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ACTUAL ISSUES OF LANGUAGE TEACHING AND TRANSLATION

AKTUÁLNE PROBLÉMY VÝUČBY JAZYKOV A PREKLADU

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Collection of Scientific and Methodological Papers

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Zbierka vedeckých a metodických článkov

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Research work is intended for researchers, students, postgraduates and doctoral students investigating the issues of intercultural relations and translation issues.

Content / Obsah

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THE CORPUS-BASED APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Abstract
In the article the problem of using corpus-based approach at the lessons of studying a foreign language as one of the new and innovative methods of teaching is considered. The necessity of applying corpus in the classroom is highlighted and the spheres where corpus may be implemented can be described.

Keywords*: corpus, corpus-based approach, foreign language teaching and learning, method of teaching.*

Nowadays in the century of new and innovation technology all aspects of lige have become dependent on the technology and computer use. Recently electronic data-based approach is widely used but some researchers are still thinking that technology-based tools hasn't been completely studied and tested. Nevertheless, we can see the cases when the foreign researchers and teachers are successfully applying the data of corpus linguistics in the process of teaching a foreign language.

While the term "corpus" is used to refer to large collections of texts which represent a sample of a particular variety or use of language(s) that are presented in machine readable form, and in Oxford dictionary it is explained as "A collection of written or spoken material in machine-readable form, assembled for the purpose of linguistic research".

Its history corpus linguistics as the section of linguistics begins from 60th of the XX century, when in Brown University (USA) by the scientists Nelson Francis and Henry Kucera the first

big corpus of the texts on the machine was created. About 500 thousand words of the printing texts of the American option of English language belonging to 15 most mass genres of the American prose (newspaper articles, reviews, art texts, scientific texts, texts of the religious contents, a fantasy, biographies, etc.) are given in the corpus with the total amount of about 1 million words. According to founders, the Braunovsky corpus was rather representative for the American variant of English and also it was devoted to reflection of linguistic features of the American printing prose. For this corpus the following four criteria:-origin of the author and structure of the text were the cornerstone of selection of texts (the author had to be the nee carrier of the American variant of English, dialogue mustn't be more than a half of the text); – synchronization (the corpus included texts, for the first time published in 1961); – a numerical ratio of texts of different genres; – availability for computer data processing (by means of tags – marks – in the text for classification and fast search) [1].

If we consider the corpus of the Kazakh language, we must admit the fact that there is no perfectly functioning corpus. But nevertheless a lot of work is done in order to create the corpus of the Kazakh language. One of these attempts is the pilot version of the corpus Almaty Corpus of the Kazakh language which is being created in the frame of the project at al-Farabi Kazakh National University. The corpus is being completed and formed with the assistance of the professors and experts of National Research University "High School of Economics". It is in the form of open access to everyone who wants to use it as a research material and methodic tool which may be found at the following url: http://web-corpora.net/ KazakhCorpus/ search/?interface_language=ru.

A lot of research has been conducted to examine the effectiveness of using corpus linguistics as a teaching technique to highlight how native speakers of English use certain language forms, vocabulary items, and expressions. Maddalena (2001) explains that the use of authentic and real life examples with L2 learners is more beneficial than examples that are made up by the teacher and do not simulate real life use of language. Another benefit of using corpora for language teaching is that it gives students the chance to actually work with language and analyze it [2].

When we consider about the necessity of using corpora at the lessons, for FLT we prefer to let the students use the dictionaries which is also considered as an indirect use of corpus, and this seems more quicker and more effective while some other teachers advise you to apply the corpus-based methods in classroom. It is well-known that the main aim of foreign language teaching is to teach to be able to communicate in real life as a native speaker of that target language. We should take into account that corpus is the best recourse for authentic materials available to be used for teaching. The students will have a

possibility to imitate the native speakers, use them as a model for interaction. The next point is that if a student has difficulties with finding an appropriate word in the favourite dictionary you may rely on corpus. It may help with identification of the difference between the words even synonyms studying them in the context provided in a corpus.

One more advantage of using corpus-based method of teaching is that the teaching and learning processes are student-centered, where the learner has control of the learning process; and the powerful and motivating discovery aspect in which the learner acts as a researcher. In teaching methods teacher can achieve any kind of result when he just directs the learner to find the necessary information himself but not giving the students the material in a ready-made form.

The use of corpora in language teaching and learning has been more indirect than direct. Corpus of a definite language is not widely used directly the reason of which may be connected with some factors. For example, the level and experience of learners, time constraints, curricular requirements, knowledge and skills required of teachers for corpus analysis and pedagogical mediation, and the access to resources such as computers, and appropriate software tools and corpora, or a combination of these [3]. In order to conduct a study of language which is corpus-based, it is necessary to gain access to a corpus and a concordancing programme. A corpus consists of a databank of natural texts, compiled from writing and/or a transcription of recorded speech. A concordancer is a software program which analyzes corpora and lists the results. The main focus of corpus linguistics is to discover patterns of authentic language use through analysis of actual usage.

The next area of applying corpus-based approach is in the process of making tests in language teaching. Corpus contributes to selection and constructions of the materials for tests, to evaluation of the results of the tests. The tests based on the real

language materials must give more effective and objective results, assessing the learner's skills and competences in using the definite language.

Corpus may be applied for elaboration of the works on the following spheres:

- studying some grammar forms which may cause difficulties in using them in a speech;

- defining which language pattern is frequently used according to the corpus;

- comparison of some constructions used in different contexts;

- teaching the students to compile a dictionary;

- identification of the difference between the misused terms or words;

- giving samples from the authentic material, literature;

- automatization of the ready-made constructions applied frequently in a speech.

