

Review of Viana, Vander ed. 2023. *Teaching English with Corpora: A Resource Book*. London: Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-032-25297-1. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/b22833>

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While many scholars have recognized the relevance of corpora for teaching, several of them have lamented that corpus-based applications in the classroom are few and far between (e.g., Meunier 2011; Götz and Granger 2024). One reason that has been put forward to explain this is the lack of ready-made materials for teachers (e.g., Breyer 2009; Gilquin and Granger 2022). In this respect, *Teaching English with Corpora: A Resource Book*, edited by Vander Viana, is a most welcome contribution, as it provides English language teachers with myriad lesson plans involving corpus-based activities.

The book starts with an introductory chapter by the editor, who sets the scene for the use of corpora in and for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (henceforth, TESOL). This chapter offers an excellent overview of how corpora can help answer very concrete questions that teachers or students could ask, for example “What nouns does the adjective *heartfelt* usually modify?” (p. 6). It also shows what impact Data-Driven Learning (DDL) can have by letting students carry out corpus analyses, not only in terms of language learning, but also for the development of more general skills (research skills, digital skills, literacy and/or oracy skills, numeracy skills, and autonomous skills). The chapter ends with a presentation of the rationale and structure of the book, emphasizing its goal of being

a single one-stop-shop volume containing lesson plans showcasing how current or future TESOL professionals can use corpora in their classes to suit their pedagogical goals and to cater for their students’ needs (p. 23).



This introduction is followed by 70 chapters, written by “authors worldwide who have different professional experiences” (p. 24). Each chapter is structured in the same way. It starts with a box specifying the level(s) of the students for whom the lesson is designed, the main aims of the lesson (including more general skills), the duration of the lesson, the time needed to prepare it, and the resources that are necessary (computer lab, Internet access, whiteboard, handout, etc.). A short introduction then presents the topic of the lesson and explains why it is important, sometimes with references to the literature. The core of the chapter is a list of numbered steps to be taken before the class (if preparation is needed) and in the class. This is followed by points for consideration and alternative steps as well as a list of references and suggested reading. Occasionally, a chapter ends with an appendix, which may include a concordance or further instructions to run a program, for instance.

The 70 chapters are organized around two main parts: one part is devoted to English for general purposes (the first 40 chapters), whereas the other part is devoted to English for specific purposes (the next 30 chapters). However, a very useful “at-a-glance chapter taxonomy” (pp. xii-xiii) categorizes the chapters according to several other dimensions:

- a) level: elementary, intermediate, upper intermediate, advanced;
- b) system: discourse (which also covers pragmatics), grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary;
- c) resources: online (relying on technological devices), offline (relying on print resources);
- d) class time: up to 30 minutes, 35–45 minutes, 50–60 minutes, 65–90 minutes, 120 minutes;
- e) and preparation time: none, 5 minutes, 10–15 minutes, 30–45 minutes.

This manifold categorization of the chapters allows readers to select lessons that might be relevant to them depending on the teaching context. In addition, an index makes it possible to select lessons that involve, say, a particular register or a specific corpus or program.

The book comes with online support materials, available from the Routledge website. Chapters that include such extra materials are identified by means of a special symbol. This is the case for 25 of the chapters. The online materials mostly consist of handouts or worksheets that can be distributed to students. Some provide teacher’s notes, answer keys, or corpus samples, for instance. Most authors can be read independently of the online materials associated with them. For a few chapters,

however, like Chapter 29 by Nausica Marcos Miguel, access to the online materials is necessary to understand what the lesson is really about.

Not only does the book address the lack of ready-made materials for teaching with corpora by making resources available, but it also makes these resources accessible, in the sense of being easy to understand. As noted in the introductory chapter, “[n]o technical or prior knowledge of Corpus Linguistics is assumed or required” (p. 26). Indeed, technical terms are defined, either in the introductory chapter or in the individual chapters. This is the case for terms having to do with corpus literacy (e.g., ‘concordancer’ or ‘n-gram’) as well as some terms having to do with linguistics (e.g., ‘conceptual metaphor’, ‘speech act’, or ‘hedging’). Each chapter is abundantly illustrated with screenshots of the tools used and corpus query outputs. Very often, different figures are provided to illustrate different steps of the lesson. Some of the figures are enriched with numbers corresponding to certain (sub)steps and pointing to the relevant parts of a corpus interface (e.g., a box to fill in or a button to click on). The bibliographical references cited in the chapters or suggested for further reading tend to be limited and efforts have been made to favour pedagogically oriented references. More generally, the average of four to five pages per chapter makes for an easy reading. The writing style, guided by the set structure and the numbered lists of steps, is concise and straightforward.

