

Application of Corpus in College English Teaching Reform

Jiamin Kang

School of Freshmen, Xi'an Technological University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China

email:2295035076@qq.com

Abstract. The information means have achieved all-round improvements, and the integrated teaching mode both online and offline has been widely applied in teaching practice, which also contributes to the teaching optimization to a large extent. The paper starts from the advantages of the corpus and explores the path of applying the corpus to optimize college English teaching. Focusing on the non-English major students in one college in the northwest of China, the paper collects and conducts a contrastive analysis of their textual materials before and after the corpus application, and after statistical analysis through SegmentAnt and AntConc, combs the differences of the using frequency and preferences of commonly-used types of construction in English writing, to explore whether it has the positive impact to use corpus in college English teaching. Based on a series of foregoing research findings, the paper holds that the application of the corpus to college English teaching can achieve the effect of stimulating interest, which will bring students a good learning experience, promote their acquisition of English knowledge, and ensure their comprehensive development. Meanwhile, it can serve as a provision of new implications for further research and practice of college English teaching.

Keywords: College English; Teaching reform; Corpus; Application

1. Introduction

Grammar is one of the common linguistic cores, but it is not to say that the totally correct grammar will definitely achieve the communicative purpose [1]. Therefore, grammar teaching and communicative teaching method have played an important role in language teaching methodology respectively for a long time, and there are numerous studies related to the two classical teaching methods. Grammar teaching is one major content in college English teaching and improving English grammar teaching is helpful to improve the teaching level. Different from English teaching in basic education, college English focuses more on the development of students' English application ability, and teachers also need to cultivate students' comprehensive English literacy in teaching, which means that the previous teaching mode is difficult to meet the teaching needs of teachers. However, there are certain problems in college English, such as students' uneven level and conservative teaching methods, which to some extent restrict the role of college English in improving students' English ability [2, 3].

In recent years, having adopted the comprehensive concept of inter-discipline, some researchers try to combine corpus method with college English teaching practice with the assistance of rapidly developing computer and Internet technology to innovate grammar teaching and communication teaching methods. Based on the actual analysis, the corpus mainly refers to a large-scale electronic text database relying on Internet technology, which has the characteristics of various samples, large scale and wide sources. After years of supplement and maturity, it is the corpus that has been gradually applied in English teaching due to its more complete educational function and its more directional teaching-oriented purpose. Many researchers have made empirical discussion on the ability of the corpus in language feature analysis by observing and summarizing rich language samples, in order to draw more objective, universal and stable research findings and conclusions[4, 5, 6, 7]. Therefore, in the context of the Internet, teachers need to pay attention to the application of the corpus to break the traditional teaching restrictions and further promote the development of teaching.

2. Significance of Using Corpus Method in College English Teaching

2.1 Enrich Contents of English Teaching. From the traditional perspective, teaching activities base mainly on required textbooks, but corresponding teaching contents are relatively limited, and are hard to come into effect of “stimulating interest”. In view of this situation, college English teachers carry out teaching activities relying on the corpus which provides students with sufficient language materials and further enriches teaching contents, so as to meet students’ needs of learning and teachers’ needs of teaching.

2.2 Promote Informatization Construction of English Teaching. The application of corpus method can further promote the construction of English informatization and guarantee the positive trend of college English teaching. Under the support of corpus method, teachers have an easy access to collect and process language materials, and students are guided to obtain an ocean of learning materials independently, which has a positive impact on the formation of students' learning habits and the development of language competency. Therefore, the construction and application of corpus is the indispensable part of digital construction in many schools for the time being. It is hoped to transform the concept of college English teaching, deepen the understanding of information-based teaching, and contribute to the construction of college English Informatization.

2.3 Stimulate Students’ English Learning Motivation. After years of learning, with good English foundation, college students have been able to skillfully memorize English knowledge and have a long-term English learning habit. However, compared with other courses, English learning requires more self-learning consciousness and has a high possibility of losing learning autonomy. Whereas the corpus mobilizes well students’ interest in English learning. For one thing, by providing students with a large number of real English resources and assigning corresponding learning tasks, students’ English knowledge system can be adjusted and enhanced gradually. For another, the corpus-based teaching method helps to improve the current teaching situation, and achieve the established goals.

3. Research Questions and Method

3.1 Research Questions. Conducting the contrastive research of corpus method, the paper analyzes the similarities and differences of two aspects(frequency of collocations and preferences of common types) for non-English majors in English writing, which expects to answer the following questions: (1) Are there any differences of collocation frequency between the two groups before and after the use of corpus?(2) Are there any differences of collocation preferences between the two groups before and after the use of corpus?

3.2 Research Subjects. Research subjects are selected from non-English freshmen from the author’s English course in the university. This school adopts the elective course system of all departments, so students in the class basically cover all majors except for art and sports), which identifies that the data source is representative and extensive.

3.3 Corpus Collection and Data Statistics. The experimental corpus was selected from several essays arranged for students through Unipus platform in college English reading and writing textbook. And the essay genre conforms to the syllabi of college English course and cet-4, so the difficulty of the essay topic is appropriate. The author collected 100 essays (50 each group before and after using the corpus), summarized the electronic version of them, made text cleaning and annotation, and built a micro corpus (C1 and C2). In this process, the author used SegmentAnt, TreeTagger, AntConc, Chi-square and Log-likelihood Calculator and Excel software to conduct subsequent operations of word segmentation, code annotation and data analysis.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Statistics of Students’ Collocation Structure. Question one focuses on differences of collocation frequency before and after the use of corpus in classroom teaching. Specific results are as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Data of the experimental and control corpus

Group	Num.of Words	Num.of Tokens	Num.of Types	Standardized TTR	P - Value
C1 (control)	5578	121	43	35.5%	0.000**
C2 (experiment)	5515	192	105	54.7%	*

After analysis, the data of C1 and C2 were significantly different ($p < 0.001$). Among them, the number of words, tokens and TTR value of C1 are relatively lower than that of C2, which shows that before the corpus method is applied to the class, C1 students have a weak awareness of collocation use, and the repetition is high. After the application, the situation of C2 students has had certain improvement.

