RESEARCH ARTICLE

Corpus linguistics and Foreign Language Education Programme

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Abstract

The researchers, linguists and applied linguists in their studies have revealed the significance of the implications of corpus based approach in teaching a second/foreign language. The corpus-based approach to linguistics and language education has gained prominence since the mid-1980s. Corpus analysis can be illuminating "in virtually all branches of linguistics or language learning" (Leech, 1997, p. 9; Conrad &Reppen, 1998, p. 11). One of the strengths of corpus data lies in its empirical nature, which pools together the intuitions of a great number of speakers and makes linguistic analysis more objective (McEnery & Wilson, 2001, p. 103). Corpora linguistics have multidimensional usage and applications in nearly all language based disciplines and have been used extensively in language related researches in the past viz; lexicographic and lexical studies, grammatical studies, language variation studies, contrastive linguistics and translation studies, diachronic studies, semantics, pragmatics, stylistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, forensic linguistics and language pedagogy. Corpora have passed into general usage in linguistics in spite of the fact that they still occasionally attract hostile criticism (e.g. Widdowson, 1990, 2000).
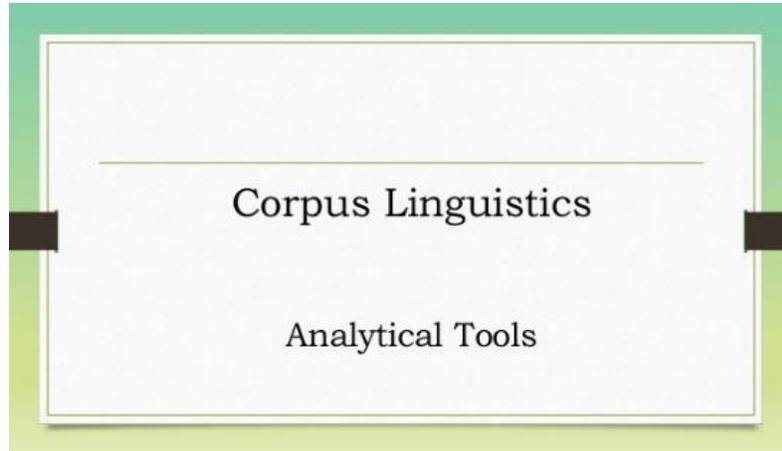
The aim of this paper is to review and analyze relevant factors related to the implementation of corpus linguistics (CL) in a classroom while teaching English as foreign language. We have noticed in the recent past that a great deal of researches continue to investigate how computer can be helpful and can function as a facilitator in language pedagogy. One particular area on computer which even now is open for further investigation is corpus linguistics. It is important to find out what exactly corpus linguistic is, what corpus linguistic studies can offer language learning and teaching , how it can be adopted and used by English language teachers, how achievable such an adoption would be. The present article will address these questions.

Keywords: Corpora, Corpus linguistics, language pedagogy, comparing L1 and L2 languages, syllabus design, materials production; corpus-based SLA

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Introduction:

The studies in the past have been carried out in order to show Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) can enhance language learning in the classroom. This approach utilized the corpus analysis data for the purpose of language pedagogy.It has been empirically proved that the corpus data obtained in an analysis of the target language is now inevitable in the target language teaching. In order to conduct a study of language which is corpus-based, it is necessary to gain access to a corpus and a concordance program. A corpus consists of a databank of natural texts, compiled from writing and/or a transcription of recorded speech. A concordance is a software program which analyzes corpora and lists the results. The main objectives of corpus linguistics are to discover patterns of authentic language use through analysis of actual usage. Corpus linguistics only concern is the usage patterns of the empirical data and what that reveals to us about language behavior and the way usage in day today communication. It is concerned with both written as well as the spoken form of language.

In academic platforms apart from different opinions and individual interpretations corpus linguistics mainly uses computer technology to analyze large collections of spoken and written texts that have been effectively structured to represent the use of day today conversations among the people in practical life situations. The recent researchers since around three decades have been applying the endings of corpus-based studies to the second/foreign language education programme.

Conrad, (2000) have argued that corpus linguistics could revolutionize language teaching by fundamentally changing the way we approach materials design and curriculum development.

