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Perhaps applied linguists like Widdowson would be content if a specially selected corpus of appropriate data could be compiled to fit the levels of simplicity they would recommend. In a recent discussion (January 1997) at least, he did approve of my proposal (elaborated in Beaugrande 1997b) to offer both

5   teachers and learners access to browse through strategically selected and sorted 'model corpora', guided by user-friendly walk-throughs. They could explore for themselves not just contemporary English and other languages, but specific social and regional varieties or registers of a language, including ones being spoken as other than first or native languages in relevant social, pedagogical,

10   or professional contexts of situation. Learners could also be given user-friendly rough-and-ready training for working together in formulating the regularities they can find in the data, rather like 'junior functional linguists'.

In pedagogic contexts, I would warmly advocate replacing the traditional

15   term and concept of rules, still used in a special sense by Sinclair (1991: 493) for 'hundreds if not thousands' of 'productive rules'. I would use 'constraints' in technical descriptions of language (e.g. Beaugrande 1997a); 'guidelines' in pedagogical materials (e.g. Beaugrande 2000c); and 'reasons' in our explanations of why people say things one way rather than another. Over the years, the term

20   'rules' has accumulated far too much prescriptive and authoritarian baggage, and we should not risk misunderstandings. From the standpoint of theory, speakers certainly do not follow 'rules' in the sense of either traditional or formalist 'grammar' for every choice they make but nearly always have 'reasons'. From the standpoint of practice, 'rules' is an exclusive and formal concept carrying

25   disempowering connotations of authorities, compulsions, violations, and punishments, and suggesting that learners are basically 'unruly' and need to be 'ruled over' (perhaps by getting whacked with a 'ruler'?); 'reasons' is an inclusive and functional concept, carrying the empowering suggestion that learners are basically 'reasonable' and deserve to know the 'reasons' why they should do or

30   say things, and to have their own 'reasons' respected. Moreover, shifting from 'rules' to 'reasons' would help to rebalance creativity with conformity, since appropriate contexts supply good reasons to choose creatively on the basis of a steadily more 'delicate' sensitivity toward the typical interactions among sets of choices offered by the lexicogrammar of the target language or language variety.

35   And learners would be strongly encouraged to approach issues of language in general from a realistic functional perspective in their later lives.

     Browsing through a learner-oriented corpus on one's own pacing and initiative should eliminate much of the stress, anxiety, and indifference fostered by

40   conventional education with its formalist focus on 'accuracy' and 'correctness'. The learners could actively invest their creativity in the discovery of 'reasons' and could thus gain substantial initiative and authority during the overall process of learning, with a matching rise in interest and motivation. Indeed, a more delicate sense of the constraints and collocations would profit both the teachers who can

45   check them against their own intuitions about the language or register, and the learners who can gain a more secure and productive basis for their creativity than can be had from the passive, alienating, and mechanical application of 'rules' laid down by teachers or textbooks. The learners will finally be able to tell which aspects of language are the exemplary ones, an ability conventional

50   schooling has long demanded but not provided.

A fascinating prospect would be to make the enterprise cumulative. Advanced learners could guide the more elementary ones though the browsing procedures and share their own results. Also, the total results could be accumulated in

55 a data base which could eventually serve to formulate the first learner-generated grammar and lexicon in the history of language education. Such a work would be an impressive implementation of the principle of learners taking charge of their own learning processes, already advocated with enthusiasm by educators like Paulo Freire (1985 [orig. 1970]) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1994), and

60 with caution by Widdowson himself, e.g., in his measured comments on 'learner initiative' and 'learner autonomy' (1990: 4f, 189ff).

I would further predict that co-operative browsing would be an excellent way to dispel the misunderstandings and anxieties language teachers may harbour

65 respecting large-corpus data. For my part, the misunderstandings I would wish to lay to rest here concerns the assertions attributed to John Sinclair. He absolutely does not assert that any corpus, however large, equals the total or 'real English'; or that the 'performed' equals the 'possible'. What he does assert is that the differences between those data and regularities which are found in

70 a very large corpus versus those which are not ought to be significant for people who want to make authoritative statements in textbooks or reference works about what 'real English' is like, especially when addressing learners of English who will try to put the statements into practice. Sinclair also asserts that there is a significant relation between that same difference and the competence of the

75 adult native speaker, who is likely to say combinations that are frequent in the corpus and is unlikely to say ones that are infrequent or have not occurred so far,

although you certainly can say them in appropriate contexts. Such a speaker has an intuitive sense of which combinations are common, sensible, useful, and so on, without implying that others are 'just not possible' or 'not real English'.

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Furthermore, Sinclair asserts that the data and regularities which do appear frequently in a large corpus should be relevant and interesting for teachers and learners of English as a native language and even more as a non-native language. And finally, he asserts that taking corpus data into account could improve the

85 quality of English world-wide because non-native learners would have much more detailed models and targets to aim for (Sinclair 1996). I in turn would assert that large corpus data can shed vital new light on issues in language teaching as part of the larger process of providing a richer and more delicate basis for a functionalist lexicogrammar than has ever been feasible before.