Challenges of Using Corpora in Language Teaching and Learning: Implications for Secondary Education*

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Lee, Shinwoong. 2011. Challenges of Using Corpora in Language Teaching and Learning. Linguistic Research 28(1), 159-178. A number of advantages of using corpora in language teaching and learning have been identified by many corpus linguists and thereby its implementation into the language classroom has been highly recommended. However, the challenges and limitations of the use of corpora have not been extensively discussed, and without critically examining the use of corpora in language pedagogy it seems premature to urge teachers to use them in their classroom. In this vein, the purpose of the current paper is to provide a critical evaluation on the use of corpora in language teaching and learning and provide implications for their use in secondary school in Korea. It is argued that without a pedagogical mediation of corpora and resolving some practical problems, the pedagogical potentials of corpora may not be realized. It is also suggested that the integration of corpora into secondary school can be fostered by providing: (a) pedagogically relevant, level-specific corpora; (b) a Korean secondary learner corpus that can show the learners’ common problems; (c) an online database of corpus-based resources; and (d) a corpus workshop for pre- and in-service teachers. It is concluded that the appropriate and effective use of corpora in the classroom is partly a technical issue, but primarily a pedagogical one. If the use of corpora in the classroom is not extensively discussed and researched to develop a pedagogical blueprint for the integration, the expected pedagogical outcomes that a number of corpus linguists simply expected may not accrue to learners and teachers. (Hanyang University)

Key Words corpora, language learning and teaching, secondary education

1. Introduction

As computer technology made it possible to store and analyze a large volume of language data efficiently and the web-based corpora are readily available, the potential benefits of corpora in language learning and teaching have been widely

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acknowledged and even praised as a new language teaching/learning tool by many language professionals. The advocates of using corpora have argued that corpora can provide a powerful tool with which learners can explore and discover patterns of authentic language, providing such information as collocations, colligation, and semantic prosody that are hardly obtainable otherwise (Bernardini, 2004; Hunston, 2002; Meunier, 2002). It has been also contended that corpus-based language teaching has potentials to motivate learners and promote learner autonomy that are highly valued in pedagogy (Aijmer, 2009; Kaltenbock & Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2005).

Due to those potentials of corpora in language teaching and learning, a number of researchers (Aston, 1997; Braun, 2007; Conrad, 2004; Hunston, 2002; Tribble, 2001) presented them as a valuable resource and an innovative teaching tool, and their use has been considered somewhat trendy among language professionals. However, the reality of everyday teaching practice seems quite different from what many corpus linguists expected. Even though there have been a few cases reported on their actual use in the classroom at an undergraduate or a graduate level (for example, Chambers, 2005; Tribble, 2001), its application into secondary education has been a rare occurrence, yet to be reported in the literature. In this vein, Mukherjee and Rohrbach (2006) pessimistically noted that “we have the impression that in EFL countries like Germany there is a widening gap and a widening lag between on-going and intensive corpus-linguistic research on the one hand and classroom teaching on the other (p. 205, cited in Aijmer 2009). This may raise a question why there is a discrepancy between what can be done and what actually is done, and why teachers rarely use corpora in their classroom despite readily-available computers and some of undeniable merits of corpora in language teaching. Therefore, the purpose of the current paper is to provide a critical evaluation on the use of corpora in language teaching, identifying the problems that may hinder the integration of corpora into the classroom and also to suggest implications for the use of corpora in secondary school in Korea. The following questions guided the current paper.

1. What are the challenges of using corpora in language teaching and learning?
2. What are the pedagogical requirements for the integration of corpora into secondary school in Korea?