EFFECTIVENESS OF USING A SMALL LANGUAGE CORPORA AS A LEARNING TOOL TO ENHANCE LANGUAGE LEARNERS' USE OF ADJECTIVES

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ABSTRACT: *Grammatical skills in writing English is very important. An adjective is a word used to describe or modify a noun, making the word more specific and a whole lot more interesting. More importantly, an adjective is an attribute to a noun word. The teaching and learning of adjectives using corpus applications is still poorly practiced in Jordanian schools. This study was conducted with the aim of promoting corpus-based language learning instructions in classroom teaching and learning practices. The methodology used includes the compilation of small language corpora as an intervention to teach adjectives to language learners. Data was gathered in the form of pre and post-tests scores of the writing produced by 30 intermediate students from a selected school in Jordan. Data was analyzed using the Microsoft excel program to generate score differences for the pre- and post-test. The quantitative findings of this study indicate that there is an increase in post-test scores of students who have effectively acquired the use of adjectives, using the language corpora.*

Keywords: language corpora, adjectives, writing skills, concordance, collocation

INTRODUCTION

Advances in electronics and computer science have changed the perspective of language teaching and learning. Among the most significant contributions of computer science to language teaching is through corpus linguistics which focuses on building, processing, and analyzing language corpora through computer systems Manvender [1, 2, 3]. The term corpora refers to a database of authentic electronic texts available on the Internet or compiled and stored on a personal computer Hunston [4].

Corpus linguistics is known to be one of the most suitable technology-based tools in language teaching and learning. According to Boulton [5], "corpus is now almost widely used in the construction of reference materials, especially dictionaries, grammar books, and usage manuals". However, in some countries, for example in Jordan, the application of corpus-based instructions in teaching and learning aspects of the language is still poorly used.

Corpus-based teaching and learning is a teaching technique that utilizes computerized technology. Some purposive corpora, built especially for use in the teaching and learning process, can assist in the application of technology-based knowledge. Various genres have been collected and used as a corpus, to assist in the process of generating knowledge, especially in the field of technology-based linguistics. One of the linguistic aspects is grammar. Grammatical skills in writing English is very important. An adjective is a word used to describe or modify a noun, making the word more specific and a whole lot more interesting. More importantly, an adjective is an attribute to a noun word.

Consequently, the primary aim of the present study is to address the effectiveness of using language corpora in teaching and learning in the intermediate classrooms, where the focus is mainly on the teaching and learning of a specific part-of-speech, namely the adjectives. The aim of the study is to investigate the increase in the use of various adjectives in the writing of students in selected schools in Jordan. The null hypothesis tested in this study (at a significance level of 0.05) was;

Ho: There was no significant difference in the scores of pre-test and post-test of the writing of students in the selected school in Jordan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In most foreign countries, abundant research has been carried out to investigate the effectiveness of corpus linguistics as a teaching and learning technique to highlight how native English speakers utilize certain forms of language, vocabulary, and expressions. From the studies conducted, it is significant that the use of examples of real-life authentic language use is more beneficial than teacher-created examples which do not simulate the real language use among language learners. The corpora can be integrated into the syllabus and used in the classroom-based instructions to teach students the targeted language at various different levels Ergül [6].

The contextual use of corpora and concordance in language teaching and learning was first introduced by McEnery and Wilson in 1969 [20]. However, it was Tim Johns ' work [7] and his awareness of data-based learning which was being applied in classrooms in the 1980s that created an interest in and more research using corpora in a language learning environment [8, 9,10]. Nevertheless, Johns's [11] method is still not commonly used in language classrooms and more empirical research is necessary to help spread the idea and facilitate the use of corpus-driven teaching and learning practices in classrooms. More importantly, the research should identify new ways to promote the application of corpus-driven classroom activities. Research needs to provide significant evidence that the teaching of linguistics components can be integrated and enhanced using a corpus-driven teaching method. The purpose of the current paper is therefore to precisely set examples of possible work that can be conceived using a small language corpora and to examine how Jordanian EFL students respond to them, both in terms of their capacity to solve the problems with language use and in terms of their opinions or attitudes towards the specific type of teaching practice. This will help schools and universities to educate, illustrate and practice specific language items directly in the classroom.

