

Teaching grammar and vocabulary with the British National Corpus

Introduction to using BNCweb
in the English classroom

Outline

- What is the BNC (and other corpora)?
- What is BNCweb and how to get registered for BNCweb?
- How can BNCweb be used for teaching grammar and vocabulary?

What is the BNC?

- One out of many corpora available today!
- What is a corpus?
 - a collection of (samples of) texts:
 - large
 - representative
 - naturally-occurring
 - computerized
 - often annotated

What types of corpora are there?

- Two main types:
 - general:
 - represent all (major) varieties/registers of a language
 - specialized:
 - represent a particular variety/register of a language

Examples of general corpora

BoE: Bank of English



Sinclair 1990: *Collins COBUILD English Grammar*

CIC: Cambridge International
Corpus



Carter and McCarthy 2006:
Cambridge Grammar of English

LSWE: Longman Spoken and
Written English Corpus



Biber et al. 1999. *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*

BNC: British National Corpus



Probably most widely used corpus in research and classrooms

Examples of specialized corpora

- CANCODE: Cambridge-Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English
- BAWE British Academic Written English
- Chat corpus: <http://corp.hum.sdu.dk/cqp.en.html>
- MICASE: Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English
- NC: Narrative Corpus

Other types of corpora

- Historical corpora
 - Helsinki Corpus (Old E to Modern E)
- Comparable Corpora
 - ICE corpora: 1m words (s/w) of different national varieties of E
- Parallel corpora
 - EU regulations
- Learner corpora
 - ICLE: 20,000 words of essays written by learners of E with French, Swedish, German etc. as L1
- Online corpora
 - TIME corpus (100m, 1923-2006)
 - <http://corpus.byu.edu/time/>
 - COCA: Corpus of Contemporary American English (400m, 1990-2009)
 - <http://www.americancorpus.org/>
 - BNCweb (web interface for BNC)
 - <http://www.bncweb.info/>

What is annotation?

- “Corpus annotation is the practice of adding interpretative linguistic information to a corpus” (Leech 2005:17)
- Example: *present*
 - present_**NN1**: noun: ‘gift’
 - present_**VVI**: verb: ‘give’ or ‘introduce’
 - present_**ADJ**: adjective: ‘not absent’

Part of speech (PoS) annotation helps distinguish between different forms and uses of a word.

What is the BNC?

Written: 90m

Non-academic prose	28%
Other published material	20%
Fiction and verse	18%
Academic prose	18%
Newspapers	11%
Unpublished written materials	5%

Spoken: 10m

Context-governed:
public speech events (6m)

- **Educational & informative** (lectures, news broadcasts, classroom discussion, tutorials)
- **Business** (sales demonstrations, consultations, interviews)
- **Institutional & public** (sermons, political speeches, council meetings)
- **Leisure** (sports commentaries, club meetings, radio phone-ins)

Demographically-sampled:
everyday conversation (4m)

- **Demographic sampling:**
 - equal numbers of
 - men and women
 - social groups
 - age groups
 - 38 UK locations
- **148 recruits**
- **Recording everyday talk**

Most spoken
files
now available
as audio!

Total: 100m

What is BNCweb?

- Free online interface for BNC
 - simple registration
 - user-friendly
 - large number of functionalities
 - for a description see:
 - Hoffmann et al. (2008)
- How to get registered:
 1. Go to:
<http://bncweb.lancs.ac.uk/bncwebSignup/user/login.php>
 2. Under "First time users" click on "Register for an account"
 3. Fill in the required information; when complete click on "Register"
 4. After registration, you will receive an email to confirm your input
 5. Remember your BNCweb access details so you can retrieve them easily!

