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The phraseology of EFL academic writing: Methodological issues and research findings

Recent corpus-based studies of recurrent word combinations (Biber & al 1999; Biber 2004), lexical phrases (Oakey 2002a & 2002b) and abstract nouns (J. Flowerdew, 2003) in native academic writing have pointed to the existence of an EAP-specific phraseology. Although these findings have had little influence on syllabus and materials design so far, Thurstun & Candlin's (1997) innovative workbook shows that corpus-based insights can be incorporated into useful inductive and productive exercises designed to help students master the phraseology of highly frequent EAP words. However, the value of such pedagogical tools for non-native speakers of English would arguably be greatly increased if learner corpus data were also used in selecting which words to teach. If only native data is used, "there is a danger that the emphasis on teaching the most frequent markers may focus on ones already familiar to and correctly used by students, or in this case, exacerbate the problem with their overuse" (L. Flowerdew 1998: 338). The aim of our presentation is to highlight the advantages of using both native and learner corpora to describe the phraseological use of EAP vocabulary and to discuss some major methodological issues, which have a decisive influence on the analysis and interpretation of the data. Among the issues raised are: the added value of the combined use of frequency and range for the selection of EAP words, the pros and cons of using word forms or lemmas, the necessity to use learner corpora that are clearly stratified in terms of L1 background and language proficiency and the difficulty of assessing the role of transfer in the learners' phrasicon. Our presentation will be amply illustrated with examples from the *International Corpus of Learner English* (Granger et al 2002).

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