

## How can language learners benefit from corpora (or not)

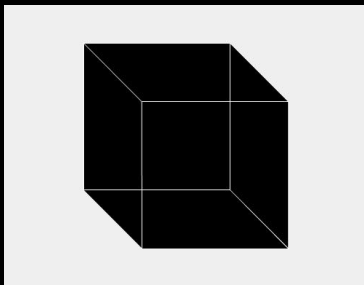
Ana Frankenberg-Garcia



## Three gateways to corpora



### First



### Second



### Third



Published corpus-based tools and  
resources

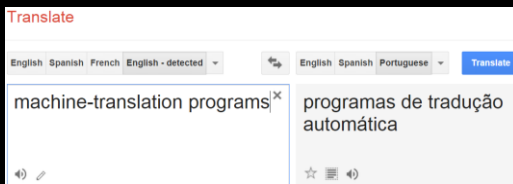
## Spell checkers and autocorrect options

absence	absence
accessories	accessories
accidant	accident
accomodate	accommodate
accordingto	according to
accross	across

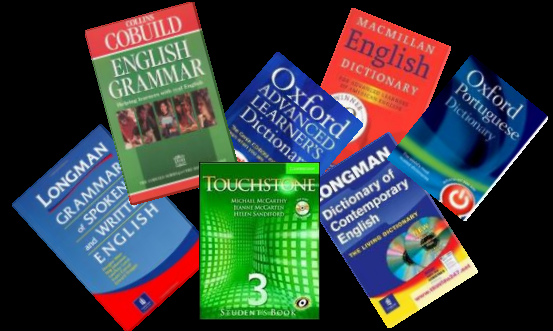
## Automatic redirection of web searches



## Machine Translation



## Corpus-based ELT materials



## New generation dictionaries

- Word frequency
  - Which headwords to include
  - Which senses to present first
  - Which words to use in definitions
- Grammatical properties of words
- Corpus examples
- Collocations
- Learner corpus data

### person - definition

★★★

NOUN [COUNTABLE] Pronunciation /'pɜː(r)s(ə)n/ Word Forms

1 an individual human, usually an adult. The plural is people, but in formal or official language the form persons is used

*Rooms cost £20 per person.*

*She's the type of person who always offers to wash up after a party.*

*Every single person in the room stopped talking.*

*Some people hate camping.*

*elderly/eligible/unemployed persons*

Thesaurus entry for this meaning of person

<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/person>

2 VERY FORMAL your body, or the clothes that you are wearing  
*His person had been searched without legal authority.*  
on **about someone's person**: *She always carried a small pair of scissors about her person.*  
1 Thesaurus entry for this meaning of person

PHRASES

- **as a person**  
used for talking about someone in relation to their character rather than their professional position  
*I wanted to get to know him as a person, not just as my teacher.*  
1 Thesaurus entry for this meaning of person
- **do something in person**

<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/person>

Get It Right!: person

**Get it right: person**

The usual plural form of person is people (not persons), and this is used in all ordinary contexts:

- ✗ Children imitate persons and situations they see on television.
- ✓ Children imitate people and situations they see on television.
- ✗ My neighbour is one of the nosiest persons I know.
- ✓ My neighbour is one of the nosiest people I know.

The form persons is used only in specialized contexts, especially in laws and legal documents, police reports, and public notices:

The coroner's verdict was murder by a person or persons unknown.

<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/person>

[illegible]

# Textbooks

► ***In conversation . . .***

People use ***'s not*** and ***'re not*** after pronouns.

*She's not strict.*

*They're not nice.*

***Isn't*** and ***aren't*** often follow nouns.

*My boss isn't strict.*


*My co-workers aren't nice.*

Touchstone Student Book 1 (McCarthy et al 2005:25)

# Textbooks

*In conversation . . .*

People say ***Sometimes I . . .*** 7 times more often than ***I sometimes . . .***




***Sometimes I . . .***

***I sometimes . . .***

Touchstone Student Book 1 (McCarthy et al 2005:46)

## Published corpus-based tools and resources



- Language selected and edited by experts
- Information from raw corpus data processed by experienced professionals
- Learners benefit from final product
- No hassle

## Published corpus-based tools and resources



- Amount of language in polished format is limited
- Language is infinitely bigger and more complex
- Learners (and teachers) have questions about language not covered or not covered in sufficient detail in dictionaries, grammar books, etc.

