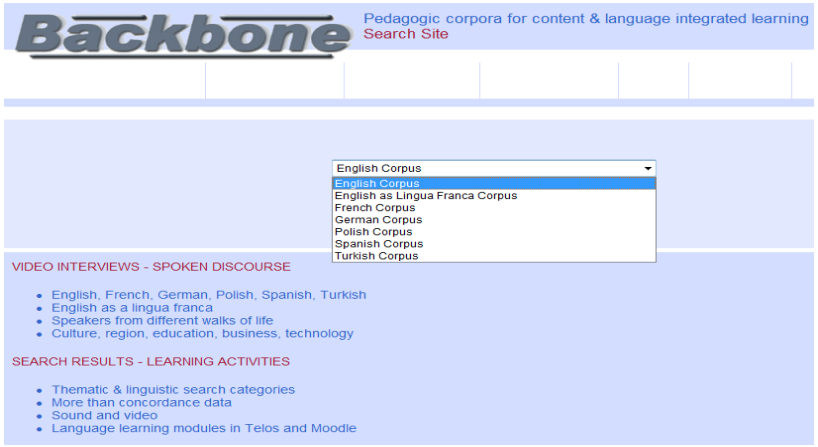
Corpus-based Undergraduate Consecutive Interpreter Training: An Evaluation of the Backbone Corpus



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Rationale for the PhD project

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
% GCSE language	76	78	76	73	68	59

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
% GCSE language	51	46	44	44	43	40

(CfBt Trust 2012)

Rationale for the PhD project

- 1999-2009: UK UG French studies down 29%
- 1999-2009: UK UG German studies down 52%

(CfBT Trust 2011)

- Language 'learning' separate from interpreter training (for example Keiser 1978: 13; Kornakov 2000: 244)
- To what extent is this realistic in the UG context?

A corpus-based approach to:

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- trial the use of the Backbone corpus in UG interpreting modules

- explore the classroom-based and self-study opportunities afforded by such resources

- contribute to corpus-based interpreter training (cf. Bendazzoli & Sandrelli 2005, 2009)

Approach

- Pilot study + 3 case studies (n=27): interpreting and lexical knowledge
- Pre-testing / post-testing
- Questionnaire and self-evaluative essay
- Accompanying exercises: interpreting- and language-focused tasks
- “Pedagogic mediation” (cf. Widdowson 2003; Braun 2005)

Language-focused exercises

- Listening comprehension tasks
- Concordance searches
- Exploratory tasks
- Language comparisons using two sub-corpora simultaneously

Interpreting-focused exercises

- Preparatory tasks – using themed section searches to compile topic-specific glossaries
- Anticipation - browsing video content

- Self-assessment – checking interpreting performance against transcripts
- Peer-assessment – recording interpreting tasks and assessing each other

Evaluation: the student perspective

- Abundance of learning materials at an appropriate level for UG students
- Resources uploaded to one place; easy to access
- Language-focused exercises encouraged listening and concentration on a deeper level
- Both types of exercise rated 'helpful' or 'very helpful' by the majority of students

	Very helpful	Helpful	Total
Language-focused	9	16	25/27
Interpreting-focused	17	7	24/27

Evaluation: the student perspective

- "I found the interpreting exercises on the computer a little bit strange. I prefer it 'live'."
- The multiple choice element of some language-focused tasks made the exercises too simplistic
- "Whole-text reading" (Braun 2007: 309) – uses corpus transcripts in 'live' practice

→ students request more of this, particularly in self-study

How were the corpus-based materials used during self-study?

Method of corpus exploitation	Total number of students using this method
Using the exercises to apply the same techniques to other videos/scenarios	18
Using the sub-corpora in L1 and L2 simultaneously to compare education systems	12
Key-word lists	8
Concordances	7
Annotation highlighter	7
Co-occurrence	2
Section search	2

Evaluation: the tutor perspective

- Abundance of materials – variety of topics and speakers
- Greater degree of pedagogic personalisation and differentiation
- Greater topic preparation by students
- Familiarisation with the corpus - time-consuming
- Corpus-based training: making the tutor's life easier (?)
- Minor technical hitches

In summary

- Student reaction largely positive
- Seems to promote preparation and a sense of discovery (Johns 1986)
- Shift towards more individualised learning
- ‘Traditional’ corpus functions used less frequently

→ students request more information about functions

- Easier for the tutor (?)
- Corpus (computer)-based work preferred in self-study

References

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