difficult to get information about using "electric or electrical connectors" in a translator, for example.

It is known other studies in this context are needed specially taking into account students' learning and performance, but it is encouraging to find out that even most of them (72.2%) do not feel autonomous frequently, they believe research technique using corpus contributes to increase their autonomy as predicted by Szudarski [2018: 104] considering "not only does DDL raise learners' awareness of the way language is used in real-life communicative situations but it also develops their autonomy by encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning".

Conclusions

Undergraduate students from an aircraft maintenance program considered the experience of exploiting corpus as positive believing this kind of activity might increase their autonomy. These results are motivating for teachers to try using corpora in their regular classes, especially if they are for English for specific purposes groups.

This may be a favorable moment to guide students through corpus tools and techniques considering many of them have been attending online classes using a computer as well as teachers have opportunities to conduct researches during their own teaching practice.

References

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