In the present era of information technology, different language features can be deliberately selected and learned autonomously by the learners. It was not so long ago when grammar and words were known as simply gap fillers with predetermined syntactic language frameworks. The studies of language corpora have shown a vague almost non-existent limit between lexis and grammar [12]. It was a

thorough analysis of language corpora. Carefully sorted corpus and concordance lines emphasized the existence of specific designs, which depended on syntactic structures of particular lexical elements, and therefore revealed that each lexical element has its own little "grammar."

Nowadays, conventional grammar teaching and learning practices are being addressed and compared with this new technology-based teaching and learning practice in mind. In fact, it is believed that the great number of grammatical things students need to learn is most often not addressed by the conventional language classes. Students must be able to do a lot of autonomous learning and language teachers, at present, must be able to teach them both how to communicate and how to learn different grammatical aspects of language, on their own. The provision of corpus data in a number of tasks will raise awareness of what is to be learned and how it is to be achieved.

METHODOLOGY

In the present study, the CACA approach was adopted to compile a genre-specific corpus that was used to develop activities used in teaching and learning. Computer-Assisted Corpus Analysis or CACA for short was proposed by Manvender in 2014 to assist in conducting textual analysis where data is gathered and compiled into a corpus and computer applications are used to conduct various structural analyses [1].

The sample of this study consists of 30 intermediate students from a selected school in Jordan. These students have been engaged in learning the English language between eight to twelve years. To make the study more representative of the intermediate students' population in Jordanian schools, many students from different socioeconomic backgrounds are included as the sample of the study. The sample was selected based on purposive sampling method recommended by Creswell in 2012 [13], to meet the objectives of the study. In order to maintain research ethics, during the analysis of the data, these students were given appropriate codes of A1 (representing the first sample) to A30 (representing the 30th sample). During the course of the study, the students' real names were not used in any document gathered for the corpora. Data was collected and compared in the form of scores, from the pre and post-tests given in the classroom.

THE PRE AND POST TEST

Students were required to complete tests that consisted of writing exercises developed based on online descriptive texts of interesting places to visit in Jordan. The texts of the corpus are taken only from one genre which is from the tourism perspectives. These articles were used to compile a small language corpus. The compiled texts of the corpus that was used in this study consist of 450 000 tokens and is therefore categorized as a small representative corpus [1].

Each writing exercise aims at a particular written task where the students, at their present level of language ability, were assumed to be able to complete with some difficulty especially in terms of using proper adjectives describing the places for tourism aspects in Jordan. The tasks focused on teaching adjectives as it is believed by many scholars that such lexical information is found to be much easier for students to focus and learn [14]. It was necessary to emphasize on the students' own ability as 'language researchers'. However, knowing that students will find difficulties in coping with the entirely new information from the technology-based instructions, and

acknowledging that they would need guidance, proper learning materials in the form of shortened concordance lists were provided. The writing exercises used are as described in the next section.

THE INTERVENTION – THE USE OF ADJECTIVES: "BEAUTIFUL", "OLD" AND "MANY"

The intervention consists of reading through a 46-line-long concordance of the adjective "beautiful", 29-line-long concordance of the adjective "old" and 71-line-long concordance of the adjective "many". Concordance is a display or a printed screen of a selected word or phrase with that word or sentence placed in the middle of the display together with the text appearing before and after it [15, 16]. The intervention used concentrates on the meanings of the selected word and how it is being used in the corpus. "Beautiful", "old" and "many" are examples of words that almost all the students are found to be familiar with but only with a narrow range of understanding its meanings and its use in describing noun words. The aim of the exercises is, therefore, to extend this range of understanding and possibly raise the students' awareness that many other highly frequent words have additional meanings to be learned and used with.

In "Tourism Corpus", there are 684 tokens of "beautiful", 536 tokens of "old" and 663 tokens of "many". Since the lines were found to be rather lengthy, the concordance had to be shortened. In order not to lose the authenticity of the texts in the small language corpus data while editing it [17], AntConc, a freeware concordance tool, available freely online, was used to shorten the concordance list automatically and this resulted in 69 lines of each selected adjective. The concordance was then right-sorted, where the words were arranged alphabetically to the right of the node word.The right-sorted concordance list allowed students to identify and examine the selected adjectives much easier than as they appear in the raw corpus. Each selected adjective is automatically color-coded by the AntConc freeware.

