Empowering Non-native English Language Professionals

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1. Introducing KorPLUS (*Korpuslinguistik für Lehrende und Studierende*)

From the beginning of the corpus linguistic era in the early 1990s, corpora have been recommended as referencing tools for English language professionals, above all teachers (Mukherjee 2002; Mair 2002; Stewart, Bernardini & Aston 2004). As has been argued multiple times, they are the best resources with which we can equip graduates of English programmes.

But reports according to which corpora are unpopular among English teachers are almost as numerous, for two main reasons: While problems of a technical nature (free availability and internet access) have largely been settled, those to do with inadequate skills remain unsolved. Moreover, in my research, a third reason suggests itself: a reluctance, among teachers and students, to acknowledge linguistic variation as part of the language, and thus one that contrasts with the role of English as a global lingua franca.

> *Is it "tendency of doing something" or "tendency to do something"?*
> (GRAMMAR)

> *Can I use "pretty strong" in my essay, or what else?*
> (REGISTER DIFFERENCES)

Therefore, I seize the opportunity to submit the digital learning package KorPLUS (https://www.uni-bamberg.de/korplus/), released on 29 March 2025, for the ISLE Teaching Innovation Prize, hoping to contribute to the popularization of corpora among English language professionals by sharing with the community a self-contained open educational resource. It is tailored to the needs of advanced students of English as well as teachers and other specialists on the job, based on Mark Davies' freely accessible www.English-Corpora.org interface, and hosted under the title 'VLC305 - Using Corpora for EFL Needs' on Jürgen Handke's popular Virtual Linguistics Campus (https://oer-vlc.de).[1] Using the package as a blended-learning resource relieves instructors of Linguistics courses of the need to perform tedious and error-prone corpus demonstrations, enables students to work through all or parts of the package at their own pace or revisit any section according to their wants, and helps professionals on the job foster their corpus skills independently of time and space. Unique characteristics of KorPLUS compared to other introductions to corpus linguistics are:

> *I always read "typical for", but at school we teach "typical of". Are both ok?*
> (CURRENT LANGUAGE CHANGE)

- video demos of the most important search functions (also available individually as a YouTube playlist),
- full interactivity and ample individual feedback (including various types of exercises from drag-and-drops, via search query puzzles to full-fledged branching scenarios mimicking the steps of a corpus analysis),
- besides basic search techniques, a large choice of examples from different areas that learners typically struggle with (confusable words, choice of prepositions, collocations, grammar problems, register contrasts, variety differences), and
- support by the VLC's AI chatbot, specially trained on the course materials.

> *Why do many say "on the weekend" – shouldn't it be "at the weekend"?*
> (PREPOSITIONS)

> *What is the difference between "intense" and "intensive"?*
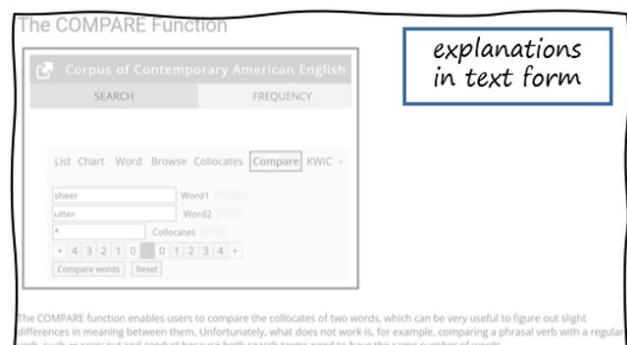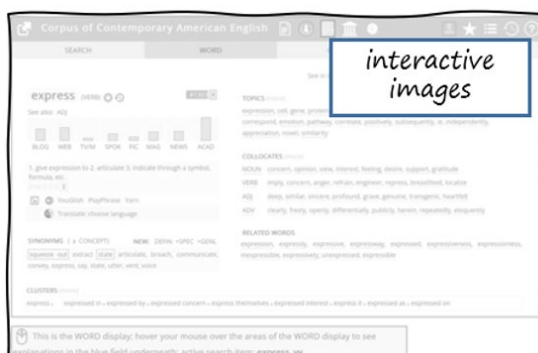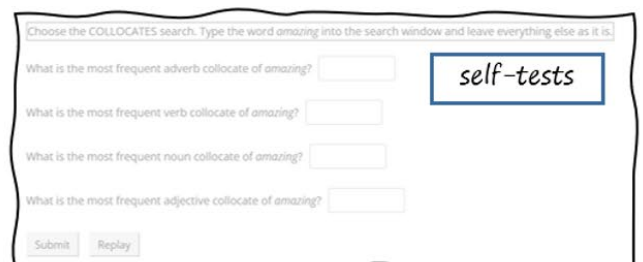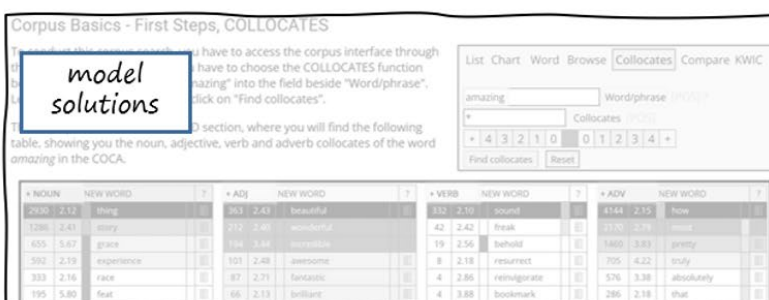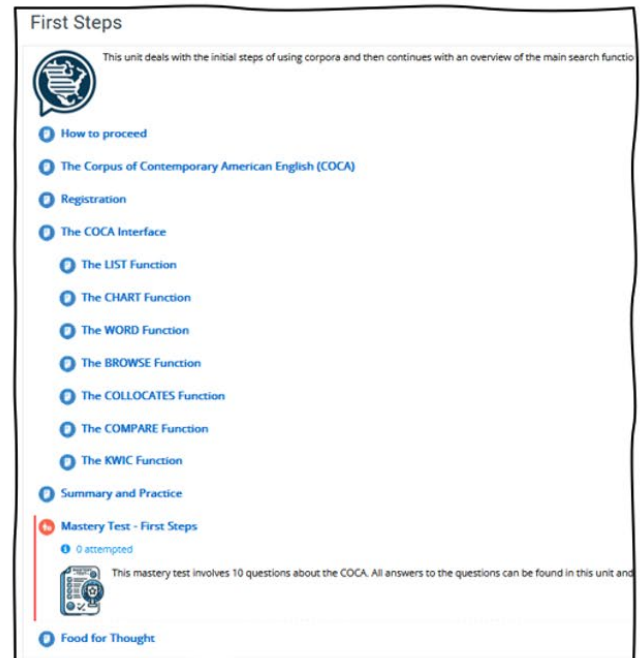> (VOCABULARY)

