

Corpus capers

A Finnish publisher shows the way with its latest CD-Rom for learners of English

WAYNE TROTMAN
writes

LINGONET VIDEOCORPUS ON CD-ROM (Lingonet Oy) Turku, Finland, 2006

LINGONET OY favour the use of video clips on CD for language teaching materials. Their recent and popular programs *Teentalk* and *Business Territories* both use this format and tend to aim at more able language learners dealing with specific aspects of English in higher education and vocational training contexts. *VideoCorpus* admirably continues this emphasis, but also contains an IT-competent linguist's cutting-edge tool – concordancing software.

VideoCorpus consists of short video clips of native speakers of British English debating fifteen wide-ranging controversial issues including animal rights, equality, the monarchy and gun law. After an introductory speaker poses the key questions on each topic, individuals from various backgrounds present their cases in sections of one- or two-minute slots. The number of speakers ranges from ten to twenty and the material totals approximately ten hours of authentic recorded speech that may, if the user chooses, be accompanied by individual transcripts of the unedited text. As the text includes all key features of natural speech such as hesitation, self-correction,

fillers and repetition this alone amounts to a potential corpus of 75,000 words, but more on that below.

Since all of the above simply opens on screen, the program at this stage was easy to move around in and functioned in the same manner as a video cassette – if anyone can still recall such a thing! So far, so good, but I still wonder how much all the language exposure in the many clips would benefit learners of English beyond listening and reading, probably with immense interest, so as to simply match and follow speech and sound. The video texts are clearly aimed at users at intermediate level and above but looked in

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need of accompanying language tasks. Teachers could quite easily copy and paste the text to produce their own personal material. Those intending to use this material will require Adobe Acrobat files on their pc.

It was not so obvious for the average user (such as this reviewer) to initially work out the second and much more valuable function of this program: the potential to build a personal corpus from the texts available and subsequently to engage in some useful concordancing to identify collocating items and near neighbours, and to detect

word frequency. After consulting the user's manual (and my IT colleague next door), then locating TextSTAT-2 and engaging in a bit of trial and error, I was soon up and running with the concordancing search tool.

Although it's obviously useful to create a corpus with the 75,000 words of natural speech available on *VideoCorpus* in order to analyse the features mentioned above, it's also possible to either add your own to this or simply design your own ESP corpus that should enable you to, let's say, study the use of commas and semi-colons in legal documents written in English. One other useful feature

of this superb program is the link to the downloadable and extremely interesting document by Mike Nelson that introduces and explains corpora on a non-technical level along with how to make good use of corpus analysis both as an independent learner and as a classroom teacher.

Wayne Trotman was last seen being dragged away from the pc screen showing the concordancing software

REVIEWS IN BRIEF

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BOOK OF THE MONTH



PRESENTING (Delta Publishing) Susan Lowe and Louise Pile ISBN 1-900783-95-9

PRESENTING IS the latest book in the Delta Business Communication Skills series, which includes books on telephoning and email. The book takes a learner-centred approach and starts with a needs analysis page, followed by a learning journal.

This slim 64-page book is fairly comprehensive. Six units cover aspects of giving presentations which will be familiar to those involved in this area of business English; these include

starting a presentation, using equipment, organising the content and dealing with questions. The book also touches on body language. An audio CD helps students with the phonological aspects of presenting, such as stress, and will be appreciated by those using the course for self-study. The photocopiable framework pages at the back are useful although space to complete some of the exercises is limited. Colour is used effectively throughout, especially the graphics of presentation slides. The use of yellow Post-it style tips is particularly useful.

Presenting should prove helpful to the intermediate student who can first glean advice, and then get on and organise the content of his or her presentation.

on the speaking and the writing sections. The large central section of the book, at just under 100 pages, is dedicated to three complete practice tests and includes an answer key.

The book provides information through 'fact files' – small boxes providing information on the task types and advice on strategy – how to approach each question. *Achieve Bulats* is black and white and comes with two CD audios with the listening material. It provides solid, no-frills practice for those students intending to take this examination.

WRITING IN PARAGRAPHS

(Macmillan)
Dorothy E Zemach and Carlos Islam ISBN 1-4050-9586-5

WRITING IN Paragraphs is aimed at low-intermediate students. It introduces them to a process approach to writing, providing teaching material for the various stages: brainstorming ideas, organising them into paragraphs, and revising them. The book covers topic areas like work, exchanging gifts, fashion trends and strange stories. The twelve units cover functional elements of writing a good paragraph, such as style, writing topic sentences and conclusions. Writers are encouraged to freewrite when brainstorming, and to have their work read and commented on by a fellow student. The photocopiable 'peer review sheets' at the back are very useful for this. The book is thorough, well laid out, and can be used for self-study.

It espouses a process approach to writing. A teacher's book describes the methodology as one which 'encourages critical thinking'. The material is well laid out and attractive. It is expected that teachers will use supplementary material on, say, grammar. Recommend for EAP teachers.

ACHIEVE BULATS (Marshall Cavendish) Russell Whitehead and Mark Harrison ISBN 0-462-00783-9

BULATS STANDS for Business Language Testing Service. It 'assesses... language skills... needed for the workplace' and tests across all levels of ability. This workmanlike, serious book opens with a section on preparing for Bulats, covering listening and reading. It finishes with some tips

EXTENDED WRITING AND RESEARCH SKILLS (Garnet Education) Joan McCormack and John Slaght ISBN 1-85964-747-2

ON PRE-SESSIONAL courses at UK universities students produce an extended piece of writing, often called a library project. This book focuses on the writing and research skills necessary to do this. It also looks at how to develop spoken skills.

The eight units provide a solid course, which has been trialled and honed by tutors at the University of Reading, UK. Typical EAP areas are covered, such as avoiding plagiarism and acknowledging sources. Lengthy appendices include a sample project and a wealth of source material. The mate-

Reviews by Pete Sharma for the Bournemouth English Book Centre

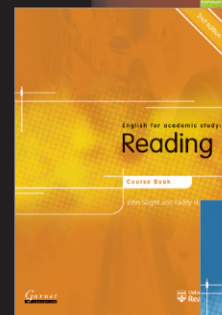
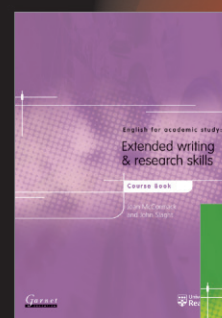
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