

The *Compleat* Lexical Tutor as a Resource for Teachers of Poetry

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Introduction

In the age of computers, technology is an ideal choice for teachers working with young people for two reasons. First, learners have easy access to gadgets and spend long hours with them. This interaction can be employed to advantage in the language classroom. Second, technology helps promote independent and personalized learning because learners get to work on activities that suit their proficiency level, and at their own pace.

Widdowson (2004) remarks that "the most striking development in linguistic description over the past twenty years has been the use of the computer to collect and analyse vast corpora of actually occurring language data" (p. 357). This "technology" has found its way into classrooms, with interesting applications and inspiring outcomes. In my paper, I will take up an illustration of one such technology. The *Compleat Lexical Tutor* (see <http://www.lextutor.ca>) is a free website which offers a variety of corpus-based tools that emphasize the role of vocabulary in language learning (English, French and Spanish) and promote inductive learning. The website was created by Tom Cobb of the University of Quebec at Montreal, Canada, and is dedicated to "data driven learning on the web" (Cobb, 1997).

Data driven learning (DDL) refers to the use of linguistic corpora in language learning (Hadley, 2002). It encourages learners to explore and analyse (authentic) language data in order to discover patterns of use for themselves

(Johns, 1990). Cobb contends that vocabularies are retained longer and used more appropriately when encountered in a variety of contexts and when learners are actively involved in the learning process. For Cobb, the rationale for this attention to vocabulary is that if learners know the 200 most frequently used words in a language, in addition to the 570 high-frequency academic words on the Academic Word List (AWL), they already know about 90 per cent of the words they will encounter in academic contexts (Cobb, 2004). The website, therefore, offers a wide range of tools to facilitate the self-learning of vocabulary in a context.

There are four main advantages of this approach, as compared to more traditional approaches to language teaching. These are: it teaches vocabulary and grammar inductively because learners discover regularities and patterns for themselves; it makes use of authentic material because the corpora are drawn from instances of actual spoken and written language; it promotes learner autonomy because the activities are learner-centred and can be used independently of teachers; and it appeals to young learners' interest in technology because learners use their laptops or smartphones to process the data and learn through discovered patterns.

The *Compleat* Lexical Tutor

The website offers a wide range of tools to facilitate data driven learning, most of which are interactive. Learners, for example, can

assess their vocabulary size, test their knowledge of vocabulary, read and listen to vocabulary in context, determine their passive

vocabularies and make them active, and test their grammar using concordance lines. A sample of the website interface is given in figure 1.



Figure 1. The Compleat Lexical Tutor interface.

The tools may be picked in accordance with the local pedagogical objectives. The system developers, however, suggest the following formulae for "learning" vocabulary:

1. Use the *vocabulary tests* to determine your vocabulary size and next zone of vocabulary growth. You may want to start with the Classic (GSL+UWL) or BNC (1-14k) word recognition tests (GSL=General Service List; UWL=University Word List; BNC = British National Corpus). The test names are also hyperlinks and will take you to the tests if you click on them. A sample of the tests page is given in figure 2.



Figure 2. Frequency based vocabulary tests.