THE WRITING EXERCISES – FILL-IN-THE-BLANKS

For the writing exercise, the students were required to complete two fill-in-the-blanks activities, for each of the adjectives. The texts for the activities were derived from the texts in the "Tourism Corpus". Total marks for the exercises were 20 marks.

The study aimed to perceive the students' responses and to find out the following:

I   How did the students use the adjectives of "beautiful", "old" and "many" with noun words correctly?
II Where did the students use the adjectives wrongly?
III Why did the students use the adjectives wrongly?

FINDINGS

Results of the teaching and learning activities based on the "TourismCorpus" can be viewed from two aspects, namely the writing skill of the students in the use of the adjectives correctly and the problem faced by the students when they use the adjectives wrongly.

There are two (2) results for pre and post-tests. The first scores whereafter the intervention stage of six (6) weeks while the second scores were from the consolidation stage of the next two (2) weeks. The following are the results of the pre- and post-tests gave before and after the intervention of six (6) weeks. The maximum score that can be achieved by the students is 20 marks. Table 1 shows the analysis of scores achieved by students in the pre- and post-

test indicating that there is a significant increase in the accurate use of the adjectives "beautiful", "old" and "many" by the students.

Table1: Pre and post-test scores before and after the intervention of six weeks

Respondent	Pre-Test	Post-Test
A1	10	15
A2	12	18
A3	8	11
A4	11	14
A5	8	14
A6	12	17
A7	8	12
A8	6	9
A9	8	12
A10	9	9
A11	4	7
A12	7	10
A13	7	13
A14	5	15
A15	11	13
A16	6	9
A17	5	8
A18	8	11
A19	9	11
A20	3	11
A21	8	13
A22	10	12
A23	12	15
A24	9	15
A25	13	14
A26	7	9
A27	5	15
A28	10	14
A29	8	12
A30	9	11

The analysis is supplemented with a clustered column chart shown below, which is used to compare the values across the two categories of scores. It shows that all the post-tests scores are significantly higher than the pre-tests scores. It also shows that 18 is the highest score achieved by the respondent A2 during the post-test, followed by respondent A6 who scored 17 in the post-test.

The second scores were from the consolidation stage of the next two (2) weeks following the intervention stage. The consolidation stage was found to be necessary in order to determine the extent of new knowledge retention among the students. Table 2 below shows the analysis of scores achieved by students in the pre- and post-test during the consolidation stage indicating a further increase in the scores. This showed that there is significant knowledge retention due to the introduction of the new corpus-based teaching method used by the teacher.

Table 2: Pre- and post-test scores after the consolidation two weeks

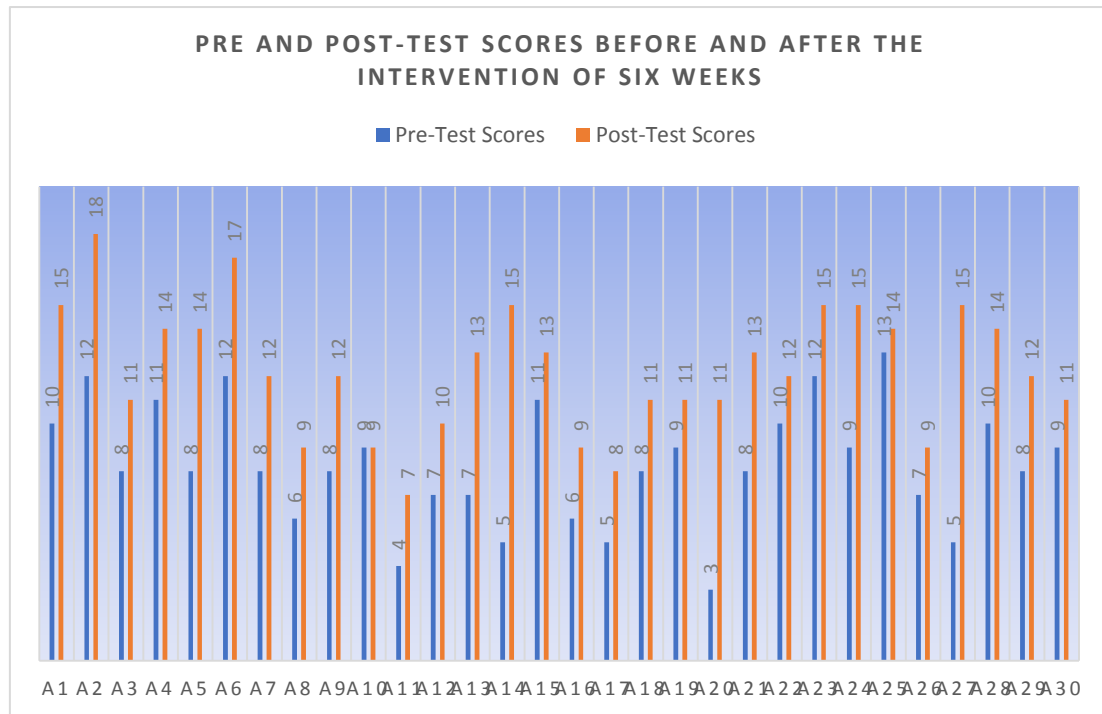| Respondent	Pre-Test	Post-Test
A1	16	19
A2	10	13
A3	12	14
A4	15	15
A5	11	17
A6	16	18
A7	12	18
A8	15	17
A9	9	15
A10	7	12
A11	9	10
A12	10	16
A13	8	11
A14	10	11
A15	6	10
A16	15	17
A17	7	11
A18	8	15
A19	9	10
A20	6	11
A21	6	15
A22	11	16
A23	13	14
A24	9	13
A25	8	12
A26	10	14
A27	8	12
A28	10	14
A29	8	13
A30	9	13