Conrad's (2001) suggestions for corpus use in classrooms:

➢ Corpus analysis should not be utilized as the only means of language instruction;
➢ Corpus tasks may accompany regular language tasks to develop learners' linguistic intuition, sensitivity to register variation, good command of collocation and colligation patterns;

➢ The ability to use corpora empowers learners, especially those who do not have a chance to interact with native speakers much, because they can use a database of

RESEARCH ARTICLE

cumulative knowledge of native speakers at any time of day and night for free

➢ Lastly, frequency findings from the corpus should not mean that a rare word combination or grammatical structure should be neglected. Rather, it should inform learners of a changeable nature of language in use and teach to be vigilant about chronological variations.

1. Corpus Linguistics: Approach to In-Service Teacher Development:

The language instructors without having linguistic background are often reluctant to incorporate corpus based pedagogy into their classes because they are not familiar with how to apply the findings of it

effectively in the practical classroom situations. In the light of the preceding contention it is advisable to provide adequate and effective corpus based Pedagogical Teachers' Training Programme. Tsui (2004) argues that more attention has been paid to the importance of raising teachers' language awareness. Mukherjee (2004) argues that corpora and concordance packages present very useful resources for the creation of exercises that motivate the learners and promote language awareness. Such courses could either be part of the general teacher training programme that every English language teacher has to do, or they could be offered to practicing teachers in the form of advanced teacher training workshops.

Computer technology undoubtedly assisted the linguistic background analysts/researchers in

the analysis of large collected data (corpora) as faster as it was previously possible. As a result, corpus-based findings have emerged that both enrich and challenge previous notions about language use.

The larger collected data which we linguistically call *corpora* can be utilized and used to systematically study a language in all its forms

and uses. In the area language pedagogy, *corpora* helps in compiling/writing dictionaries, grammar books, usage manuals, textbooks, syllabuses, tests, and other resources.

In this new millennium, computer technology undoubtedly has revolutionized

the fields of linguistic researches particularly descriptive linguistics and

RESEARCH ARTICLE

applied linguistics (language pedagogy) with the advent of corpus linguistics. One of the major aims of second language acquisition (SLA) research is to describe and explain the factors that underlie the learning and use of a second (additional) language (A¨del, 2015; Ellis, 2012 ;).

There is a need to apply practically in the classroom the findings of the corpus analysis of the target language in teaching English as a foreign language. Apart from other things, it is advisable to look into the validity and applicability of the corpus based language teaching materials if possible. It is hoped that it would enhance the understanding of the students in the target learning. Despite the growing importance of corpora in linguistic research, the use of these language databases is relatively scarce in the area of language teaching (Granger 1994).

The scholars are of different opinions about Corpus linguistics. Corpus linguistics is considered to be an approach to the study of language (Gries 2009), rather than a branch of linguistics, which focuses on the analysis of real samples of language use. Corpus linguistics came into being with John Sinclair and the Cobuild project at the University of Birmingham (United Kingdom). From its emergence in the 1960s, the popularity of this discipline has grown to the greater extent that it has an impact in language pedagogy.

Corpus Linguistics around four decades ago has started its journey as a field complementary to the mainstream general linguistics, artificial intelligence, computational linguistics, and applied linguistics with direct involvement of computer technology in the area of linguistic research and application. Moreover, within last five decades it has evolved as one of the most promising empirical fields of language study that contribute in a handsome manner for multidimensional growth of mainstream linguistics and language technology in general. As a matter of fact, the influence of corpus research can be felt in syllabus design, teaching materials (dictionaries and books) and classroom activities (Barlow 2002; Krieger 2003).The language instructors are now required to be aware of the effectiveness of this approach in the real classroom situation.

2. Corpus Linguistics: Defined and Explained in the Broader Perspectives of Second/Foreign in Language Teaching Corpus linguistics is defined as a systematic analysis of the actual (real) production of language (either spoken or written) as opposed to intuition. The texts (spoken or written production of language) are assembled to form a large collection of authentic texts called a corpus (plural-corpora) which comes in various sizes. According to Reppen (2010), a corpus is "a large, principled collection of naturally
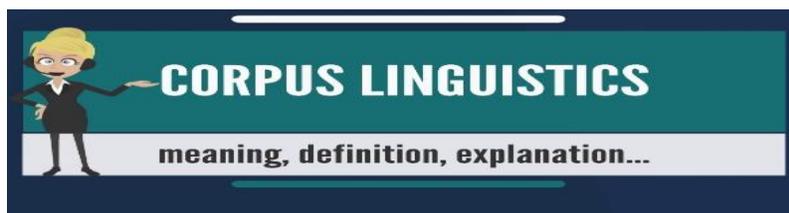
RESEARCH ARTICLE