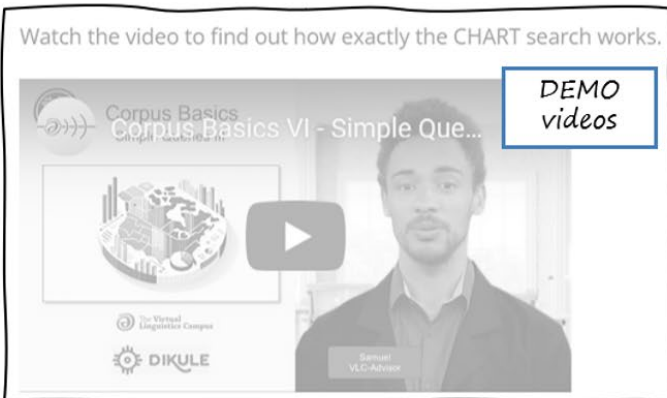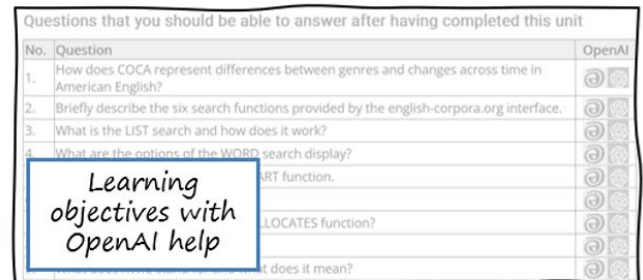On their own, the materials represent a workload of around 30 hours (1 ECTS point). Being open educational resources, they are offered to anyone in the community to use as a stand-alone package, integrate into a blended-learning setting and/or combine with class sessions, for which additional questions and suggestions are provided.

> *Does "family" combine with a verb in singular or plural form?*
> (BRITISH VS. AMERICAN ENGLISH)

Above all, the goal of the self-learning package is to provide users with enough practice and routine to become corpus-literate learner-researchers, capable of lifelong learning, and thus able to keep up with the multifaceted and ever-changing English language. The immediate benefits of the course include improved writing skills and language awareness. Potential further applications of corpus skills involve objective, data-supported corrective feedback, proofreading, copy-editing, translation, curriculum development, materials design, materials criticism, and data-driven learning.

Mastery Tests

Learning objectives with OpenAI help

DEMO videos

First Steps

This unit deals with the initial steps of using corpora and then continues with an overview of the main search functio...

- How to proceed
- The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)
- Registration
- The COCA Interface
  - The LIST Function
  - The CHART Function
  - The WORD Function
  - The BROWSE Function
  - The COLLOCATES Function
  - The COMPARE Function
  - The KWIC Function
- Summary and Practice
- Mastery Test - First Steps
  - 0 attempted

  This mastery test involves 10 questions about the COCA. All answers to the questions can be found in this unit and...
- Food for Thought

model solutions

self-tests

interactive images

**explanations in text form**

A glimpse of some KorPLUS ingredients.