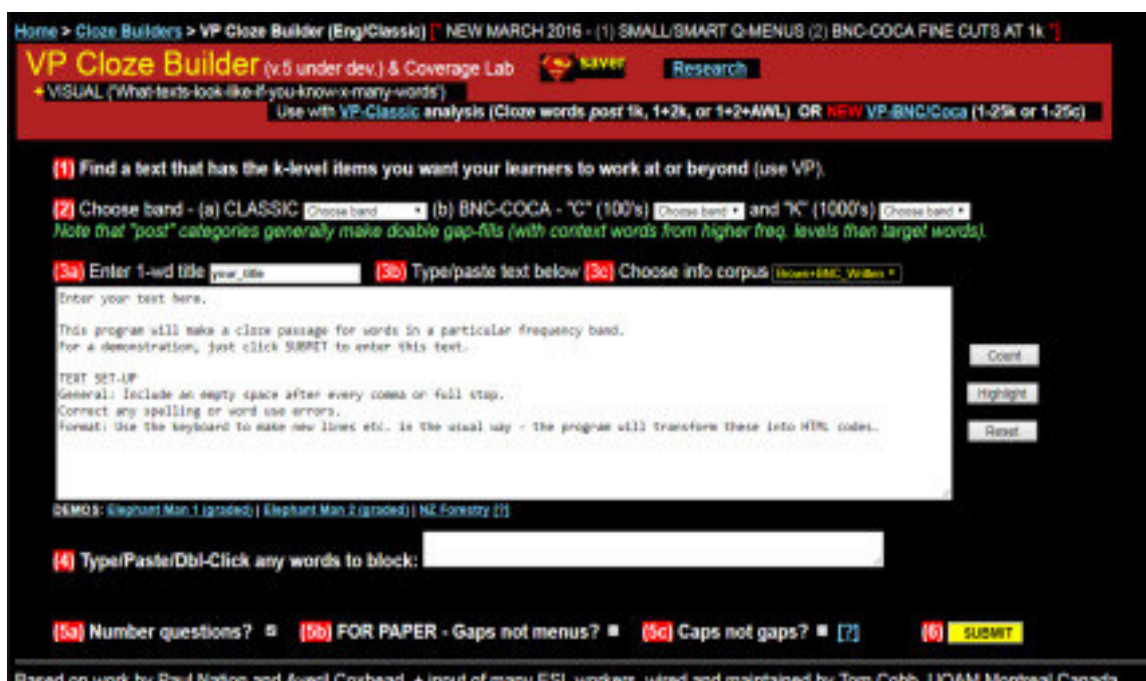


Figure 5. VP cloze builder.

- If you want to work outside the frequency framework altogether, but not entirely independently, then you can read a novel with full click-on lexical support. You could also make your own resource-supported texts at Hypertext Builder, figures 6, 7.

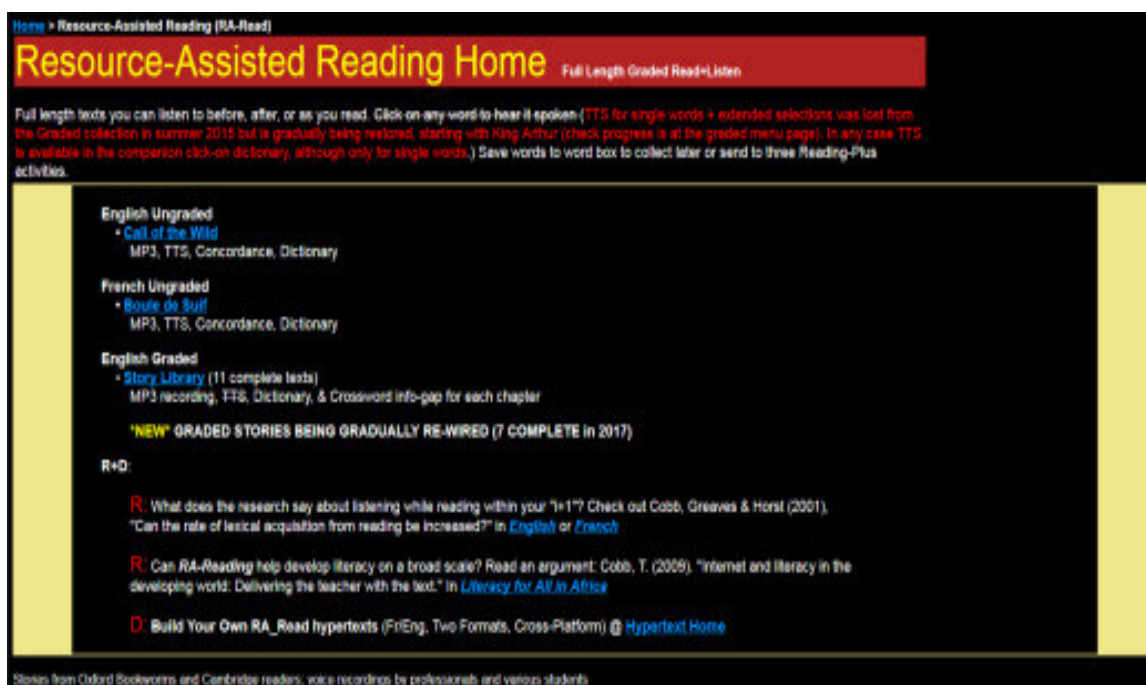


Figure 6. Resource-assisted reading home.