Diagram 1: Clustered column chart showing the comparison between pre and post-test scores.

Both the pre-tests and post-tests conducted during the intervention stage and the consolidation stage showed a significant improvement in the scores achieved by the students. Therefore, the null hypothesis tested at a significance level of 0.05 is rejected.

CONCLUSION

The present study has been conducted with the aim of exposing students, especially Jordanian ESL students, to corpus-based learning. Corpus-based teaching has shown a significant impact on improving students' writing skills, especially in their use of adjectives. The linguistic aspects studied are modern linguistics in which the use of corpus is believed to encourage classroom and autonomous learning, where students are given the opportunity to research and study the use of their chosen linguistics components.

The findings of this study indicate that there is a significant increase in students' understanding of the usage of adjectives, after using a corpus-based learning approach. The findings of the study also show that the use of a corpus is effective in improving writing skills generally, and improving the use of particular grammatical constituent, specifically, among the intermediate students from the selected schools. The use of such a method indicates data-driven learning (DDL) approach, a term first coined by Johns in 1991.

As claimed by Johns (1991), data-driven learning (DDL) refers to acts that provide computer-generated concordances screens to language learners in a language classroom, to examine and explore language patterns. Being aware of the significant benefits that DDL has to offer to the language learning pedagogy, and recognizing its advantages such as providing authentic learning and active student-centered learning, this study investigated the effect of enriching the use of adjectives, with the use of screenshots of concordance lines in the compiled tourism corpus and also knowledge retention among Jordanian EFL students. Findings of the present study suggest that enriching the classroom language instructions with an exploration of concordance lines has a positive impact on the learning of adjectives and can also help students recall new adjectives more efficiently.

Various inherent quality data-driven learning may attribute to the benefits of the concordance enhanced language learning instructions on conventional teaching and learning practices in general. Data-driven learning offers a large number of accurate and contextualized data to the students. This form of feedback encourages inductive learning and includes adjusting the role of the teacher in the classroom and improving the emphasis of classroom learning. In addition, match prints can be used to increase learners' awareness and knowledge of the language. Therefore, it can be concluded that a corpus-driven teaching and learning method is a good technology-based practice that (perhaps) motivates learners by adding examples of authentic language use [18].

It seems extremely important to involve many more language teachers in corpus-based research and thus to disseminate information on the use of corpus-driven instructions [19],. As claimed by Gilquin and Granger [18], another reason not to use DDL in classrooms can simply be that the teacher knows little about corpus-based teaching materials and the potential of using corpora in the language classroom (p. 366).

In summary, this study found that with the use of corpus-based teaching techniques, communicative skills among Jordanian intermediate students can be enhanced. Pedagogically, the study also found that the use of the corpus can encourage students' interest and motivation in studying languages other than English, particularly in activities that challenge the mind, such as writing poems or rhymes using conjunctions and prepositions obtained through the compiled corpus.

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