How to work with BNCweb

- In the middle of your screen, empty white box:
 - the search box
 - type in the word or phrase (the ‘string’) you are looking for
- For more complex searches, check out “Simple Query Syntax help”
 - extremely useful for lexical/grammatical patterns
 - query syntax requires some getting used to ...
- Hit “Start Query” to get results

The screenshot displays the BNCweb (CQP-Edition) interface. On the left is a vertical navigation menu with categories: Main menu, Query options (Standard query, Written restrictions, Spoken restrictions), User-specific functions (User settings, Query history, Saved queries, Categorized queries, Make/edit subcorpora, Upload external data file), Additional functions (Browse a text, Search keywords/titles, Explore genre labels, Frequency lists, Keywords), and About BNCweb (BNCweb book, The BNCweb team, New features, Bug reports, The CLAWS-5 tagset, Oxford BNC homepage). The main content area has a header 'BNCweb (CQP-Edition)' and a sub-header 'Standard Query'. Below this is a large empty search box. To the right of the search box are controls: 'Query mode' set to 'Simple query (ignore case)', 'Number of hits per page' set to '50', and 'Restriction' set to 'None (search whole corpus)'. There are 'Start Query' and 'Reset Query' buttons. A 'Simple Query Syntax help' link is also present. Below the search area is a red 'News' section with two items: one dated 4.6.16 about access problems, and another stating that all users now have full access to the corpus.

Example: *goalless*

- What does ‘goalless’ mean?
- Do the search!
- After clicking “Start Query” you will see 50 hits
 - called ‘concordance lines’
 - either in “Sentence view” or “KWIC view” (*Key Word In Context*: search item aligned in middle)
 - Click on >> to see more concordance lines
 - Click on the search item (in **bold blue**) in the concordance to see the hit in its larger context
- Browse the concordance lines:
 - what does this tell you about the major meaning/use of ‘goalless’?

CBG 2889	Arsenal's goalless home draw with negative Ipswich illustrated how badly their confidence has been affected by their strikers' failure to convert chances — and Graham looks ready to go back to basics.
AHK 858	Airdrie 0 Hearts 0 AFTER one of the least memorable Scottish Cup semi-finals on record, Airdrie and Hearts played out a soulless, goalless draw who will challenge Rangers on May 9.
CBG 6442	The 30-year-old striker had the Hereford goal at his mercy in the 66th minute but volleyed over from six yards out as the game ended goalless .
BOL 626	Birmingham had held Cardiff to a goalless draw and Huddersfield were champions.
AK6 825	Both teams's lack of scoring power always threatened a goalless draw and there was little to suggest the deadlock would be broken for most of
AHK 807	AIRDRIE and Hearts must replay on April 14 following their goalless Scottish Cup semi-final draw, and Hearts manager Joe Jordan was the m
ASC 364	Wimbledon's win at Hillsborough was important for morale, but last week's goalless draw with QPR at Plough Lane only satisfied the nihilists.
KN2 448 <small>4)</small>	And now in the er [gap:name] Trophy games this evening, these are the latest scores, Brentford nil Wickham two, Burnley nil Carlisle one, Day Stockport two, Cambridge against Gillingham, Cardiff against Torquay, Exeter against Plymouth, all goalless , Hull nil Scarborough two, North Wrexham still awaiting the first goals there, Rotherham nil Huddersfield one, and York City one Hartlepool nil.
K97 9402	Roughwood played a goalless draw at Farmers Arms and Pinewood shared six goals at home with Bulford.
IJJ 4534	Norwich's victory over Villa and Manchester United's goalless draw at home to Arsenal leaves Norwich a point clear of Ron Atkinson's men at Carrow Road.
CH7 4092	The goalless draw threatened to flare into an ugly row between several players after Luton's teenage striker John Hartson appeared to be fouled
K4T 1065	Lawrence played it cagey after the goalless draw against Blackburn Rovers.
K5A 6431	THIS was a first-rate match, full of incident and controversy, which was not done justice by the goalless scoreline.
CP9 1517	This success also gave City their first League double of the season, but it was a little ironical that in a game where the respective goalkeepers pl minutes, an error by the Halesowen custodian should have produced the match winning goal.
K97 4178	In 1991, they went to face Real Madrid in The Bernabeu Stadium after a goalless first leg in Moscow, and came away with an outstanding 3-1 v
K2D 2683	Three of the four previous league clashes between the clubs had ended goalless , and this game appeared to be heading the same way.
BOL 83	After losing centre-forward Lloyd Davies with a knee injury, the Cobblers soldiered on with ten men to earn a goalless draw.
AK6 893	There was no doubting Hearts' superiority in this goalless affair.