## Direct uses of corpora

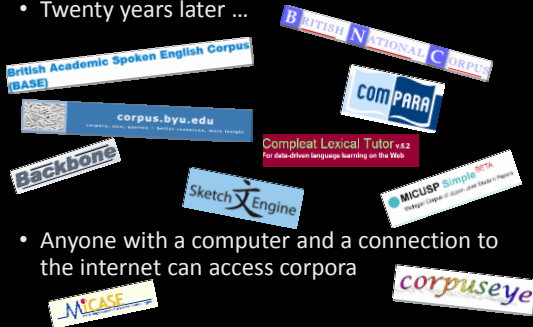


Tim Johns (1936-2009)

- One-to-one student teacher corpus consultations
- Data-driven learning (Johns 1991)
- Use of computers not widespread
- Corpora not accessible to general public

## Direct uses of corpora

- Twenty years later ...



- Anyone with a computer and a connection to the internet can access corpora

## And...

- There are books and websites about the use of corpora in language learning



## If teachers start using corpora

Learners can come into direct contact with corpora too

1. Without computers
  - The soft approach (Gabrielatos 2005)
  - Hands-off (Boulton 2010)
2. With computers
  - The hard approach (Gabrielatos 2005)
  - Hand-on (Boulton 2010)

## Using corpora hands-off

- Learners do not need to learn how to use concordancing software
- Teachers can prepare countless different types of hands-off corpus-based exercises for them
- But the mere fact that a classroom handout or activity is based on corpora is no guarantee of success ...

1. A smooth cheek, nearly hidden beneath grimple and sunglasses.
2. Protected by a grimple of bone, the brain was an organ of mind-boggling complexity.
3. Shoshana noticed her hair was so perfectly sleek it looked like a blond grimple.
4. Megan flopped down next to me and yanked off her grimple.
5. I heard my own laughter, echoing inside the grimple.
6. a woman with a ponytail sneaking out from under her grimple.
7. The balaclava can also help counteract chills from your vented grimple.
8. You can be pretty anonymous with a grimple on. What does grimple mean?
9. She said he wore a grimple with the visor down.
10. During rehab, she will probably wear a grimple.

## Grimple exercise


- Interesting from a linguistic perspective
- Raises language awareness
- Shows meaning can be derived from context
- But why bother?
- Isn't it easier and faster to look up *grimple* in a dictionary?
- Grimple = concordances for helmet in COCA\*

\* COCA <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>; Davies (2008).


## "grimple" in MacMillan Dictionary online

**helmet** - definition

★

NOUN [COUNTABLE]  Pronunciation /'helmt/

a hard hat that you wear to protect your head  
a *motorcycle helmet*

 Thesaurus entry for this meaning of helmet

## "grimple" in Oxford Portuguese Dictionary Online

Oxford Dictionaries  
Language matters

helmet

HOME » ENGLISH-PORTUGUESE » HELMET

**helmet**

American English: /'helmt/   
British English: /'helmt/ 

Translation of helmet in Portuguese:  
noun

(for soldiers, police officers, cyclists)  
**capacete** PT:  BR: PT:  IT

(for knights)  
**elmo** PT:  BR: PT:  IT

a safety helmet

## Another example

Guess what  
the missing  
word is

Many of them were \_\_\_\_\_ workers, you know support staff, people who cleaned, cooked.

Employment? – All \_\_\_\_\_ jobs, answered Claire. 'dishwasher, building janitor...'

...he does \_\_\_\_\_ tasks vaguely tied to insurance.

If they do find a job, it's \_\_\_\_\_ labour.

