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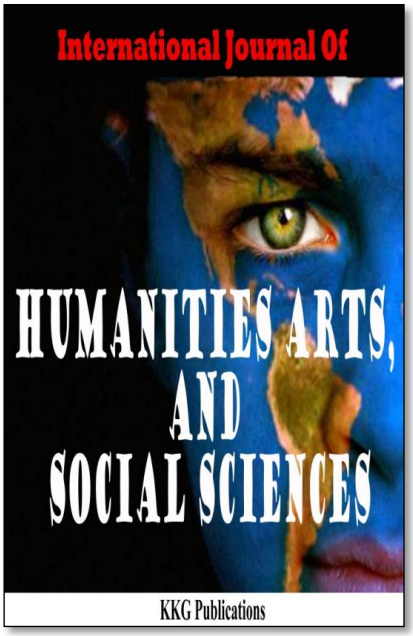

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A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH TO LEARNING A TOUR GUIDE TALK

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Abstract. Due to the fact that few studies have been conducted on learning and teaching English for tourism on the basis of corpus-based approach, this paper reports on an empirical case study conducted to investigate the integration of corpus-based approach into learning a tour guide talk in English. With this aim, 70 students who had already taken a course of English for tourism in the previous semester were selected as subjects. They were initially prepared to be familiar with the program before experiencing a corpus-based learning on tour guide talk. Then, they were tested and asked to respond to questionnaires designed to know their attitudes towards corpus-based approach to learning English for giving tour guide speech. Results show that students seem to feel positively motivated towards corpus-based learning, specifically by the fact of having direct access to real tour-guide-speech samples. Also, they do find frequency, collocation, and language patterns of guiding speech interesting and fruitful for application. Additionally, students acknowledge the potential of corpus-based approach as a powerful tool to generate independent learning and developing strategies for giving tour guide speech. It is hoped that the research would call for a changing role of language teacher as the results suggest a need for a move from a traditional lecturer to active-learner generator.

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the rapid development of computer technology in recent years, the investigation of corpus has been highly popularized and corpus-based approach has been integrated in several fields of studies, including lexicographic and lexical studies, grammatical studies, language variation studies, contrastive and translation studies, stylistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and language education.

In language pedagogy, corpus-based approach has recently received extensive attention as it allows language learners access a collection of large and principled databases of naturally occurring examples of written or spoken data, called corpora (Xiau, 2008). The greatest advantage of corpus data to language pedagogy not only lies in its empirical nature, which allows learners to access a great deal of authentic data in a structured way (Biber & Reppen, 2002), but also lies in their machine-readable nature, which can allow learners and teachers extract all authentic, typical examples of the usage of a lexical and grammatical pattern from a large body of text in a few seconds.

Specifically, the use of corpus has been heavily applied to a wide range of language learning and teaching such as corpus-based language descriptions, corpus analysis in classroom, course and material design (e.g., Willis, 1990), and learner corpus research (e.g., Connor & Upton, 2002; Sinclair, 2003; Scott & Tribble, 2006). In essence, a convergence between teaching and language corpora can be divided into three focuses: the indirect use of corpora in teaching (reference publishing, materials development, and language testing), the direct use of corpora in teaching (teaching about, teaching to exploit, and exploiting to teach), and further teaching-oriented corpus development (LSP corpora, L1 developmental corpora and L2 learner corpora) (Leech, 1997).

Using corpora in language teaching and learning has been more indirect (corpus-based approach) than direct (called as corpus-driven approach, corpus-informed approach, or data-driven learning). The essence of the direct approach is the student's inductive acquisition of lexical and grammatical patterns through exploring corpora. Applying this bottom-up approach to language teaching, a language teacher does not teach language features, but rather presents learners with authentic examples and asks them to interpret and draw language conclusions themselves. The advantage of this kind of learning is that students' motivation would increase as they are highly motivated to discover what they need to learn themselves.

However, there are some disadvantages of this rule-discovery approach. Firstly, it is time-consuming as students need to interpret the language rules themselves. Some students might not like this kind of learning style. It can be worse when some students may interpret the rules too broad or too narrow. This may force them to do the interpretation for several times.

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Moreover, the direct use of corpora in language pedagogy is restricted by a number of factors such as knowledge and skills required of teachers for corpus analysis and pedagogical mediation, the access to resources (e.g., computers, appropriate software tools and corpora), personal learning preferences, and learners' ability in technology.

As opposed to inductive approach, deductive one starts with presentation of a rule and is followed by examples in which the rule is applied. This approach seems to be appropriated to a register-specific course that has its own specific terminology and language patterns, which might be more difficult for students to identify the language rules themselves. In learning second or foreign languages, which requires a great deal of exposure to language data, a process of explicit learning of lexis (Kennedy, 2003) should be focused. In addition to the lexical focus, corpus-based approach can demonstrate how the target language is actually used in different contexts (e.g., Biber, Leech, & Conrad 2002).