occurring texts (written or spoken) stored electronically" (p. 2). Good reasons to use such corpora (plural) are that they help identify both "linguistic and situational co-occurrence patterns" and offer "a ready resource of natural, authentic, texts for language learning," in addition to removing some of the guessing of native speakers of languages, whose intuitions are "often ill-informed" (p. 4). Corpus linguistics is used in many linguistic areas (McCarthy & O'Keefe, 2010), language learning and teaching is a primary one, especially for ESL/EFL.

The application of corpus linguistics is inevitable in a foreign language teaching. Linguists, applied linguists and many others pointed out the relevance of this approach in language pedagogy. The present study draws the attention of relevance of this approach to those engaged in teaching English as a foreign language in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There is a need to pay attention to it see its possible implications in the target language. Many researchers (e.g., Conrad, 2000) feel that corpus linguistics could revolutionize language teaching; by fundamentally changing the ways we approach all areas of pedagogy, including materials development, curriculum design, teaching methodology and teacher training.

A corpus is defined here as a principled collection of naturally occurring texts which are stored on a computer to permit investigation using special software. The term corpus is derived from the Latin word corpus that means "body". The Latinterm, however, displays two distinct descendants in modern English:

(a) corpse (it came via Old French *cors*) and
(b) corps (it came via modern French corps in the 18th century).
The first form (i.e. corpse) entered into English in the thirteenth century as *cors*and

during the fourteenth century it had its original Latin 'p' reinserted. At first it meant simply 'body', but by the end of the fourteenth century, the sense firmly established. However, on the other hand, the original Latin term ***corpus*** acquired in English in the fourteenth century (Ayto 1990: 138).
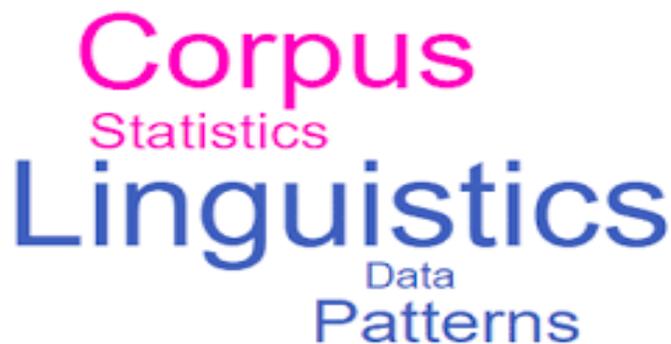
It is hoped that the corpus analysis in language pedagogy will assist the language instructors to enhance the understanding of the entire class. Corpus linguistics has made a wealth of frequency information available to language teachers, and this information can play an important role in helping teachers to decide what is more or less important in a language classroom, depending on what is known to be more or less typical in actual language use (Biber&Reppen, 2002).For example, teachers who would like to know which phrasal verbs are used most frequently in English can consult corpus-based frequency lists (e.g., Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad &Finegan, 1999; Gardner & Davies, 2007). Teachers preparing University students for the demands of academic study in English-speaking universities can now find lists of the most frequently used academic words across disciplines (Coxhead, 2000), as well as lists of important multiword phrases used in university spoken and written discourse (e.g., Biber, Conrad,& Cortes, 2004).

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Corpus linguistics research has also shown that lexis and grammar work together to create meaning, and this has fundamentally changed our understanding of what it means to "know" a word. While dictionaries and language teaching materials previously focused on providing word definitions, these resources are increasingly drawing upon corpus analysis tools to provide additional information about collocation, the tendency of words to co-occur with other words, and phraseology, the tendency of words to occur in particular grammatical patterns (Hunston, 2002). It is a well-known fact that a word cannot be defined in isolation, but rather, meaning is expressed through a combination of a word with other words and syntactic patterns.

