

Introducing fantasy fiction terms with samples from chronicles of Narnia via ‘Sketch Engine’

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Annotation: the article looks into one of the corpus-based teaching and learning tools – Sketch Engine. It explores and showcases the possible practice of teaching fiction terms on the Sketch Engine. It as well enumerates some merits and demerits of the approach encountered while creating the demo practice.

Keywords: Sketch Engine, fiction terms, corpus linguistics, data driven learning, lexical items analysis

1.0 Introduction

The word corpus originally adopted from Latin which means body; further, when the term combined alongside with Linguistics, it refers to a massive compilation of spoken (transcribed) and written language. In a nutshell, corpora present opportunity to analyze large collection of language used in various ways. Some of the purposes of language analysis with corpora include genre analysis, analysis of language use, particular variety of a language analysis, comparative cultural studies, discourse analysis, language teaching, lexicography, semantics, stylistics etc. Thus, this paper focuses on the use of corpora in the language teaching context. More precisely, it attempts to demonstrate potential advantages of using corpus as a language teaching tool. Chronicles of Narnia, compiled as a corpus, are used as a data, and a set of exercises driven from the corpus through the software “Sketch Engine”. The anticipated outcome from such a design of a lesson is to ease the content development when fantasy literature is introduced to students in terms of lexis as well as to teach adverb subordinate clause with the authentic examples in the chronicles in terms of grammar, respectively. In the following paragraphs, the different use of corpus linguistics in language teaching will be briefly discussed along with the concise literature review. The process of compilation of the corpus will be followed by this, comparative analysis will be shown in three different sources, particularly in the created corpus, in the reference corpus (BNC), as well as in a traditional grammar reference books. Further on, the set of created exercises will be presented and discussed. The final section will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of corpus use in language acquisition.

With the emergence of corpus based linguistic studies, the language education has reached another milestone in its revolution path. In contemporary classroom, corpus has provided massive aid in many aspects of language learning such as grammar and vocabulary, most importantly, it seems to be a reliable source in developing authentic teaching and learning materials. In addition, some of the many advantages of corpus use in language acquisition appear to be the clarification of seemingly close synonyms (it prompts answers to the most common question by students – what is the difference between?) based on real life contexts with various grammatical constructions etc.

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2.0 Literature Review

Corpus Linguistics, as relatively recently found branches of Linguistics, has been criticized repeatedly for the last several decades. One of the proponents of CL, Tim Johns (1994) has positively described data driven learning (DDL) as authentic data that debunk all the myths, intuition-based explanations which is quite normal of “armchair” linguistics. Another supporting scholar Hunston (2002) assessed computer assisted corpus linguistics as a valuable tool of language analysis non-linearly, and quantitatively as well as qualitatively. However, having said the potential use and presupposed achievements of CL in ELT, the fact that not many classrooms seize this opportunity in their neither design of curriculums/syllabi, nor classroom methodology or teaching materials leaves many of us disappointed and frustrated. This issue has been raised by a few scholars. As an example, Granger (2004) bitterly mentions even though there is an active work ongoing in corpus-based linguistics, the actual number of corpora use in ELT is upsettingly low. He also adds that there is a genuine need for corpus promotion among language education or for publications which advocate the use of corpora in pedagogical practice. One of the experts in education - Tribble (2008) agrees with Granger stating only a few numbers of language teachers appear to be employing corpora in classrooms. In addition to that, my personal experience confirms the fact above to be completely truthful since the institution I worked for a year ago and the other institutions we had been in contact with had never facilitated this type of learning in education. Thus, it is crucial to motivate ELT personnel to get actively involved in the process of both applying corpora into teaching practice and spreading a word about it. Doing so, it seems to be a decent reciprocation of prospective language teachers to the incredible enthusiasm of corpus linguists.

3.0 Compilation of Chronicles and methodology

First, all seven chronicles of Narnia located on publicly open websites in an eBook format, after the series were downloaded and converted into machine-readable pdf format. Without any modifications having been made to the files, as to Sinclair’s “clean-text policy” (1992), they were uploaded to Sketch Engine as a whole and the software made it ready to work with. The total number of words in the corpus constitutes about 406,000 words.