4.2 Statistics of Students' Types of Collocation Structure. Question two focuses on differences of collocation preference before and after the use of corpus in classroom teaching. In this regard, the author classified the collocation into six types. Specific results are as shown in Table 2:

Table 2 Data of the experimental and control corpus

Form Categories	C 1 (control)		C 2 (experiment)	
	Type	Frequency	Type	Frequency
<i>Verb + Noun</i>	8	13	12	30
<i>Link verb + Predicative</i>	4	6	6	11
<i>Adj + Noun</i>	9	13	10	20
<i>Modal verb + Verb</i>	2	2	4	17
<i>Subject + Verb</i>	0	0	2	4
<i>Infinitive + Verb</i>	1	2	2	4

After analysis, the type and frequency of C1 students are relatively lower than C2'S, which shows that C1 students prefer to use the types of *verb + noun* and *adj + noun*, and even there is no use of the type of *subject + verb*. However, after the application of the corpus, the above status of C2 students was improved and all types were used to some degree, but the types of *subject + verb* and *infinitive + verb* are still less used relatively.

5. Conclusions

By comparing and analyzing the effect of corpus method used in class before and after, the paper holds that this method has practical significance in optimizing the path of college English teaching and promoting students' English level, and can provide some implications and references.

5.1 To Provide Students with Rich English Learning Resources. The new teaching mode can attain the educational object of "stimulating interest", and can fully mobilize students' interest in class participation. Since the new period, many universities in China have begun to actively build their school-based language corpora that are in line with the reality of their school and conducive to promoting students' comprehensive development, so as to provide students with diversified and all-round teaching resources. With the applying of abundant language materials, students can jump out of textbooks, and learn the real and vivid language resources under the guidance of teachers, which can also do well to the exercises of students' self-learning ability and the creation of teachers' efficient classes.

In addition, in order to meet the actual needs of students, universities and teachers also need to integrate and classify the corpora of language materials, which can strengthen the association between English learning and students' majors, and stimulate students to comprehend the close

internal relationship between English learning and their majors. For example, students majoring in finance and economics or mechanical manufacturing can use the corresponding corpus to make clear the words and patterns commonly applied in their financial or mechanical contexts, which can enrich students' language accumulation and improve the level of idiomaticity and fluency of their English expression. With the help of the corpus, students' English learning ability is further enhanced, and they will use the corpus actively in their later learning.

Moreover, the corpus can also break the old barrier of traditional English textbooks, because the corpus will regularly update language materials, which are closely related to students' daily routines and major trend. Students can search more up-to-date English terms and expressions.

5.2 To Promote the Construction of “Online+Offline” Teaching Mode Without Time-Space Limit. With the support of the corpus, teachers can build a teaching system integrating online and offline to provide an assurance for students' independent and flexible learning. The application of the corpus provides a sea of resource support for college English teaching, and students can also study and consult materials independently after they are taught the using methods of the corpus. Based on the new teaching mode, teachers can create a teaching environment of flipped classroom, guide students to search language materials outside class and design self-study programs based on the course content [8]. During the process, teachers can collect teaching materials in the corpus combined with the teaching content, and then share them to students before class, so that students can complete the corresponding learning tasks in combination with the teaching plan [9]. After the class, teachers can carry out set teaching activities in combination with students' in-class situation, which not only improves the vacancy of students' major position in traditional teaching, but also guides students to master more knowledge related to their majors and other aspects and cultivates students' language application competence.

5.3 To Break Students' Thinking Patterns to Acquire Expressions or Vocabularies. By using the corpus, students can also break the fixed thinking restrictions. That is, teachers can design relating teaching activities to let students learn and understand different expressions and vocabulary, which is similar to the Chinese with the same pronunciation and different characters. Some English words have different meanings in different a context, which requires them to have a sense of flexibility. In fact, in the process of English communication, the use of vocabulary is not rigid, but makes various changes around the contexts, in order to express their own views and ideas effectively. For instance, most students have formed a deeply rooted thinking mode in English learning --- when others ask “How are you?”, many students will reply with “I'm fine, thank you. And you?” But if the answer is changed into “Not too bad” in response, some students could not continue the follow-up conversation. [10] For this, teachers need to consciously use corpus resources and let students learn different language collocations and their connotations. Besides, students can further understand different communication conversations and know about the real language materials to experience their concrete meanings, so as to change the inherent understanding of English learning and break the traditional thinking pattern.

5.4 To Improve Teachers' Informationized Teaching Competency. The effective use of the corpus requires teachers to master good teaching ability of informatization. First of all, school administrators need to deeply analyze the curriculum reform standards of higher education, understand the current needs of social positions and job market for students' English competence, and then make an initial plan for the direction of talent training, so as to formulate the improvement plan of teacher education ability. Secondly, start with multiple dimensions to improve teachers' comprehensive educational ability. Universities can invite experts and excellent teachers to deliver lectures, so that teachers can understand the necessity of the integration between the corpus-based method and class teaching. Third, universities and relative teachers should make references of the successful cases from peer colleges and frame teacher training programs, in order to encourage English teachers to master the integration of corpus-based method and college English teaching.

To sum up, the corpus-based method plays a vital role in optimizing college English teaching, and its innovation of teaching mode and teaching means are of great value to improving the current situation of college English teaching. In this regard, schools and teachers need to pay attention to

the application of new teaching methods, and carry out corresponding teaching activities.

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