3. Contrastive Inter language Analysis:

Corpus based findings need to be interpreted in conjunction with findings from other areas of researches on language pedagogy and SLA. It is important then, to explore the major areas of interface between corpus linguistics and language teaching research. It is advocated by Granger (1998) that it is of great significance to analyze learners' corpora in SLA studies. When applying corpus linguistics to SLA, one type of methods is usually adopted, that is, Contrastive Inter language Analysis (CIA). CIA, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, refers to two different types of comparison: one between native language and learner language (L1 vs. L2), while the other between different varieties of inter language (L2 vs. L2) (Granger, 2009: 18).A series of learner corpus studies have been conducted by taking a CIA approach, such as Altenberg and Granger (2001), Housen (2002), Nesselhauf (2005), Ädel (2006), Xiao (2007), etc., which have revealed a number of inter language features in various linguistic environments.

Learner Corpora and Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) has benefited from learner corpus linguistics research, and there is already general agreement that corpus data, especially the learner corpus data "opens up interesting descriptive and pedagogical perspectives" with "a profound and positive impact on the field of FLT" (Granger, 2002: 21). The two areas which gained most from corpus-based research are materials design and classroom teaching methodology.

4. Research Questions in Corpus Analysis of the target language:

1. What are the implications of corpus based findings which reveal patterns of

RESEARCH ARTICLE

actual language use for teaching methodology, materials development, and syllabus design?

2. In what ways can the use of corpora in the classroom facilitate language learning?

3. How might collections of learner language data contribute to our understanding of second language acquisition and effective language pedagogy?

5. Scope of the Study:

Corpus researchers have made impressive strides in describing the distribution of lexis, grammatical structures and multi-word units (Biber et al., 1999), in exploring lexicon-grammatical patterns (Partington 1998; Hunstonand Francis 1999), and in accounting for differences in language use across unique settings (Biber et al., 1999). As a result, insights into the frequency of linguistic features, the relationship between pattern and meaning, and the variation of language use across registers are now available to language teaching researchers.

Corpus linguistics provides a more objective view of language than that of introspection, intuition and anecdotes. John Sinclair (1998) pointed out that this is because speakers do not have access to the subliminal patterns which run through a language. A corpus-based analysis can investigate almost any language patterns-- lexical, structural, lexico-grammatical, discourse, phonological, morphological etc.

6. Syllabus Design:

According to Barlow (2002), three realms in which corpus linguistics can be applied to teaching are syllabus design, materials development, and classroom activities. It is a fact that
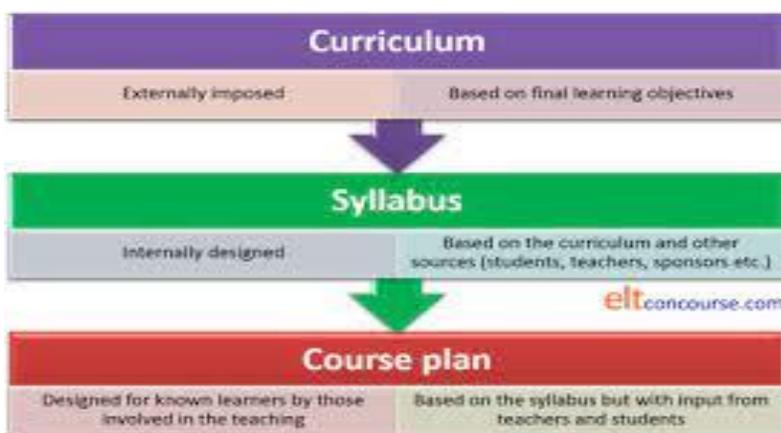
the computerized version of corpus linguistics started to inspire many language instructors, linguists and researchers when in their studies some inconsistencies were revealed between lexico-grammatical structures in the corpora and those found in traditional language textbooks that were often based on intuition of the writers. In consequent, some of the linguistic properties of individual words (lexicon) and phrases, such as their frequency and collocations, were not generally open to intuition, which means that corpus analysis can assist in formulating and finalizing the syllabus of a prescribed course.

Many researchers have recommended the use of corpus-based findings to inform material writers as to L2 teaching materials (e.g. Biber & Reppen, 2002;

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Applications of corpus linguistics to language teaching may be direct or indirect. (Stubbs, 2004).Large general corpora have proven to be an invaluable resource in the design of language teaching syllabi which emphasize communicative competence (cf. Hymes 1972, 1992) and which give prominence to those items that learners are most likely to encounter in real life communicative situations.