In the process of teaching and learning, especially a foreign language the experience of Kazakhstani researchers and teachers is a bit limited. The works devoted on the given issue aren't widespread, which proves its underinvestigated condition. The experience of foreign teachers is worth being taken into account for further development of the given problem in the sphere of education in the Republic of Kazakhstan. For this purpose there are organized different conferences and round-table discussions on the problem of creating a language corpora, in our case the corpus of the Kazakh language and difficulties the researchers face on the way to it. Some of this work has been done on how to exploit and evaluate corpus use in the language classroom. There is enumerated a definite list of issues the language teachers enlisted while they were asked to name the main reason of the corpus-based approach absence at the lessons. Some of them refer to the poor technological competence while others blame

the shortage of the devices as computers with an access to internet and programmes installed.

For evaluation the level of knowledge and competence of the students in using the corpora of languages in the classroom a survey was conducted in a form of questionnaire in al-Farabi Kazakh National University. The results of the questionnaire showed incomplete skills of practicing of corpus use in the classroom, nevertheless some of them insisted on using the language corpus for the purpose of seeking the materials for writing diploma work and thesis. But they turned out to use the corpus in their own time and individually without the assistance of the language teacher. When they were asked about the level of their technological competence all answered that all had some general experience of using computers for personal and professional purposes, although a few were not confident in their abilities in this respect.

It was also made clear that there was no obligation on any of the students to complete the questionnaire. In general 53 students were questioned but 3 students refused to participate in the survey. The results taken from the survey are reproduced below with the help of graph for ease of interpretation:
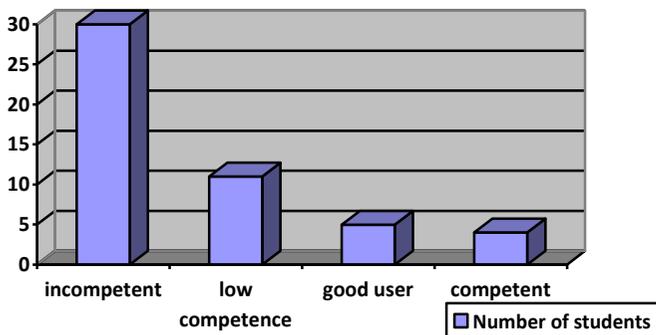
According to the chart it's easy to conclude that the students have less practice in using corpora in the classroom

despite the fact they have quite full theoretical information about corpus linguistics.

The majority of the respondents accepted the fact that they didn't use the corpus of language at the lessons or even for lesson preparation. Only 22 percent of the questioned students declared that they had an experience of using corpus of language (Almaty Corpus of the Kazakh language) at the lesson for informing about the creation of the given corpus in Kazakhstan and what functions of it and how one could use. While some students insisted on using corpora of language which was executed in the process of writing their dissertation or diploma works just four students had an experience in practicing the language corpora application and knowledge about the stages of creating and compiling the corpus of the Kazakh language.

But most of the students expressed their wish to use corpora in their studies. Interestingly, and seemingly contradictory, fewer would choose corpora than those who enjoy it. They would prefer to keep to traditional methods of teaching and learning. Their choice was justified with the time spent on the instructing how to use the corpora of languages instead of using this time for giving new material according to the curriculum.

We tried to give a list of positive and negative aspects of applying language corpora at the lessons through the eyes of students. If ones highlight the positive points of language corpora usage as a good source of authentic material both for the lesson and research, a real opportunity to get ready made patterns, possibility to learn directly without any reference books and a chance to see and listen to the student's automatic mistakes and to correct them in relations to the material, the others mention the time spent on learning and using language corpus, the shortage of technical equipment, difficulties in analyzing the huge corpora (e.g. in English classrooms) as the main disadvantages of using language corpora at the lessons.

From these listings, one can immediately identify the technical aspects, time and language variety to be most problematic. Nevertheless, "quite all participants could easily identify the advantages of corpus use and their potential. The fact that corpora represent 'real language use in context' is viewed by many as an asset in their awareness of language process…" [4].

The students were questioned if they expressed desire to use corpus-based approach in the classroom and the results achieved from it is as followings:
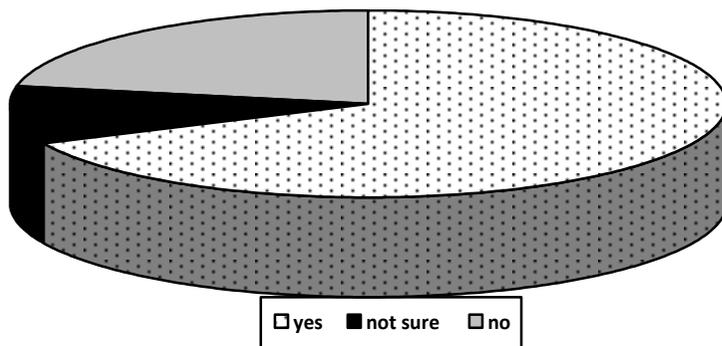
As it is shown, a clear majority indicates that they are very positively intentioned in relation to integrating corpora in the classroom, with a maximum of 34 expressing willingness towards in-class use.   The percentage who have chosen to use corpora is relatively high given because some of them are already involved in corpus-based research.

In conclusion we can say that the results of this study are most encouraging and suggest that the corpus-based approach should be integrated in the language teaching and learning processes. The difficulties drawn from the enumerated suggestions of the students must be taken into account and settled. At the same time the teachers should take an initiative and widely use the language corpora in any fitting cases at the lessons.

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