<http://elt-resourceful.com/2012/09/26/some-user-friendly-concordance-ideas/>

## Missing word exercise

- Interesting from a linguistic perspective
- Raises language awareness
- Shows meaning can be derived from context
- But do learners have time for this kind of analysis when they only have a few hours a week to learn a foreign language?
- Won't they feel frustrated if they can't guess that the missing word is *menial*?

## Another example

### Exercises

- 1 Study these concordance lines with *can* and classify them according to whether they relate to:
- 1 ability
  - 2 possibility
  - 3 permission
- (There are three of each.)
- a I **can** cook anything because I'm a Cordon Bleu chef.
  - b You **can** also reach the museum by train from any station on the suburban line.
  - c Now follow me, Piper, and you **can** join me in a bit of supper.
  - d Chimps **can** create artworks, use tools in a quite sophisticated fashion, and understand the concept of language.
  - e Anyone who turns up on the day **can** join in the fun.
  - f Many paddling pools **can** also be used as sandpits.
  - g Tropical fish **can** live without food for six weeks.
  - h Many credit cards **can** now be used to draw cash from ATMs around the world.
  - i You **can** keep it. I've got others.

Natural Grammar (Thornbury 2004:31)

## Can exercise

- Interesting from a linguistic perspective
- Raises language awareness
- No evidence that classifying different meanings of *can* has a positive effect on learning
- Conscious analysis could even be detrimental

## Concordances need to be integrated to everyday teaching

(Frankenberg-Garcia 2012)

Textbook dialogue on *Welcome* CD (Jones 2005:10)

- PASSENGER I was wondering, er... could I have a smoking seat?
- CHECK-IN CLERK I'm afraid this is a non-smoking flight, sir. Would you prefer an aisle seat or a window seat?
- PASSENGER Erm, well, I'm not sure. You see, it's the first time I've flown and I, well, I'm feeling a bit uneasy about it.

## Aisle exercise

(Frankenberg-Garcia 2012:40)

1. The air hostesses inquired what I was making passing in the aisle quite genuinely complimented my work.
2. I arrived at Salisbury Cathedral, just as the bride was about to go up the aisle.
3. As she looked around she felt a twinge of sadness that in a carriage where 70 per cent of the commuters were men there were five women forced to stand in the aisle.
4. He hurried up the aisle of the church.
5. She picked up her suitcase and made her way along the aisle.
6. The layout of the store, with wide aisles, gives customers room to move around.
7. I spend much of my time at the shops; wandering through the aisles, faltering, never knowing what to buy.

Where an aisles be found?

aisle=corridor?

## Grimple, menial, can and aisle

- On the surface, concordances for *grimple*, *menial*, *can* and *aisle* are very similar
- All focus on a given word
- All draw attention to context
- But *aisle* concordances were different

## Aisle

- Not a word at random
  - learners were curious about aisles because of authentic classroom situation
- Concordances used to expand previous one-off contact with the word
- New input exponentially enhanced with concentrated doses of word in context
- Learners figured out there are aisles not just on planes, but also on buses, trains and in shops, churches, cinemas...
- Learners noticed difference between *aisle* and *corridor*

## Hands-off activities are not just about language comprehension



Write a composition about something that happened on a bus (Frankenberg-Garcia 2012:43)

1. Back at the bus stop, the other people were furious.
2. You missed the bus, " she said.
3. When the bus pulled up to our school on Lincoln up.
4. I was sitting on the bus to school, I was looking out the window.
5. I saw a man trying to catch the bus as it pulled out of the station.
6. We got on and off the bus together.
7. She reached the gate just as the bus driver was collecting the last of the tickets and closing the door.
8. The people in the bus queue are going.
9. He walked to the bus shelter at the road.
10. Benny knew they would come to meet her off the bus .
11. I'm usually late for the bus.
12. I used to ride the bus by myself when I was your age.

Notice the words that go with bus

Can some of these expressions be useful in your composition?