2. An empowering skillset and an empowered mindset

With corpus literacy as a core linguistic practice, a number of other competences follow naturally. The KorPLUS package is currently being developed to include a critical assessment of Large Language Models as competing resources and their performance as text correction tools (for a sneak preview, see the YouTube playlist "Corpora vs. AI Tools" or Schlüter & Deckert 2024). As it turns out (and rather unsurprisingly), corpus-based insights are superior to ChatGPT and dedicated text correction tools like DeepL Write and Grammarly whenever reliable and objective acceptability judgements are required. Yet, AI literacy and corpus literacy (as subject-specific instantiations of digital data literacy) constitute important future skills for language experts that are best exploited synergetically. In addition, the KorPLUS package represents a learner-centered, adaptive digital learning scenario and affords users the chance to experience a modern educational setting, ideally integrated into a hybrid environment that combines the advantages of self-paced learning with those of personal in-group exchanges.

As regards the development of an expert mindset, the gains are equally important: With corpora at their fingertips, non-native (as well as native) English language professionals can develop an emancipated role image. The kind of analytical thinking and strong research orientation fostered by corpus methods endow them with metalinguistic insights that can help rationalize the linguistic 'gut feeling' that is no longer conceived as the unique birthright of native speakers. Corpus skills can empower non-native language experts by helping them overcome the supposed and frequently resented displacement of their authority to native speakers. Moreover, corpora afford insights into the statistical nature of language, the omnipresence of variation and recent language change phenomena. Thus, different Englishes can be understood as natural and necessary outcomes of the heterogeneous learning biographies of native as well as non-native users of English. Current discourse about the role English as a Lingua Franca will benefit from the corpus-informed language awareness of its participants.

Especially in situations in which language professionals find themselves confronted with the seemingly unmanageable diversity of Englishes, access to multinational corpora enables them to transcend the limitations of their individual competence. In a series of quasi-experimental questionnaire studies with native and non-native English-speaking teachers and students from eight different countries (Schlüter 2022, 2024a/b, to appear), results have repeatedly shown that corpus-informed language education has a long way to go before acceptance of variation will be instilled in most professionals' mindsets. With my publications in the field of English Language Teaching, I hope to demonstrate that corpora are an excellent – if not the only – referencing tool for coming to grips with variation around the world. Crucially, corpus literacy can foster greater acceptance of global English variation, particularly in European educational institutions.
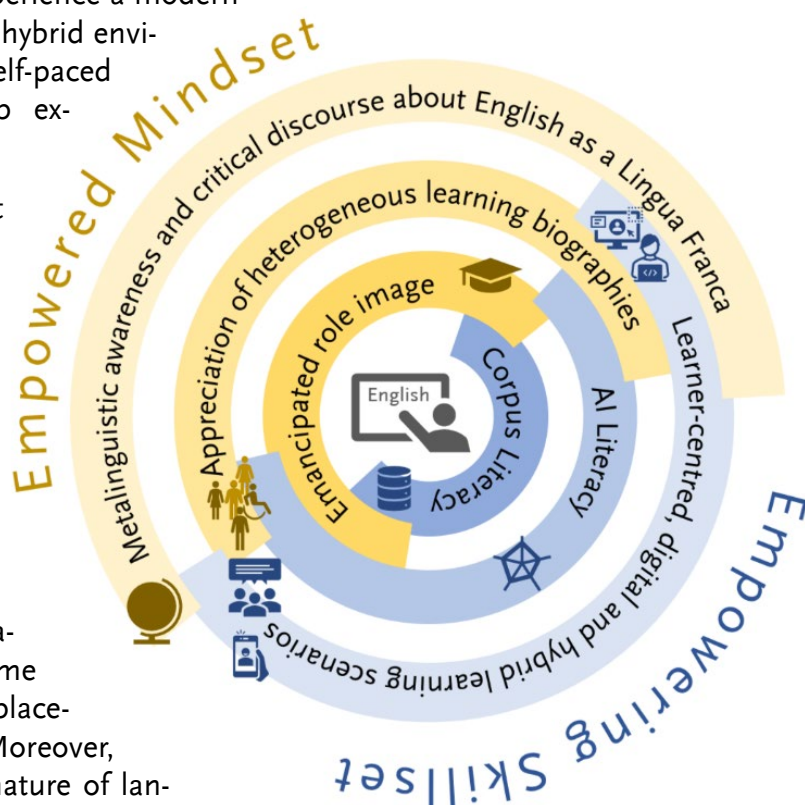
Introductory videos

Meet Emily, a student of English and KorPLUS user, on YouTube.

Meet Noah, a teacher of English and KorPLUS user, on YouTube.

User feedback

For someone who never used corpora before, I could easily follow the steps and could, if necessary, go back to the respective timestamp to rewatch parts I didn't understand the first time seeing/hearing about it.

Before this course I had never used corpora, but I have grown to appreciate them greatly.

This course introduced me to corpus basics in a way that was easy to understand thanks to detailed explanations and demonstrations of corpus searches. The interactive exercises helped me to gain confidence in creating my own corpus queries.

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