Building language corpora for learning and teaching English for special purposes

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Teaching and learning language for special purposes can pose a challenge on multiple levels, beginning with the discovery of the relevant lexis, preferred structures, and discoursal conventions, through selection from the identified material, to its gradation.

The talk will introduce, via concrete examples, the potential, methods and ease of applying both self-compiled and already available (collections of) texts and concordancing and information visualisation interfaces in the language classroom.

We will demonstrate the principles and methods of developing corpus resources, ways to utilise them for teaching general-, specialist-domain and academic language courses, as well as frequent errors to be avoided in the process.

Relevant collections of texts can include any genre, from journalistic articles, literary pieces, and specialist texts (e.g. medical journal papers, health records, patient diaries, legal acts, cookbooks...) to samples of student compositions.

We will show how the corpora can be subsequently easily and quickly analysed with freely available software, for in-class data-driven learning, informed materials development that can complement the language curriculum, self- and remedial teaching.

We shall see how such tools reveal a plethora of information about the lexis, grammar, information structure, and cultural associations in the genres investigated, how they can serve to unearth the most frequently overused or erroneous forms, or successful lingua franca strategies.

By the end of the session, the audience will be able to take the first steps in easily compiling their own corpora that will be relevant to the aims of their learning goals (students) or courses (teachers), know how to exploit the text collections for materials preparation, self- and remedial teaching, and in-class activities, spice up classes with novel, authentic and attractive tasks, and make more informed choices in both learning and pedagogy.

No previous familiarity with corpora or classroom concordancing is required.

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