## Hands-off activities need not be just on paper

- Learners working on a textbook unit about payment methods
- Many preposition errors noted
- Slides with concordances for lemma=pay for whole class participation and discussion

## First, concordances with lemma=pay leading learners to figure out

- You pay people (no preposition)
- You pay for things in general
- But you pay the bill/tax/rent (no preposition)
- You pay (in) cash
- You pay in dollars/euros etc.
- You pay by cheque/credit card

## Next, gapped concordances for practise

Source: COCA

- Americans living in Europe but being paid ..... dollars feel as if they've taken a big pay cut.
- Brenna's grandmother paid ..... the trip with what would have been Brenna's college money.
- He foolishly agreed to pay ..... Daniel the outrageous sum of fifteen thousand dollars to represent him in court.

- I never paid ..... the book. I stole it.
- She paid ..... the bill, and they left the restaurant, full but dissatisfied.
- I paid ..... her \$5 to cut the grass.
- Etc.



## Lemma=pay slides

- Learners had problems using prepositions with **pay**
- Massive doses of **pay** in context
- Because concordances were not bland, exercise-book sentences
- Stimulating conversation topics to discuss as a group
- Not just another boring, solitary grammar practice exercise

## Hands-off activities need not be just on paper

- With user-friendly freeware like HotPotatoes (<http://hotpot.uvic.ca/>)
- Teachers can create customized interactive CALL exercises for learners to work at their own pace

## Hands-off activities need not be just on paper

- Learners of English for Tourism having trouble understanding Americans using inches, gallons, ounces, etc.  
— setting is *directly related* to what is going on in the classroom
- CALL exercise with concordances from COCA to help learners become familiar with non-metric units used in the USA

## Hands-off need not be just concordances

- Collocation data can be used to boost vocabulary related to any topic (Frankenberg-Garcia 2012)
- Word Sketches (Kilgarriff et al 2004)

train (noun) enTenTen12 freq = 584042 (45.0 per million)

board of	21844	0.3	subject of	28329	0.2	adj. subject	8111	0.2	modifier	72723	0.3	modifier	164124	0.4
board	21844	0.3	whistle	521	0.0	punctual	22	0.0	freight	316	0.0	vreck	8332	0.0
overall	1114	0.4	depart	509	0.0	uptown	6	0.0	gray	2252	0.0	station	22271	0.7
ride	3295	0.5	track	1603	0.0	eastbound	11	0.0	commuter	2228	0.0	ride	2633	0.0
catch	4682	0.5	chug	10	0.0	fanatic	10	0.0	high-speed	2091	0.0	depot	908	0.0
board	255	0.8	rumble	18	0.0	southbound	11	0.0	potty	1492	0.0	ticket	4629	0.0
hop	331	0.7	arrive	207	0.0	westbound	1	0.0	express	1829	0.0	journey	3300	0.0
recruit	605	0.5	derail	152	0.0	northbound	10	0.0	wagon	2038	0.0	derailment	368	0.0
overcrowd	170	0.3	travel	1564	0.0	air-conditioned	12	0.0	steam	2376	0.0	fare	933	0.0
weight	1231	0.3	wreck	128	0.0	stationary	20	0.0	subway	1859	0.0	locomotive	456	0.0
exit	282	0.3	collide	126	0.0	infrequent	19	0.0	passenger	4661	0.0	carriage	506	0.0
collide	171	0.0	stop	2009	0.0	infrequent	9	0.0	break	1228	0.0	conductor	485	0.0
delay	381	0.9	haul	146	0.0	empty	86	0.0	runaway	1027	0.0	horn	558	0.0
bind	563	0.9	pull	1243	0.0	filthy	9	0.0	bullet	1759	0.0	bus	1665	0.0
crowd	198	0.8	barrel	79	0.0	frequent	56	0.0	overnight	1493	0.0	travel	2447	0.0
rob	208	0.8	run	4856	0.0	slow	100	0.0	toy	536	0.0	timetable	233	0.0
stop	1932	0.6	cross	979	0.0	noisy	12	0.0	sleep	750	0.0	crash	932	0.0
miss	1264	0.4	journey	83	0.0	crowded	9	0.0	Eurostar	553	0.0	bombing	462	0.0
book	330	0.4	lunch	72	0.0	plentiful	9	0.0	oncoming	559	0.0	robbery	334	0.0
interchange	102	0.3	pass	1739	0.0	full	466	0.0	intensity	516	0.0	track	2546	0.0
halt	145	0.3	transport	223	0.0	everyday	60	0.0	crowded	586	0.0	tram	214	0.0
levitate	76	0.3	approach	549	0.0	daily	133	0.0	maglev	296	0.0	operator	1064	0.0
crate	74	0.2	speed	208	0.0	late	218	0.0	speeding	414	0.0	trestle	148	0.0
hit	113	0.2	hurtle	68	0.0	comfortable	87	0.0	underground	470	0.0	robber	186	0.0
cancel	265	0.1	roll	456	0.0	convenient	41	0.0	bus	2016	0.0	whistle	169	0.0
take	1904	0.1	crash	147	0.0	capable	67	0.0	Express	881	0.0	collapse	709	0.0

