

# Implementing Specialized Corpora in L2 Writing Classrooms

@RobertEPoole



Poole, R. (2016). A corpus-aided approach for the teaching and learning of rhetoric in an undergraduate composition course for L2 writers. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 21, 99-109.

# Corpora in the (writing) classroom

- Römer (2010): few changes to the “pedagogical landscape” (p. 18)
- Boulton (2010): corpus research “seems largely invisible downstream to teachers and learners” (p. 129)
- Ädel (2010): investigations of corpus approaches for writing instruction have been few

# Rethinking corpus approaches

- corpus approaches should be integrated within existing pedagogy (Conrad, 2000)
- corpus approaches can “complement traditional language learning resources” (Chambers (2005, p. 111).
- “corpus approaches...can be scaffolded into, more familiar approaches that focus on learning through meaningful language use and the development of critical thinking and autonomous learning skills” (Reinhardt, 2010, p. 247).

# Corpora in the writing classroom

- The teaching and learning of particular EAP & ESP genres, e.g. letters of application in Henry & Roseberry(2001) and Henry (2007) and master's thesis in Charles (2007)
- Transfer of vocabulary to writing tasks (Kaur & Hegelmeir, 2005)
- Implemented with more advanced populations, e.g. professional forestry students in Friginal (2013) and graduate student writers (Lee & Swales, 2006)

# My aim

- to scaffold corpus study into mainstream pedagogical approaches to supplement existing L2 writing curriculum
- to move corpus data in freshman composition to areas other than vocabulary and error correction (e.g. Gilmore, 2009; Liu & Jiang, 2009)
- to introduce corpus study for L2 writers (and non-L2 writers) for the heightening of rhetorical awareness

# A corpus-aided approach: Guiding principles

1. **contrastive principle**: “awareness of the operation of language in all texts is usually best stimulated when texts are compared and contrasted” (McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 166)
2. **continuum principle**: “students’ language development is best supported when students are exposed to both literary and non-literary texts” (p. 167)

# Raising rhetorical awareness

- **rhetorical awareness facilitated through comparison/contrast across multiple parameters**
  1. primary texts
  2. data derived from the interest group corpora
  3. authors & purposes
  4. genres
- **rhetorical awareness heightened through ecological thinking**
  1. texts are interrelated
  2. strategies & features pattern throughout the debate
  3. keywords are reproduced
  4. all choices meaningful in the debate

# The class

- 21 international students
  - 18 L1 Chinese speakers, 2 L1 Arabic speakers, 1 L1 Korean speaker
- minimum score of 70 on the TOEFL or a 6.0 on the IELTS
- students in the course must receive a satisfactory grade within their introductory writing course before matriculating to this second course.

# The Rosemont Copper Mine Debate

2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014

Augusta Resources submits Plan #1 ([pdf](#))



[Pdf](#)

[Revised Plan from AR & Forest Service Release #1](#)

Independent Economic Study Released

Rosemont Truth Org first post

Wystrach [video](#)

[NYT Feature](#)

Draft EIS

EPA Letter Recommends Against Mine

EPA asks ADEQ to deny RCC clean water cert

[ACOE rules RCC below standards](#)

# The primary texts

Title	Date of Publication	Genre	Author
Analysis of Updated Draft	11/07/2013	formal business letter	Environmental Protection Agency
EPA Recommends Against Federal Water Permit for...	11/20/2013	press release	Save the Scenic Santa Ritas (SSSR)
Augusta Comments on SSSR's Inaccurate Press Release	11/20/2013	press release	Augusta Resources
Augusta Resources Shares Collapse After Group Leaks Report	11/20/2013	financial news report	Stockhouse
Rosemont Shouldn't Get Federal Permit to Build Mine	11/23/2013	Opinion-Editorial	Arizona Daily Star
Save the Scenic Santa Rita's Distorts EPA Report	11/21/2013	Opinion-Editorial	Arizona Independent

# The corpora

- press releases from Rosemont Copper Company (~20K, 35 texts)
- blog release from Rosemont Truth environmental organization (~70K, 70 texts)

The contrastive corpus analysis enabled noticing of patterns of features and strategies representative of each group

# more on the corpora

- localized (Flowerdew, 2004)
- pedagogical (Willis, 2003)
- specialized (Beaugrande, 1996)
- exhaustive (i.e. all possible target texts included)

# The data

- all corpus data was prepared by the instructor using Antconc & Microsoft Word
- Teacher-prepared materials most effective for they avoid “the corpus as maze” and “drowning in the data” challenges (Ädel (2010, p. 46)
- Students never heard the word “corpus”, performed no corpus query, nor generated a single concordance line

**Two types of data:**  
concordance lines  
keyword lists

# Corpus activity #1: *Rebuilding context using concordance lines*

- students were presented concordance lines of items identified by the instructor as rhetorically salient in the ongoing debate from both interest groups
- students worked in groups of 3-4
- focused attention to “the interrelations between the data and the texts they are derived from” (Gavioli, 1997)

## Stakeholder A

Read the sentences below carefully. Think about the keyword that is written in bold in each line.