Since the development of computer technology makes it possible to collect, label, observe and analyze linguistic data on a fairly large scale, corpus-based approach has gained much attention in language studies, both in a general language studies and in specific registers. Tourism language is also one of the specialized corpuses with specific-register terminology (Handumrongkul, 2010). While the specialized corpus should be integrated into the language learning so that learners can learn languages with authentic materials, few studies investigate the learners' attitudes towards the integration of corpus into English language classrooms for specific purposes (Braun, 2007). Research into students' attitudes toward corpus-based approach could be of great value, particular in course design. Since it is still uncertain if students' attitudes towards the integration of corpus are positive or not, the present study aims to investigate the students' attitudes towards corpus-based approach into English for tourism course, particularly on giving a tour guide talk (Gui & Yang, 2002).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main goal of this study is to investigate the learners' attitudes towards corpus-based approach. However, there are further steps that need to be proceeded. The first step is that corpus of tour guide talk needs to be compiled. To compile a corpus of guide talks, the criteria of selecting guides must be initially set. That is, guides selected in the present study must receive a certificate for guiding, with experience for more than five years, and allow the researchers to record the guiding speech in English. Only four Thai guides allow us to record their guiding speeches that took place at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, a very famous tourist attraction in Thailand. After the tour speeches were recorded, they were transcribed and checked for major grammatical mistakes.

After the corpus of tour guide talk was compiled, the next step is that it was analyzed by using AntConc 3.2 and CLAWS. These programs were chosen as they are free and user friendly. In addition, AntConc has several effective tools, including concordances, word frequency generators, and word distribution. The step is necessary as it will help identify the language characteristics of guide talk register and help set a guideline for the subjects to learn.

The next step is that the complied corpus is introduced to the subjects in this study. They were 70 third-year undergraduate students from Business English program, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. All of them were Thai and already took the fundamental tourism course in the previous semester, where they needed to learn the language characteristics (e.g., lexis and grammatical patterns) of this discipline-specific register and practice to give a tour guide talk as a part of the objectives of the course (Kjellmer, 1991). Most of them were female but the gender is not the focus of the study. Before allowing the students to learn tour guide talk on the basis of corpus-based approach, we need to ensure that the subjects would pay attention to their learning. This could be achieved in several ways; however, the following steps were implemented in this study. Firstly, the students needed to be trained on how to use the program and how to apply corpus to learn the language of guide talk. Also, they needed to do the test after they finish learning. The test is an excerpt of guide talk that was modified from the corpus. The right answers were later given and explained through corpus-based approach.

This research was designed to investigate the attitudes of the learners towards corpus-based approach. In order to investigate attitudes, various ways of measuring can be developed. One convenient option for a large number of the subjects is to use the questionnaire. In order to be able to cover all of the attitudes and reasons towards the approach, only two open-ended questions, written in Thai, were included in the questionnaire. The first question was to know how the students think about the integration of the corpus-based approach to learning tour guide speech (Do you think corpus-based approach is motivating and useful for learning a tour guide talk?). Another question was to know how they think they can learn from a corpus-based approach; how they find this approach is useful to promote their learning. The students were allowed to write down their attitudes in Thai because they were asked to clearly write down their reasons in depth.

Method Procedure Summary

1. A specialized corpus was created. Tour guide speech of four experienced guides was recorded, transcribed, checked, and stored in a computer readable format.
2. The subjects had been introduced on how to use the programs and they were trained so that they seem to be familiar with using the programs for three weeks (three hours a week).
3. Then, some of the language characteristics of tour guide (e.g., frequent words, collocations, and frequency of some

part of speeches) had been deductively illustrated through corpus-based approach in the classroom for three weeks (three hours per week). In the classroom, the subjects were introduced to items such as word lists with marking frequent words and unfamiliar words, concordance lines with some collocations, content words and functional words, how to tag texts, and how tagged texts can be used to search lists of nouns or identify a word with different parts of speech. They were also introduced to the grammatical structures that tend to co-occur. For example, they can see which verbs must frequently take complement clauses (e.g., I think that …). Meanwhile, they were asked to do self-learning outside classroom and they needed to share what they had learnt themselves in the three-week class.

4. Students were asked to do the test but they were allowed to use corpus provided. However, to get the answers, they must be able to learn on the basis of corpus-driven approach (corpus-informed approach, data-driven learning, or inductive approach).
5. After finishing the test, the right answers were given and explained through corpus-based approach.
6. Finally, the questionnaires were handed over to them and they were asked to complete the questionnaires taking up to 30 minutes.