Teaching vocabulary with BNCweb: Suffixes – 9th grade

- What are suffixes?
 - suffixes are endings that change the word class of a word
- Focus on *-ment*:
 - use this search string:
 - **{*ment/N}**
 - this gets you any string of characters (*) ending in *-ment* that is a noun (N)
 - **careful:**
 - not every word ends in the suffix *-ment* (e.g., ‘moment’)
 - press [Start Query](#)
 - open drop down menu [NewQuery](#)
 - select [Frequency Breakdown](#)
 - press [Go!](#)
 - this gets you a frequency list of all words that match your query
- Work with the hits:
 - for each true hit, find the verb:
 - e.g., government – govern
 - write the word pairs into your vocabulary notebook
 - click on the noun in the frequency list to see hits in context
 - copy a suitable example sentence into your vocabulary notebook

word	word class	suffix	new word	new word class
<i>punish</i>	verb	<i>-ment</i>	<i>punishment</i>	noun
<i>slow</i>	adjective	<i>-ly</i>	<i>slowly</i>	adverb
<i>electric</i>	adjective	<i>-fy</i>	<i>electrify</i>	verb
<i>enjoy</i>	verb	<i>-able</i>	<i>enjoyable</i>	adjective

Frequency breakdown of lexical items for position "node" (1265 types and 200000 tokens)

No.	Lexical items	No. of occurrences	Percent
1	Government	22767	11.38%
2	Development	11935	5.97%
3	management	8009	4%
4	moment	7831	3.92%
5	Department	6328	3.16%
6	arrangement	5037	2.52%
7	Agreement	4955	2.48%
8	arrangement	4824	2.41%
9	constraint	4521	2.26%
10	employment	4032	2.02%
11	investment	3986	1.99%
12	statement	3617	1.81%
13	parliament	2596	1.3%
14	equipment	2256	1.13%
15	accident	2120	1.06%
16	investment	2477	1.24%
17	disaster	2386	1.19%
18	unemployment	2398	1.17%
19	equipment	2208	1.1%
20	arrangement	2142	1.07%
21	commitment	2083	1.04%
22	arrangement	2033	1.02%
23	disaster	2006	1%

Teaching grammar with BNCweb: Question tags – 7th grade

- 1. Use this search string:

`<s> + + + + + + + + + _{V} (_{ADV})? _{PRON} \? </s>`

- this search returns 9 or 10-word sentences that end in a verb followed by an optional adverb (e.g., *not* or *n't*), a pronoun, and a question mark

- 2. Work with the hits:

- copy and paste 20 suitable hits into a table with 3 columns
- select sentences with *different types* of question tags
- in each sentence cut off the question tag
- insert it in another row in the column “Tag cut off”

Statement	Tag correct	Tag cut off
You're going to fire me,		isn't it?
Listen, it's a night out,		haven't you?
She hadn't lived there very long though		aren't you?
I expect you've completely forgotten already,		had she?

- 3. Exchange your table with a partner:

- your partner's task is to put the question tags back into the right row in the column “Tag correct”

To conclude ...

- Just a rough and dirty introduction to using corpora, such as BNC via BNCweb, in the English classroom
- Can be used for teaching grammar and vocabulary, as shown
- Can also be used for classroom preparation and exam marking, not shown but see Rühlemann (2008 a, b)
- Learner autonomous method:
 - random samples —> different learners work with different data —> make autonomous selections
- Limitations:
 - requires computer facilities and internet
 - requires computer literacy and affinity
 - heavily focused on language form and language awareness
 - needs to be coupled to communicative tasks
- In sum: one useful tool in the, hopefully, large tool box of the modern English teacher!

References

- Hoffmann, Sebastian, Stefan Evert, Nicholas Smith, David Lee and Ylva Berglund Prytz (2008). *Corpus Linguistics with the BNCweb—a practical guide*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang
- Rühlemann, C. 2008a. ‘Das British National Corpus im Englisch-Unterricht: Wie können Lehrer und Lehrerinnen das BNC nützen?’ (Teil 1) *Praxis des Fremdsprachlichen Unterrichts* 2(08): 43-47.
- Rühlemann, C. 2008b. ‘Das British National Corpus im Englisch-Unterricht: Wie können Schüler und Schülerinnen das BNC nützen?’ (Teil 2) *Praxis des Fremdsprachlichen Unterrichts* 3(08): 32-36

More ...