Word Sketch for "train" - enTenTen corpus (Jakubíček et al 2013)

## Using corpora hands-on

- More problematic than hands-off (Gabrielatos 2005, Boulton 2010)
- Learners need to grapple with
  - New technology
  - Raw corpus data
  - New approach to learning



## Using corpora hands-on

From the view point of technology

- Language classrooms don't usually take place in a computer lab
- Language learners may not like technology
- All sorts of things can go wrong with computers
- Internet connection can be slow or unavailable
- Concordancers are not particularly intuitive or user-friendly

## Using corpora hands-on

From the perspective of the corpus, learners need to

- Decide which corpus to use
- Understand the strengths and limitations of the chosen corpus
- Interpret their results in the light of the above

## Using corpora hands-on

From the perspective of learning, learners may feel overwhelmed and overburdened with

- The amount language at their fingertips
- Raw corpus output, i.e., unedited language
- Having to figure out for themselves what to look out for in a sea of data

## Using corpora hands-on

- And if this is not enough to discourage language learners...
- Many hands-on classrooms activities described in the literature are for linguists, not for learners
- Interesting from the viewpoint of language research, but dissociated from the reality of language learning

## Using corpora hands-on

Reppen (2010:44)

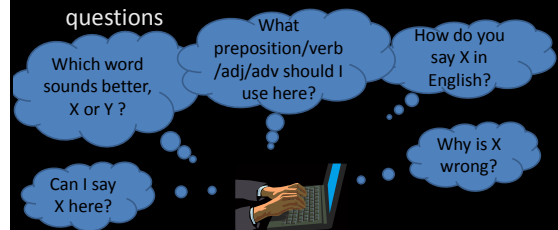
- Which texts have the highest normed counts for *well* in MICASE?
- Is *well* being used as a filler, a discourse marker or an adverb?

Reppen (2010:62)

- Create frequency lists for a few newspaper texts and scan resulting word lists to determine level of difficulty of each text

## Using corpora hands-on

- Hands-on corpus consultation needn't be discarded
- Particularly suitable for learner's individual questions

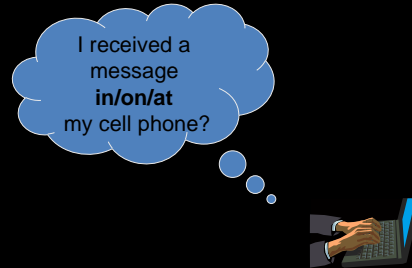


## Using corpora hands-on

- If all learners are asking the same questions, worth preparing a hands-off activity for the whole class
- If only individual learners ask, show them how to look up the answers autonomously
  - But dictionaries are quicker (easier?)
  - If not in dictionaries, use corpora

## Using corpora hands-on

What preposition can I use here?