In addition to making its contents easy to understand, the book makes it relatively easy to implement. A majority of the lessons require no preparation time. The plans are usually for complete lessons, not limited to the corpus analysis itself, but also proposing warm-up activities, group discussions, follow-up tasks, and sometimes even ideas for follow-up lessons. Very practical considerations are included, for example the recommendation to use corpus queries on [www.english-corpora.org](http://www.english-corpora.org) wisely because the number of free queries per day is limited (p. 40, Chapter 3 by Robin Sulkosky), or the advice “to observe students’ reactions closely and to have the contact number of a local support group that can be contacted if needed” (p. 161, Chapter 30 by Vander Viana) when discussing gender equality (or lack thereof). The book also offers ready-made handouts and worksheets (in the form of online support materials; see above) or elements that can be used in the classroom, such as corpus examples or tables to be completed by students. Suggested answers are sometimes provided. Twelve of the lessons do not require any technology (offline activities). For the other lessons, the

necessary corpora and tools, which have been chosen because they are easy to use, can almost always be accessed free of charge (although registration may be necessary).

As is evident from the “at-a-glance chapter taxonomy” mentioned earlier, the book can cater for a wide range of needs. Besides the dimensions listed in the taxonomy, the chapters deal with a large number of themes, including some topical ones (e.g., climate change in Chapter 58 by Robert Poole). They tackle many different linguistic phenomena (e.g., transition words in Chapter 46 by Nicole Brun-Mercer, reporting verbs in Chapter 53 by Joseph J. Lee, or contractions in Chapter 57 by Megan Bruce) and many registers (e.g., online reviews in Chapter 17 by Natalia Mora-López, blogs in Chapter 24 by Maristella Gatto, or obituaries in Chapter 69 by Rudy Loock). They involve quite a few different corpora —e.g., the *British National Corpus* (BNC), the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA), the *News on the Web Corpus* (NOW),<sup>1</sup> or the *British Academic Written English Corpus* (BAWE)<sup>2</sup>— although COCA is by far the most often used corpus in the book. Also, it should be underlined that a majority of the corpora are monolingual corpora of expert writing. Other types of corpora are less commonly used, e.g., learner corpora in Chapter 2 by Rosie Harvey and Irene Marín Cervantes, parallel corpora in Chapter 5 by Elen Le Foll, student writing corpora in Chapter 56 by Jenny Kemp and Laurence Anthony, multimodal corpora in Chapter 59 by Luciano Franco and Vander Viana. Spoken corpora are found in several chapters, although most of the time the analysis relies on transcriptions and does not involve the acoustic signal. Even Chapter 21 by Roger W. Gee, on pronunciation, starts from letters or sequences of letters (e.g., *th*, *ee*) to identify words with specific sounds in COCA. The use of the *Speech Accent Archive*<sup>3</sup> is suggested as a possible alternative to find good candidates for pronunciation activities, but this is not, strictly speaking, a corpus. As is the case with corpora, various programs are exploited in the book, but some are more frequent than others. This is the case of [www.english-corpora.org](http://www.english-corpora.org) (recurrent throughout the book) and *AntConc*<sup>4</sup> (only used in the second part of the book on English for specific purposes, especially when the activity involves collecting one’s own corpus). Other tools include *KonText*,<sup>5</sup> *Sketch Engine for Language Learning*,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.english-corpora.org](http://www.english-corpora.org) for information on the BNC, COCA, and NOW.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sketchengine.eu/british-academic-written-english-corpus/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://accent.gmu.edu/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://kontext.korpus.cz>

<sup>6</sup> <https://skell.sketchengine.eu>

*StringNet Navigator*,<sup>7</sup> *VocabProfilers*,<sup>8</sup> and *WebCorp*.<sup>9</sup> Variety is also visible in the corpus techniques applied (e.g., concordances, collocates, n-grams, keywords, frequency lists, and even multidimensional analysis in Chapter 40 by Vander Viana) and in the pedagogical approaches adopted (e.g., gamification in Chapter 3 by Robin Sulkosky, L1-based teaching in Chapter 4 by Natalie Finlayson, kinesthetic learning in Chapter 6 by Riah Werner, and differentiated instruction in Chapter 45 by Loretta Fung). Furthermore, the alternative steps in the penultimate section of chapters allow for possible adaptations according to students' level, degree of difficulty, time available, register investigated, etc. And while the book focuses on the teaching of English, most of the activities could be adapted to other languages, provided the necessary corpora and tools are available and similar linguistic phenomena exist in the other languages.

