Using Educational Technology in the English Language Classroom: Week 3

Grammar: Using a Corpus to Explore Grammatical Examples

COCA: The Chart Function

https://youtu.be/zhAFU22l4iE?list=PLRCcuy8rgTjdQUcgJi3fpLbkruWECbasn

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The last function for COCA that I want to look at is the Chart function. Earlier, we saw how you could compare a word or a phrase in the different sections of COCA such as academic writing versus the spoken part of the corpus. Chart does something similar, where we can enter a word or a phrase, and we can see immediately across all the different registers or sections of COCA how frequent that word or phrase is.

![COCA Chart function](image)

Let’s try with the word “experiment.” We have our Sort/Limit open here. We want to sort by Mutual Information. Again, three is nice. We’re using only one word, so this side isn’t necessary, just that side.
We’ll put See Frequency by Section and see what we get with the word “experiment.”

There you go. We can see the word “experiment” happens in all the different sections of COCA, and our little histogram, our little bar graphs over here tell us how frequent it is. Just at a glance, we can see that the word “experiment” is most frequent in Academic.
Corpus of Contemporary American English

![Frequency histograms for "experiment" in sub-sections of Academic](image)

**Figure 4. Frequency histograms for "experiment"**

We can click on that and get some more information of the different sub-sections of Academic and how frequent that word is.

![Frequency information for "experiment" in sub-sections of Academic](image)

**Figure 5. Frequency information for "experiment" in sub-sections of Academic**

That’s one thing that you can have your students do. When they look at a word or a phrase, it’s always important to know what register that word or phrase is used in, so that can be an activity where if your students have a word or a phrase, the first step is to say, “Okay. What register is this word or phrase typically used in, or where is it most commonly used?” Then, from there, you can search for different collocates and then beyond, looking at how words compare with one another or patterns in the KWIC.
lines and then to the List function to look at the wider context and just see exact strings of words. There’s a lot that can be done in COCA.

One last thing that I want to stress is yes, you can have your students interact directly with COCA, but also, as a teacher, you can use COCA to help you prepare materials. If you want your students to look at how “big” and “large” are used, you don’t have to let them go directly to the corpus; you as the teacher can use the corpus to help inform materials that you make. A lot of times, that’s better for students, as just letting them loose directly into the corpus might be overwhelming if they’re not trained well. I encourage you to use COCA. It has a lot of potential and a lot of power. Your students can interact directly with the interface, or you can use COCA to help inform your own teaching materials that you make.