## Monolingual learners' dictionary

**cell phone** NOUN  
(also **cellular phone**, informal **cell**) (ESPECIALLY NORTH AMERICAN ENGLISH) (BRITISH ENGLISH USUALLY **mobile phone**)  
a telephone that does not have wires and works by radio, that you can carry with you and use anywhere

Usage note: Phones

**Making and receiving phone calls**

- the phone/telephone rings
- answer/pick up/hang up the phone/telephone
- lift/pick up/hold/replace the receiver
- dial a (phone/extension/wrong) number/an area code
- call somebody/talk (to somebody)/speak (to somebody) on the phone/telephone; from home/work/the office

<http://www.oxfordadvancedlearnersdictionary.com/>

Try this: <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>

DISPLAY: ☒ LIST ☐ CHART ☒ KWIC

COMPARE

SEARCH STRING: WORD(S)

COLLOCATES:

POS LIST

Electronic surveillance agency, the NSA, it was an encrypted **cell phone message** (a companion of an incoming text message and her spare **cell phone's** ringtone), released, the first **message** on his **cell phone** was from his estranged girlfriend, Lella. She left a **message**. Called his **cell phone** and no response. And then one of the men, saying someone left an eerie **message** on her **cell phone** voice mail... In court, monitor runners via a Web site, a **cell phone** text **message** or e-mail. # No longer muted and left a **message** on my **cell phone**. She had read the police report, she said, GPS information in a text **message** using its own **cell phone**. The biggest difference, she'd left a **message** on Jeremy's **cell phone** asking him to call so they might at least that left that **message** on your **cell phone**? " # Nina waited for an answer, then as it was this **message** on his **cell phone**, " Nina said to Jeri on their way out the screen and an SMS **message** to someone's **cell phone**. (But don't even think about sending a message after he played a **message** on his **cell phone**. As he recalls it, " the voice was a stack. He left a **message** on Ferdi's **cell phone** that somebody had seen him driving. " A text **message** on my **cell phone** would work for me. Those seem sort of illiterate. He sends her a **message** via **cell phone**. By commercial's end, she's charmed, and she

## Another hands-on example

- Business English class
- Looking at closing lines in business letters
  - Should you need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me
  - Once again, I apologize for any inconvenience
  - I look forward to your reply
  - I look forward to hearing from you
  - I look forward to seeing you next week
  - Etc.

Last year's teacher said you can't say "I look forward", you have to say "I am looking forward"

## Well, let's check

- This site (<http://www.someya-net.com/concordancer/>) contains Business Letters in British and American English



### Online BLC KWIC Concordancer Search Result

Search String: contain "look forward to hearing"  
Search Corpus: BLC Business Letter Corpus (BLC2000)  
No. of Hits(a): 212

```

1 r your prompt attention to this matter, and shall look forward to hearing a favorable reply from
2 BLC2:15:03672] We hope you enjoy your course, and look forward to hearing about it.
3 [BLC2:36:01390] We look forward to hearing favorably from you soon.
4 [BLC2:36:02613] We look forward to hearing favorably from you.
5 [BLC2:25:07827] I look forward to hearing favourably from you.
6 [BLC2:32:02614] We look forward to hearing from teachers in some
7 [BLC2:32:02519] We look forward to hearing from the prospective
8 service we need in the Lebanon, and we shall now look forward to hearing from them.
9 BLC2:32:02749] We thank you for your interest and look forward to hearing from Whatawhata High
10 [BLC2:15:01073] I look forward to hearing from you about this
11 [BLC2:15:05975] I look forward to hearing from you after you have
12 you for placing your order with our company and I look forward to hearing from you again in the
13 [BLC2:22:01273] We look forward to hearing from you again in the
14 [BLC2:05:00064] We look forward to hearing from you again soon.
  
