Looking at EAP Course Effectiveness via Longitudinal Learner Corpora: Register Variation, Attitude and Errors

Presented by
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Date: 7 November 2016 (Monday)
Time: 3:30 – 5:00 p.m.
Venue: OEM906, 9/F, OEN Hall Building (Main), Ho Sin Hang Campus, Hong Kong Baptist University

Abstract
While universities devote great effort to initial EAP instruction, many question the effectiveness of such instruction on student production. The present study seeks to determine whether EAP instruction results in a longitudinal linguistic variation in the direction of the established norms of an academic register, asking whether our learners are able to develop an academic stance on a topic, and whether any 'focus on form' in our instruction results in a reduction of common L2 errors. These data would, by extension, provide a quantifiable linguistic measure of EAP course effectiveness.

This invited talk describes the construction and analysis of a longitudinal corpus of written EAP essays and reports totalling 213,408 words, collected from freshman Chinese undergraduate students at a university in Hong Kong. The data were collected over a semester’s EAP training at three data points (pre-EAP training, immediate post-training and final written examination). I discuss three main analyses with respect to this data. Firstly, I describe the results of a multidimensional analysis (Biber, 1988), where the L2 production exhibited considerable variation between data points in the direction of academic discourse across all five dimensions analysed, including a drop in the use of first person pronouns and the mechanical use of discourse connectives, alongside an increased emphasis on nominalisation and more careful, hedged, presentation of stance. Looking at stance in more detail, I describe the results of a metalinguistic analysis of hedging, boosting, self-mention and attitude marking devices to determine how and to what extent EAP instruction results in the development of an academic voice in the students’ L2 writing. Finally, I present the results of an error analysis of the longitudinal data across a number of lexicogrammatical and morphosyntactic error categories, noting that despite our best efforts, it may be better to reduce a focus on error correction both in course materials and written feedback.

Despite the findings for L2 errors, the overall findings from the corpus suggest a warmly positive effect of EAP instruction on learner production after only a single semester. A number of pedagogical opportunities for the data are also outlined including the benefits of such analysis for written corrective feedback and future analysis of discipline-specific L2 discourse.

Bio-data
Peter is now in his 13th year in TESOL/ applied linguistics fields, with previous experience including writing and consultancy work with publishers including Cambridge University Press, two sessions as director of studies for language schools in the UK, over six years' experience in the Korean EFL context, lengthy experience as an IELTS examiner, textbook author and item writer, as well as teaching and supervision experience at Cambridge University.

Peter’s areas of research and supervisory expertise include second language acquisition, (learner) corpus analysis, language assessment, EFL materials preparation, Korean, Mandarin and South-East Asian linguistics, and data-driven learning. He has published in leading journals including Language Learning, Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory, Journal of English for Academic Purposes and International Journal of Learner Corpus Research, has worked with international scholars for a publication in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), and won the John Sinclair Bursary for his 2016 presentation at the leading corpus linguistics conference ICAME37 in Hong Kong, 2016. At CAES, he is the coordinator of the MA Applied Linguistics (MAAL) and CAES’s coordinator for the MA TESOL (partnering with the Faculty of Education) from September 2016, and co-teaching the module 'Second Language Acquisition' for both MA programs. He is currently serving as a section editor for Open Linguistics (ISI-ESCI) - an open access linguistics journal from De Gruyter, and serves on the editorial boards of International Journal of English Linguistics (ISI-ESCI), and The Linguistics Journal. He also chairs the corpus linguistics special interest group at CAES (from Sept. 2016).

ALL ARE WELCOME

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