It is important to define keyword in this context as it unfolds some parts of analysis. Scott (2001) explains the term as the words frequency of which is much higher compared to some norm. To set some norm, the reference corpus is required which in this analysis is British National Corpus (BNC). The reason for BNC is that it includes a large collection of written and spoken British English and that British English representation sets some norm against the British novel of Chronicles of Narnia.

4.0 Data analysis and discussion.

First analysis examines the lexical features of genre through keywords. To find out the high frequency fantasy genre related word, with the help of frequency word lists on Sketch Engine, high frequency words

lists are generated excluding tokens of proper names and function words such as articles, punctuation, pronouns, prepositions, and others since they are not helpful for introducing a genre. Then, the proportional frequency is calculated with both corpus as it is important to compare general corpus with the specific to identify key lexical items of fantasy literature. The findings highlight the words below as of more frequent in fantasy literature compared to the general corpus, thus they are recommended to introduce to students within the topic of Fantasy in the language course.

Witch, dwarf, beast, magic, giant, faun, palace, dragon, adventure, hawk, sword, creature, truffle hunter, magician, armor, fledge, king, queen, invisible, vanish, fade, centaur, unicorn, queer, evil, horizon, treasure, wicked, hobbit, ghosts, forecastle, satyr, gnome, crescent, mortal, triumph, bestowed, creepy, shaggy, supernatural, illusion, mirage, hero, gothic etc.

It is obvious that the words such as witch, dwarf, unicorn, centaur, dragon, hero, king, queen can be taught as characters of fiction/fantasy genre, while wicked, invisible, mortal, queer, shaggy, bestowed are adjectives that describe scene or personages of current genre. Hence, utilizing the lexical items from Narnia series in classroom, in the latter sessions some extracts from the movie can be demonstrated with the words covered to keep the balance between all language skills. Additionally, filling the gaps exercise can be employed as a post-learning activity. Last, a task which learners are asked to produce a small piece of this genre, can be implemented to measure the outcome.

Often students feel confused when they encounter contradictory samples out of classroom, for, it is crucial to activate corpus-incorporated learning in institutions where languages are taught. In this regard, Tsui (2004) confirms it is quite important to make language teachers aware of the fact that along with the forms and constructions the ordinary textbooks unpack, there are other structures in language that is probable.

5.0 Conclusions

Overall, this essay demonstrated some ways of corpus use in language teaching/learning, particularly in classroom (DDL). With the help of lexical item analysis via Sketch Engine, a small set of fantasy literature vocabulary has been generated based on fantasy series of Chronicles of Narnia. As for grammatical construction analysis, the corpus does not particularly prompt any structure being typical of fantasy, adverbial conjunctions have been explored through the software as intermediate level students tend to stutter producing complex sentences. To my view, in practice, it would have been of tremendous help for learners to discover almost unlimited complex sentence constructions with as little cue as just a single type of adverbial conjunction. Other advantages of using corpus in teaching/learning include a) it exposes learners to authentic language and raises their awareness of grammatical and lexical patterns; b) it creates “explore and discover” atmosphere, in other words inductive approach, where they figure rules out rather being taught to. And this perfectly aligns with some modern teaching theories of ELT.

On the note of advantages of Corpus-based teaching, the CQL (Corpus-based Query Language) allows instructors of languages to extract certain hits in Corpora. This presents an amazing opportunity of providing plenty of examples to students on many grammatical/lexical topics in language.

Yet, it is necessary to mention the limitation of corpus within this project as well as the drawbacks of corpus-based activities. First, the set of fantasy related words has been generated based on the series of a novel, even so, many more other genre representative words are left out. This can mean that it simply lacks the complete representativeness being merely partial. Another point to note is that frequency list generates high frequent words, however, in case the bigger idea needed to be driven, it would only display 1-7 sentences, moreover, it does not provide the source of extracts. To speak about implementing corpus while learning is in progress, this requires some technical skills as well as basic knowledge on how to operate around software. That is the main challenge for most of the millennials and older teachers/learners. For instance, some of my acquaintances completing this program simply disregarded this option module as it is computer based.

Having touched upon both benefits and drawbacks of corpus use in classroom, I withstand the fact that this approach needs to be brought into as many classrooms as possible. By doing so, it is highly likely that language learners will find ELT classes both beneficial and innovative.

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