The Analysis

Data concerning the subjects' attitudes towards corpus-based learning were collected by questionnaires. To be able to cover all attitudes, two open-ended questions were asked. The subjects were asked to express their attitudes and reasons in details under each question. To investigate the attitudes, themes of the attitudes were first set from skimming the data. Then, the data were coded under the roughly-set themes. After being checked and adjusted for several times to ensure reliability, four themes of the attitudes can be set: Language, Guiding presentation, Application, and Learning skills. These themes were used as a basis for coding. Then, sub-categories of reasons were later created after the themes had already coded. Finally, the intra and inter reliability were checked.

FINDINGS

Subjects' Attitudes towards Corpus-Based Learning

The subjects' attitudes towards corpus-based approach were all positive. There is no criticism on this kind of approach. However, the subjects did not tell which of the two programs is preferred. Nevertheless, overall, these positive attitudes may be due to a novelty factor (Clark, 1983). The reason could also be due to the subjects' program and computer familiarity. The positive attitudes suggest that corpus-based approach is not only motivating but could be also successfully integrated into learning and teaching guide talk as long as the course is well designed to serve the purposes of the courses and learners.

Subjects' Reasons towards their Positive Attitudes

The prominent reasons were illustrated through Table 1 as follows:

TABLE 1
Frequencies of All Reasons

Themes	Numbers of Subjects	Sub Categories of Reasons	Numbers of Subjects
Language	N = 45 (50.56%)	- Vocabulary	N = 21
		- Grammar	N =12
		- Authencity	N =12
Guiding	N = 12 (13.48%)	- Guiding expressions	N = 7
		- Guiding techniques	N = 5
Learning	N = 32 (35.96%)	- Easy to learn	N = 19
		- Resources for learning and practicing	
		- Applicability	N = 9
		- Knowledge sharing	N = 3
			N = 1
	Toal = 89 (100%)		

First of all, it is worth noting that some subjects gave their reasons more than one themes and one reasons. Overall, all students are very satisfied with corpus-based approach because they think that corpus-based approach helps them understand better and faster. A relatively high number of students state that corpus-based approach towards learning a guide talk is clearly fruitful for language learning, especially on vocabulary because they think the approach helps them to understand more on the meanings of the specialized terminology and it also allows the students to be able to use the terminology more accurately. Particularly, on the basis of corpus-based approach, they are likely to learn collocations better. Moreover, they feel that they can learn and understand grammatical rules better than the traditional way as this approach illustrates them with concordance

lines that they can induce the grammatical patterns themselves. For authenticity, they think corpus-based approach demonstrates to them a variety of vocabulary used within a real context. They feel that this is very useful in terms of giving a better choice of vocabulary to avoid repetition of word usage and allow them to choose the right words for the right situation.

For guiding skills, they think corpus-based approach really helps them understand how to use some discipline-specific vocabulary for giving a tour guide speech. Importantly, they learn the guiding strategies such as describing a place, explaining, and comparing things to illustrate to the tourists. Moreover, they think the approach helps them see obviously that one of the guiding skills is interpersonal skill, in other words, using this approach helps them learn that interpersonal skill is necessary for giving a guide talk.

For learning skill, most of them found the program and the approach easy to use. This really promotes their learning. They stated that corpus is a useful resource for self-learning and practicing. Additionally, they found the approach fairly applicable to their further learning in other subjects or in their lives. Although few students think that corpus-based approach is useful in terms of promoting the values of knowledge sharing, it is still worth noting for learners' development.

Subjects' Learning Topics

Additionally, the subjects were asked to identify what they think they have learnt from corpus-based approach. The topics they stated in the questions are illustrated in Table 2. Looking at the subjects' learning topics seems to shed light on what the instructors can focus on in their teaching. They found an interesting difference between the authentic corpus and the textbook. They stated that they are surprised to learn that in giving a guide talk in English, the original words in Thai can be used before explaining the meanings in English later. Although it cannot be clearly observed, some students state that they can notice the guiding expressions by looking at the concordance lines.

TABLE 2
Frequencies of Learning Topics

Themes	Sub-categories
Language	- Vocabualry (original Thai words, unfamiliar words, connectors/ conjunctions, collocations, phrasal verbs such as known as, frequent words, words with different parts of speeches, related word forms/ synonyms) - Grammar (tenses, sentence sturctures, grammatical patterns such as to be used to, prefixes and suffixes such as how do suffixes change a word from a verb to a noun)
Guiding strategy	- Guiding expressions (e.g., "Now, we can see that …") - Vocabulary for describing (e.g. it was buit by …)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to investigate the learners' attitudes towards corpus-based approach for learning tour guide talk. In general, the findings show that the learners have positive attitudes towards the integration of corpus into their learning. The finding suggests that corpus-based approach seems to be fruitful not only for language ability but also for profession and learning skills. That is, the findings from reasons reveal that the approach influences their learning. Although it is believed that the approach suits more for language ability, the present study shows that this approach can also promote learning skills. However, it is worth noting that the approach will be applicable due to the situation of learners (e.g. their age, level of language competence, level of expert knowledge, and attitude towards learning autonomy).