As already suggested with respect to the predominance of certain (types of) corpora and tools, the book does not necessarily offer a balanced mix of activities. Chapters devoted to vocabulary are far more numerous than those dealing with pronunciation, and there are fewer chapters designed for beginners than for more advanced students. It is also unclear why a few lessons are presented as being meant for trainee teachers (e.g., Chapter 34 by Jenny Kemp and Luke Timms), while most of these lessons might just as well be organized among language students. In addition, certain chapters less fully embrace the corpus linguistic approach than others. Thus, in Chapter 6 by Riah Werner, the role of corpora is very modest: the corpus-based finding that the 'if + present simple + imperative' construction is widely used serves as a starting point for an activity that does not involve corpora at all and that includes sentences which are very unlikely to occur in naturally-occurring language (e.g., *If you like bananas, jump*). In some chapters, invented sentences are shown to students, e.g., *I can see the book in front of me* (to illustrate the physical meaning of the verb *see*), while (simple) corpus examples would have worked perfectly well. Since all lesson plans have arguably been tested, one would have liked to see more statements of the following type, displaying a more personal take on the lesson: "I have used this task successfully on several occasions on a university pre-session course, including students at the weaker end of the ability range" (p. 76, Chapter 11 by John Williams). Similarly, one would have expected to find more warnings such as "Sometimes students find the idea

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<sup>7</sup> <http://nav.stringnet.org/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.lex tutor.ca/vp/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.webcorp.org.uk/live/>

of using technology daunting at first” (p. 267, Chapter 51 by Jenny Kemp and Laurence Anthony) or “As FLAX is a large online library, students might get lost initially” (p. 236, Chapter 44 by Eman Elturki). Many chapters tend to present an overly rosy picture of corpus-based teaching. This leads to contradictions in the book where most authors describe [www.english-corpora.org](http://www.english-corpora.org) or *AntConc* as student-friendly tools, but some point to the challenges that they may present for students (see p. 129 on [www.english-corpora.org](http://www.english-corpora.org) and p. 227 on *AntConc*). Warnings about the difficulty of collecting one’s own corpus or about the amount of noise generated by certain automatic searches (e.g., *NOUN is (a/an) NOUN* to retrieve similes of the type *time is money* in Chapter 18 by Natalie Finlayson), for example, would have been desirable too —not to discourage teachers, but to reassure them that the difficulties that they are bound to encounter sometimes are part of the normal process of using corpora. The book also presents some weaknesses that are understandable given the large number of chapters that it brings together. It can thus be inconsistent in the information that is provided, in the sense that, say, the first occurrence of a term in the book is not defined, but a later occurrence is (the term ‘register’, for instance, is defined on p. 254, but most of its earlier occurrences are not). Another example has to do with registration to access corpora on [www.english-corpora.org](http://www.english-corpora.org): while Chapters 1 and 3 refer to this corpus interface, it is only in Chapter 4 that the requirement to register is mentioned for the first time. Finally, cross-references, as very occasionally found in the book (for Chapters 32 and 33 and for Chapters 53 and 67), would have been welcome for some other chapters too (e.g., Chapters 2, 14 and 31 on phrasal verbs or Chapters 25 and 35 on conceptual metaphors).

Despite these limitations, the book offers what many have been waiting —and hoping— for: a varied collection of lesson plans that teachers can easily implement to incorporate corpora in their teaching. To paraphrase O’Keeffe *et al.* (2007: 248), cited in the introduction, the authors of the chapters do not “stop at the classroom door”, but enter the classroom head-on. They do so with so many inspiring ideas that the book should have both short-term and long-term impacts. In the short run, it should lead teachers to organize some of the corpus-based activities described in the different chapters. In the long run, it should encourage them to create their own materials and develop their own lesson plans involving corpora. This, in turn, could have repercussions on textbooks and other published resources, the current weaknesses of

which are highlighted in several chapters (e.g., p. 193 and p. 217). If more and more teachers use and want to continue using corpora in their teaching, publishing houses might become less reluctant to include corpus activities in pedagogical publications. Ultimately, a book like *Teaching English with Corpora* might be just what is needed to finally give corpora the place that they deserve in the educational world.

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