With the application of corpus linguistics in language pedagogy, the researchers have used the corpora extensively and effectively to provide more accurate descriptions of language use. Mindt (1996), for example, find that the use of grammatical structures in textbooks for teaching English differs considerably from the use of these structures in textbooks for teaching English. He observes that one common failure of English textbooks is that they teach 'a kind of school English which does not seem to exist outside the foreign language classroom' (Mindt1996:232).As such, learners often find it difficult to communicate successfully with native speakers. A simple yet important role of corpora in language education is to provide more realistic examples of language usage that reflect the complexities and nuances of natural language.

The syllabus organizes the teacher's decisions regarding the focus of a class with respect to the classroom needs. Frequency and register information could be quite helpful in course planning choices. By conducting an analysis of a corpus which is relevant to the purpose a particular class, the teacher can determine what language items are linked to the target register. Richard Schmidt (1990), a proponent of consciousness-raising, argues that what language learners become conscious of -- what they pay attention to, what they notice...influences and in some ways determines the outcome of learning."

RESEARCH ARTICLE

According to Willis (1998), students may be able to determine:

➢ the potential different meanings and uses of common words
➢ useful phrases and typical collocations they might use themselves
➢ the structure and nature of both written and spoken discourse
➢ that certain language features are more typical of some kinds of text than others

Barlow (1992) suggests that a corpus and concordancer can be used to:

o compare language use--student/native speaker, standard English/scientific English, written/spoken
o analyze the language in books, readers, and course books
o generate exercises and student activities
o analyze usage--when is it appropriate to use obtain rather than get?
o examine word order
o compare similar words--ask vs. request

7. Application of Corpus Linguistics in Teaching English as a Foreign Language:

Corpus linguistics research has also shown that lexis and grammar work together to create meaning, and this has fundamentally changed our understanding of what it means to "know" a word. While dictionaries and language teaching materials previously focused on providing word definitions, these resources are increasingly drawing upon corpus analysis tools to provide additional information about collocation, the tendency of words to co-occur with other words, and phraseology, the tendency of words to occur in particular grammatical patterns (Hunston, 2002).

Related to the issue of corpus selection is that of corpus bias, which can cause frustration for the teacher and student. This is because the data can be misleading; if one uses a very large general corpus, it may obscure the register variation which reveals important contextual information about language use. The pitfall is that a corpus may tell us more about itself than about language use. Another obstacle to confront is the comprehensibility issue: if you use concordance in a class, it can be quite difficult for the students (or even the teacher) to understand the data that it provides. Lastly, the issue of learning style differences--for some students, discovery learning is simply not the optimal approach. All of these points reinforce the caveat that careful consideration is required before a new technology is introduced in the classroom, especially one which has not been thoroughly explored and streamlined.

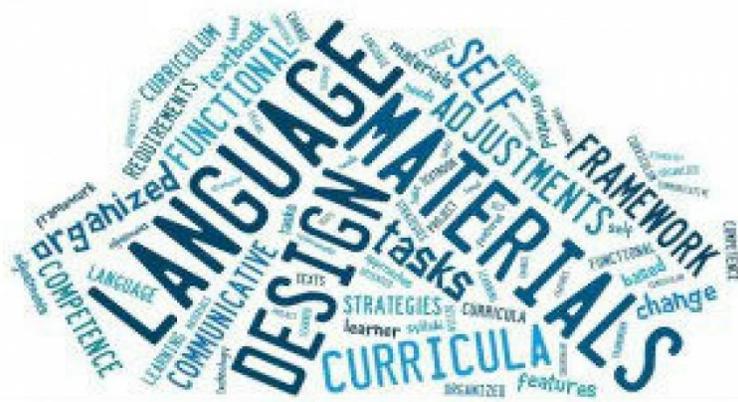## 8. Language Pedagogy: Materials production:

The use of corpora and corpus technology for language learning and teaching purposes has been a topic of concern among the linguists, applied linguists, researchers, lexicographers and pedagogues for more than two decades now.

