Exploiting corpora to provide guidance for academic writing: The BAWE Quicklinks project

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The Challenge

- Not much time for feedback
- Many writing problems hard to explain or not covered by grammars
- Students may not understand feedback provided
  
  e.g.  
  ‘Wrong word’  
  ‘Incomplete sentence’  
  ‘Meaning unclear’

The same types of problem often recur. There must be a quicker, more effective way!
Writing for a Purpose


• Advice on university genres (essays, case studies, law problem questions etc.)
• Examples from the BAWE corpus www.coventry.ac.uk/bawe
• Linked to SketchEngine the.sketchengine.co.uk/open/
Conclusions of essays in the Humanities often contain this pattern:

*it can/could be assumed/inferred/concluded that*

Writing for a Purpose provides a SketchEngine link to lines from the corpus:

You can click on the red words to get more context.

You can also click on a sidebar to find out the discipline of the writer, their level of study, age, and other details…
Extension of WfaP approach to give quick feedback

Say you come across an error of this sort:

*Ellis (2002) supports that formal grammar teaching has a delayed effect on language teaching.*

- Possibly not a frequent error in itself
- **But** example of common *type* of error
- Also not obvious how a student could check whether they were right
Extension of WfaP approach to give quick feedback

The student who writes...

Ellis (2002) supports that formal grammar teaching has a delayed effect on language teaching.

...can be directed to ske.li/ezt to see the error of their ways.

These examples show the need for a noun (e.g. ‘idea’) between ‘support’ and ‘that’.

Burnett supports the idea that

Einstein’s theory supported the observations that

Aston studies supported the notion that

Horwitz and Polden to support the argument that

Taiwan family systems supports the hypothesis that

Novak (1998) supported the idea that

Ingram 1989) further supports the notion that

Hornstein (1990) support the proposal that

Plutarch appears to have supported the idea that

Durlston Head also support the theory that

Field 2003:121. This supports the idea that
Link creation

Uses Corpus Query Language (CQL)
e.g. for the ‘supports that’ link:

\[
\text{[tag = "NP.?"] \{0,3\} \text{[lemma = "support"] \[word = "the\] \text{[tag = "NN.?"]} \text{[word = "that"]}}
\]

But, crucially, potential users do not need to know this – they just need the website...

Takes time to make links – but they’re reusable...
Database of links

Site here
Navigating the site

Search by word/phrase

Entries List
- among the first
- attitude to
- aware of
- careful
- common
- concerned
- confidence in
- contribute to X happening
- damage (cause ...)

Search by general concept

Tags
- 'causing'
- aboutness
- addressing problems
- attitude
- awareness
- become vs. get
- care/caution
- causing problems
- certainty
- feelings
- frequency of occurrence
- hedging
- implementing/introducing
- introductory

Categorisation / tag-creation process still underway – feedback welcome
Structure of Entries

Entries look like this:

aware of

This link was created in response to this:

*help them get more aware of*

The re-usable link is ske.li/aware_of and looks like this:

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An innocent person, so people became more aware of themselves. The jury first acquitted the communist States became more and more aware of these problems as the Cold War drew on. Morehouse, King became all the more aware of the abundant existence of racism. However, the global society is becoming more aware of environmental issues, as they are more aware of the UK. The public are becoming more aware of 'super bugs' such as MRSA, and there is becoming more and more aware of the welfare issues of battery hen farms. Secondly, they have become more aware of environmental issues (Tregear, Dent and People want to become more and more aware of what they eat, how it is produced and...
Some considerations

• Users need to be able to find the right link quickly
• How should we group links to help this happen?
• Specific examples (e.g. here) are best for correcting particular mistakes
• More generic examples (e.g. here) address a wider range of issues and are more likely to be reused
Ways the links might be used

• Simply provide a link to examples of acceptable usage
• Provide two links for comparison
• Provide link(s) with advice – e.g. “you need a noun (e.g. idea) between support and that”.
• Provide link(s) with a prompt to encourage reflection (“what kind of word follows support? What tense is usually used?”)
• Provide link(s) and encourage further exploration of SketchEngine.
Longer-term goals

• Increase coverage of types of error
• Investigate extent to which these are used (by type of error?)
• Encourage suggestions (and contributions?) from users

To add:
• Tutorials on CQL + how to create concordances
• Ways students might be encouraged to get more out of Sketch Engine (?)
Thanks for coming

BAWE QUICKLINKS
links for EAP teachers

Any questions?