- Vocabulary work:
 - phrasal verbs with PUT
- Teaching grammar:
 - if-patterns

Teaching vocabulary with BNCweb:

Phrasal verbs – *7th grade*

- Phrasal verbs are combinations of small verbs and one or more other small words
 - mostly prepositions such as up, with, down, etc.
- Phrasal verbs are very common.
- Examples:
 - get up, do away with, look forward to
- They often mean more than their parts together:
 - do away with = abschaffen
 - look forward to = sich freuen auf
 - Many phrasal verbs have more than one meaning.
- Example:
 - PUT on

Example	Meaning
<i>He puts on Gene Pitney.</i>	auflegen (Musik)
<i>I put on a bit of make-up</i>	auftragen (Makeup)
<i>I put on my dressing-gown</i>	anziehen (Kleidung)
<i>What, he's put on weight?</i>	zunehmen (Gewicht)

Phrasal verbs with PUT

- Use the **search strings** in the right-hand column to find *two suitable examples* for each phrasal verb with PUT.
- Careful:
 - *not in all examples you find on BNCweb does the phrasal verb have the meaning you are looking for!!!*
- Copy and paste your examples into the table and print it out.

Examples	Phrasal verb	German	Search
	put sth. on	e. anziehen	{put/V} * on
	put sth. off	e. verschieben	{put/V} * off
	put so. up	j. aufnehmen	{put/V} * up
	put up with sth.	sich mit e. abfinden	{put/V} up with
	put sth. down to sth.	e. auf e. zurückführen	{put/V} * down to
	put sth. past so.	j. e. zutrauen	{put/V} * past

Teaching grammar with BNCweb: if-patterns — *10th grade*

- **Four patterns:**
 - If-0: general; fact
If/**When** it rains, I take an umbrella.
 - If-1: specific; realistic possibility
If it rains, I'**ll** take an umbrella.
 - If-2: specific; hypothetical possibility
If it rained**ed**, I'**d** take an umbrella.
 - If-3: specific; unreal possibility in the past
If it **had** rained**ed**, I'**d have** taken**en** an umbrella.

if-0

☞ If-clause: If I **go out** with my friends
if + present tense

(Note: you can say 'when' instead of 'if')

☞ Main clause: I **don't** drink too much.
present tense

☞ Used for:
● **cause-effect relationships**

if-I

☞ If-clause: If it **gets** warm today,
if + present tense

☞ Main clause: I **'ll go** swimming
will/ 'll + VVB
(infinitive)

☞ Used for:
● **realistic possibilities**

if-pattern II

If-clause:

If I **were** you,

if + past tense

Main clause:

I **'d go** to Paris.

would/ 'd + VVB
(infinitive)

Used for:

● **hypothetical possibilities**

if-pattern III

If-clause: If I **hadn't gone** to the concert,
if + past perfect (= had + 3rd form)

Main clause: I **would have met** the girls in
my room.
**would/ 'd + present perfect
(= have + 3rd form)**

Used for:
● **possibilities in the past**

Investigating if-pattern II with BNCweb

☀ Use this search string:

if * * _V*D

☀ Copy and paste 10 instances of if-pattern II into a Word document

☀ Highlight the structures typical of if-pattern II:

If-clause	Main clause
if I made the slightest false step	he would leap at me

Investigating if-pattern III with BNCweb

☀ Use this search string:

if * * had _V*N

☀ Copy and paste 10 instances of if-pattern III into a Word document

☀ Highlight the structures typical of if-pattern III:

If-clause	Main clause
If I had known there was a charge for each	I would have made her wait.

Working with if-patterns II and III

- ☀ Select instances of if-patterns II and III into a Word document.
- ☀ Delete the verb forms, instead give only the infinitive in brackets:

If-clause	Main clause
If I ... (know) there was a charge for each	I ... (make) her wait.

- ☀ Print it out and ask your partner to fill in the gaps using the right forms.