The analysis of corpus of all reasons illustrates that the predominant reason for finding corpus-based approach motivating was the easiness of usage, and a variety of vocabulary choices. This suggests that corpus should be more applied as a tool for language checking. If the students feel using dictionary is boring or difficult, they could be taught to use corpus as an optional tool instead of dictionary as a traditional one. In this study, two questions were asked. Both of these questions attempt to generate the findings on how the learners think about corpus-based approach. However, the two questions clearly contribute to different results. Interestingly, the subjects' reasons of positive attitudes contrast with what they stated that they have learnt. While the question asking about what they have learnt can elaborate on what aspects are likely to be useful to be included in the teaching, the question asking about their attitudes and reasons can reveal some interesting and unexpected findings on what they think they can learn from corpus-based approach. It is worth noting, however, that to help learners get a full benefit from the use of corpus-based approach, language teachers must first of all be equipped with a sound knowledge of the approach. We view this as priorities for future tasks of corpus linguists if corpora are to be popularized to more specific language teaching context.

Corpora can be used in language teaching in two ways: the soft version and the hard version (Leech, 1997). Nevertheless, this study revealed that the application of both versions also results in satisfactory attitudes. It, however, should be noted that the soft

version, which requires the teacher print out examples from the corpus and devise the tasks whereas the learners work with these corpus-based examples usually in a form of concordance, should be applied first at the training stage. Then, the hard version, requiring learners to explore the corpora themselves, should be applied later. According to corpus linguistics theory, it is applicable for surface level, without context. However, some of the findings reveal that there are many of the students who can link vocabulary to contexts. Based on corpus-based approach, students can see how the target language is actually used in a specific context (e.g. Biber et al., 2002). However, the vocabulary they learn can be limited to only frequent words or what we as teachers select for them. They might not be able to identify the salient vocabularies, which is also worth for studying in English for specific purposes.

Almost all learners agree that corpus-based approach allows them to understand collocation better. They can better understand which lexical items co-occur frequently with others and how they combine within a sentence. This is very important to language learning as collocation is evidently more important than individual words themselves (Kita & Ogata, 1997; p. 230) and is needed for effective sentence generation (Smadja & McKeown, 1990). Zhang (1993), for example, finds that more proficient L2 writers use significantly more collocations, more accurately and in more variety than less proficient learners. Collocational error is a common type of error for learners (McAlpine & Myles, 2003; p. 75), Altenberg and Granger (2001) and Nesselhauf (2005) find that even advanced learners of English have considerable difficulties with collocation. One possible explanation is that learners need detailed information about common collocational patterns and idioms; fixed and semi-fixed lexical expressions and different degrees of variability; relative frequency and currency of particular patterns; and formality level, which can all be learned through corpus-based approach.

The methodological implications of the present study are also worth discussing. Corpus-based approach seems to be more practical for learners who are unfamiliar with active learning approach. Another implication is that the integration of corpus is very fruitful and essential. Corpus-based approach will not only help them to understand more but it will also aid the student grasp the ambiguity of language of tourism, and thus gain a better understanding of English vocabulary in this specific discipline. It should also be noted that some grammatical rules and guiding strategies should be illustrated first in order to generate explanations to the classes so that the learners will be able to comprehend this kind of text better.

Corpora appear to play an important role in helping to decide what to teach though corpus-based approach is nearly absent in English for tourism. One of the causes for this absence is perhaps the access to appropriate corpus resources. This involves creating corpora that are pedagogically motivated, in both design and content, to meet pedagogical needs and curricular requirements so that corpus-based approach becomes a successful integration of the curriculum.

We can say that now we are living in a new era of technology. Computer programs have been promoted into the classroom. However, the process of formal education in some classrooms such as literature, communication and tourism has not changed much over the past several decades. Educators, also playing an important role in language learning, should change their roles so that they are able to prepare their students to be ready for the changing world. It is clear that the teacher's role must be redefined to meet the needs and demands of today's culture. The role of the teacher has traditionally been of the gatekeeper of information because teachers had access to the information that their students needed. This was an important role 30 years ago when there was no Internet access to huge amounts of information instantly. It was the teacher who held the keys to the world of knowledge. With the rapid development of information technology, language teachers should integrate corpora into their teaching (e.g., Gabrielatos, 2005; Stevens, 1995 & Tribble, 1997) as corpus-based approaches are valuable in supporting student satisfaction and learning.

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