```

### Online BLC KWIC Concordancer Search Result

Search String: contain "looking forward to hearing"  
Search Corpus: BLC Business Letter Corpus (BLC2000)  
No. of Hits(a): 19

```

1 programme sounds interesting indeed and I shall be looking forward to hearing all about it from
2 [BLC2:04:01087] I'm looking forward to hearing from you in the ne
3 [BLC2:04:03240] I am certainly looking forward to hearing from you again soon.
4 [BLC2:31:01360] We are looking forward to hearing from you in the ne
5 [BLC2:04:03537] I am looking forward to hearing from you in the ne
6 [BLC2:29:00058] I'm looking forward to hearing from you soon.
7 assistance in making our final decision, and are looking forward to hearing from you soon.
8 [BLC2:31:03180] Bee appreciates your interest and I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.
9 [BLC2:32:01976] I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.
10 [BLC2:32:02042] I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.
11 [BLC2:32:03159] We are looking forward to hearing from you soon.
12 [BLC2:01:00221] I am looking forward to hearing from you.
13 [BLC2:31:00769] We are looking forward to hearing from you.
14 [BLC2:32:00772] We are looking forward to hearing from you.
  
```

## When using corpora hands-on

- Teachers can demonstrate to learners how they can use corpora
- To find out answers to questions that are in the forefront of their minds
- For which there are no ready-made answers in dictionaries and other conventional references
- Relevance and usefulness of corpora is immediately obvious

## When using corpora hands-on

- One computer only in class can be used like a shared dictionary
- It's unlikely that language learners will become power users of corpora
  - But is that what they want?
- After a few demonstrations learners can begin to use corpora on their own to answer simple questions that are relevant to them

## Recent developments

- SkELL (Baisa & Suchomel 2014)
- Sketch Engine for English Language Learning
  - > 1 billion words
  - texts from news, academic papers, Wikipedia articles, open-source (non)-fiction books, webpages, discussion forums, blogs etc.

<http://skell.sketchengine.co.uk/run.cgi/skell>

SkELL train Examples Word sketch Similar words

train (noun) switch to (verb)

verbs with train as object

board haul derail catch operate ride tilt stop miss collide pull accommodate run bind schedule

verbs with train as subject

depart travel run arrive derail stop operate collide haul track transport pull pass slow shed

adjectives with train

daily capable slow ready full late available able such

modifiers of train

freight passenger express commuter wagon high-speed steam subway gray long-distance Amtrak electric suburban baggage car

nouns modified by train

wreck station ride journey depot derailment ticket whistle crash ferry fare robber operator bombing robbery

words and/or train

bus train subway freight plane ferry airplane automobile locomotive track bus passenger taxi artillery boat

Word Sketch for "train" - SkELL (Balsa & Suchomel 2014)

## Some recommendations

- Corpus-based exercises and activities should be relevant to what is going on in the classroom
  - Language learners don't have time to and may not be interested in analysing language for its own sake
- There is no need to use the terminology of corpus linguistics
  - Don't say corpus, say website or tool
  - Don't say concordance, say sentence or text extract
  - Don't say collocation, say words that go well together

## Some recommendations

Learners need specific instructions on what to do with corpora

- When using corpora hands-off
  - Printing out concordances and asking learners to observe and discuss them is too vague
  - Tell them exactly what to look out for
  - If they notice other things as well, great.
- When using corpora hands-on
  - Show that a corpus can help
  - Show how to carry out relevant query
  - Make sure learners can understand the results

## Some recommendations

When dealing with corpus data

- If hands-off
  - Select which data to use and edit it if necessary
  - Leave out language that is too difficult or inappropriate for the classroom
- If hands-on
  - Encourage learners not to be intimidated by unedited language and to focus instead on the answers to the question that prompted their query
  - But be there to help learners with any clarifications that they feel are important
  - Sometimes one query leads to another one...

## And to conclude

- When discussing whether or not data-driven learning actually works
- Remember there are different ways of introducing learners to data-driven learning
- What is fascinating to a linguist may not be relevant or useful to a learner
- For data-driven learning to work, it must focus on what is interesting to the learner rather than on what is interesting about the data

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