According to Aston (2000), there are three fields in which corpus data prove relevant to English language teaching:

RESEARCH ARTICLE

● teaching about corpora, as corpus linguistics finds its way into university linguistics curricula;

● exploiting corpora to teach languages, linguistics, and potentially other subjects;

● teaching to exploit corpora, so that learners can explore them for their own purposes. (Aston, 2000:7)

Many researchers have recommended the use of corpus-based findings to inform material writers as to L2 teaching materials (e.g. Biber&Reppen, 2002; Conrad, 1999; 2000; Carter & McCarthy, 1995; Frazier, 2003; Holmes, 1988; Harwood, 2005; Lawson, 2001, Romer, 2010, Kennedy, 2002).Comparison of the language in textbooks with reference corpora has resulted in development of more effective pedagogical materials (Gabrielatos, 2005).Corpus linguistics studies take advantage of the existence of large collections of language production (written or spoken language) in order to investigate a language. Foreign language pedagogy is now beginning to see new possibilities for recent advances in corpus linguistics to improve language teaching and learning. Foreign language pedagogy is now beginning to see new possibilities for recent advances in corpus linguistics to improve language teaching and learning.

With the help of the corpus analysis of a language the researchers and linguists revealed the most important elements of the structural properties of the human language and consequently taken into account for the pedagogical purposes. In the light of these distinct elements of the human language they prepared instructional/remedial teaching and learning materials for the purpose of teaching.

Concluding Remarks

In this digital based language pedagogical era the corpus linguistics which is one of the areas of linguistics has fundamentally changed our understanding of language use and consequently has led to the changes in how we approach to the foreign language education programme in a country. Expectedly, in the coming few decades, it is likely that corpus-based researches endings will continue to familiarize all of us about the development as well as the production of language teaching and learning materials. The use of corpora in the classroom is also likely to increase, as instructors and the peer groups are likely to get more and easy access to online corpora and text analysis tools. The major question to be explored is "How teachers and students in connivance can comprehend most effectively and as a result make use of

RESEARCH ARTICLE

the corpus-based resources available to them". There is a need to explore and focus appropriately the use of corpora in a wide range of practical classroom situations. It will undoubtedly facilitate all of us in a variety of ways in which the analytically obtained corpora might be applied to language pedagogy.

In this regard the studies done in the past revealed that there has been an intimate connection between corpora and computer technology. The first computer corpus, namely the Brown Corpus, was com- piled by the pioneers in corpus linguistics Nelson Francis and Henry Kučera at Brown University, US. Since then on more and more corpora started to appear. This academic tradition has been going on in a language education programme since then in its full potentialities.

This is a technological era which provides us with a plethora of devices as well tools but corpus linguistics is one of the methods/approaches that has proven to be extremely effective for both the language instructors and language learners in enhancing teaching as well as the learning qualities respectively. The instructors in general may encounter difficulties and constraints at the initial stages in its implementation in practical classroom situations. Despite struggling with some initial difficulties and some other pedagogical constraints everyone will soon realize and see the advantages of this tool and improve their teaching practices. Hopefully the application of corpus linguistics in the L2 pedagogy will assist the teachers as well as the entire classroom

to accomplish the required learning outcomes at the end of a language education programme in a college semester.

Corpus resources, findings and methods in the days to come have a great potential to improve the ongoing pedagogical practices in our language based institutions and that corpora can be used in a number of ways to inform instructional materials and reference works, language learning devices/tools. Finally corpus linguistic can be significantly useful in teaching specifically in three areas include: 1) syllabus design 2) development of material 3) classroom activities. The corpora will assist the language instructors as well as the researchers in the analysis of various language patterns, discourse, structural, lexical, grammatical, morphological, phonological aspects of language. One thing to be pointed out at last that data obtained in foreign language pedagogy must be in accordance with the needs and the academic levels of the peer group keeping view the objectives of the course. According to Conrad (2000) demonstrates that the materials writers and developers should pay much more attention to register specific corpus studies. In foreign language pedagogy there are multi-dimensional aspects along with the prerequisites that play an important role and are to be taken into consideration. The Language instructors should be aware of these various dimensions while teaching a foreign language. Any theory, new trend in language pedagogy proposed guidelines and suggestions, remarks, in the concerned area must be seen and taken advantage of what it has to offer.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Last but not least corpus linguistics is really a gift for all of us to go through it and apply it practically in the class if possible. It is hoped that its implementation will definitely contribute in our pedagogical mission and endeavor in achieving the course objectives.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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