1. a final EIS for the Rosemont Copper **project** along with the Record of Decision.
2. Our leadership has always understood that our **project** will receive the highest scrutiny from
3. answered fully and successfully and that the **project** meets all standards addressed by the
4. and robust economics of the Rosemont **project**, propels Augusta to becoming a solid
5. The Rosemont Copper **project** is located in Pima County

**Who do you think is the author of these sentences?  
What rhetorical effect do you think the author wants to achieve through the use of these words?  
Why would he/she choose these words and not other similar words?**

# Student-created keyword lists

## The environmental org.

- *water*
- *animals*
- *jaguar*
- *environment*
- *toxic waste*
- *ecosystem*
- *save*
- *Canadian*
- *permit*
- *proposed*

## The Copper Company

- *money*
- *jobs*
- *economics, economy*
- *protect*
- *project*
- *financial, investors*
- *investors*
- *safe*
- *secure*
- *increase*

# Corpus activity #2: keywords in context

	Keyword	# of Times	Rating
1	proposed	163	51
2	tailings	60	36
3	whether	55	33
4	objections	74	31
5	forest	296	29

## Keywords from Environmental Texts

## Keywords from the mining company

	Keyword	# of Times	Rating
1	forward	54	103
2	nyse	25	68
3	school	27	65
4	copper	222	57
5	economic	25	50

# The keywords analysis essay

In texts and debates, it is common to find patterns of ideas and strategies. These patterns of ideas are often represented by keywords. For your homework, analyze the keywords from the two lists and explain why these keywords are rhetorically important for each group's messages. What ideas and strategies are likely being used in the texts from the two groups? What do the keywords show us about the strategies the company and the environmental organization are using? In your writing, you should consider the rhetorical situation and use the words ethos, logos, and pathos.

*“In my opinion, the author adopted this specific word multiple and multiple of times because by using it, the SSSR keeps their supporters in a fighting mode, and to keep them standing up against their competitors.”*

*“Using the proposed word suggests there still have hope to against the company. To have hope extremely inspires other opponents and audience. “*

*“Forward is a very appropriate words in company’s letter. The word is an ethos that increases the company’s credibility. Forward means the future, or hope.”*

*“The company tries to convince the audience that their copper mine can bring a good future. In some ways, the company leads audiences to believe what the cooper mine bring. They do not want their audience to consider the asked questions by the SSSR.”*

*“We also can see that the word jaguar was used 42 times in their writings. This word is used by the SSSR organization because it causes pathos in the audience. Pathos is created because the word jaguar resembles nature and wildlife in the mountains, and with the proposed mine, wildlife will be damaged, which will eventually cause compassion in their audience. “*

# Student attitudes

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Uncertain</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
In general, working with the keyword lists helped me learn about rhetorical strategies.	2 (12.5%)	0	1 (6.25%)	3 (18.75%)	10 (62.5%)
In general, working the keyword lists helped me understand patterns of rhetorical strategies in texts	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	8 (50%)
In general, working with the keyword lists and example sentences was a useful activity that added to the textbook and other materials.	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)	6 (37.50%)	7 (43.75%)
In general, working with the keyword lists and example sentences was interesting.	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)	2 (12.5%)	6 (37.50%)	7 (43.75%)
Working with the keyword lists was difficult.	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	3 (18.75%)	2 (12.5%)	5 (31.25%)
I believe studying keyword lists can help me be a better writer on other academic assignments.	1 (6.25%)	0	4 (25%)	5 (31.25%)	6 (37.50%)

# Considerations

- value of localized, specialized pedagogical corpora and the benefit of teacher knowledge
- facilitate and enable comparison/contrast of texts, corpus data, and interest groups
- design for convergence (Leech, 1997)
- insights possible from small corpora

# moving forward

- this illustration is an entry point, but the approach can be applied to other discourse domains where arguments likely more subtle and nuanced
- closer study of the development of rhetorical awareness



Thank you!

Robert Poole  
[robert.poole@tamucc.edu](mailto:robert.poole@tamucc.edu)  
@RobertEPoole

# References

- Ädel, A. 2010. Using corpora to teach academic writing: Challenges for the direct approach. In M. Campoy-Cubillo, B. Bellés-Fortuño, and M. Gea-Valor (Eds.) *Corpus-based approaches to English language teaching*. London: Continuum.
- Boulton, A. (2010). Learning outcomes from corpus consultation. In M. Jaén, F. Valverde, and M. Pérez (Eds.), *Exploring new paths in language pedagogy* (129-144). London: Equinox.
- Chambers, A. (2005). Integrating corpus consultation in language studies. *Language Learning and Technology*, 9 (2), 111-125.
- McCarthy, M. & Carter, R. 1994. *Language as discourse*. London: Longman.
- Römer, U. 2010. "Using general and specialized corpora in English language teaching: Past, present, and future". In M. Campoy-Cubillo, B. Bellés-Fortuño, and M. Gea-Valor (Eds.) *Corpus-based approaches to English language teaching* (18-38). London: Continuum.