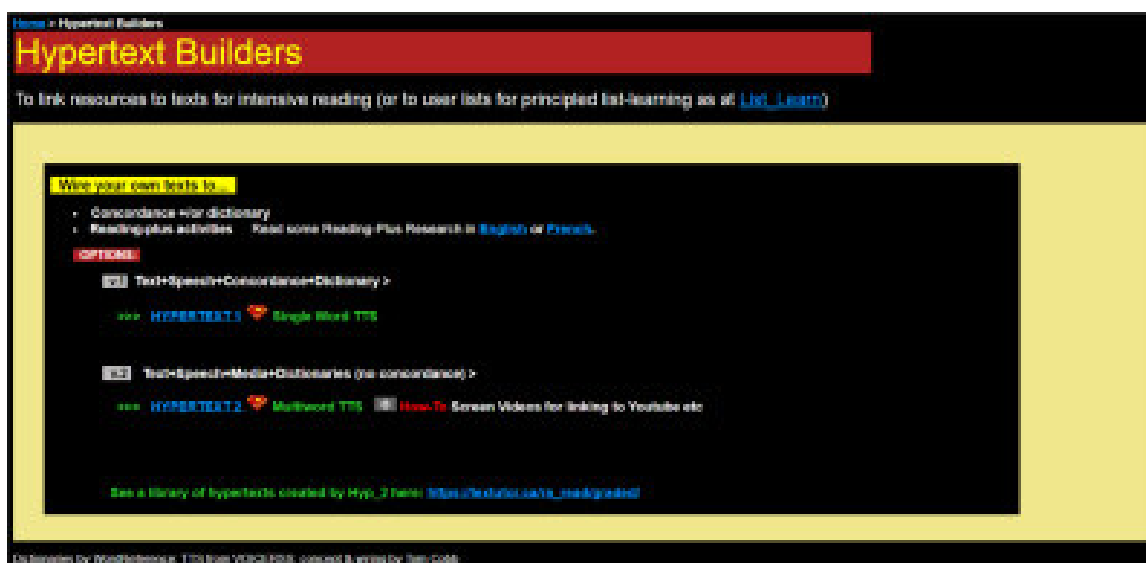


Figure 7. Hypertext builder.

For tutorials on using the *Compleat Lexical Tutor*, watch the youtube channel *Using Lexical Tutor Web Site* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43CrLOtule4>.

The *Compleat Lexical Tutor* and Teachers of Poetry

In this section, I will highlight two tools that are most directly relevant to the poetry classroom. The first tool is Vocabprofile. Teachers can input poems into the WebVP Classic, as seen in figure 8.



Figure 8. Web VP classic.

When you hit submit, you get the analysis of the text at the lexical level, as shown in figure 9.



Figure 9. Lexical analysis of 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'

The output shows that the percentage of the K1-K2 words (most frequently used 2000 words) in the text is about 85 per cent, the percentage from the AWL is under 1 per cent, while off-list words (which may be proper nouns, archaic words, abbreviations, etc.) constitute a little over 14 per cent. This lexical frequency breakdown is crucial to the teacher of poetry, especially at the stage of text selection. It provides an answer to the decades-old debate about which poems to select for the language classroom. If the learners have taken vocabulary tests and determined their vocabulary size, teachers can select the right text for their class with the help of Vocabprofile. It may be noted here that learners can also benefit from this tool by inputting their essays and monitoring the percentage of AWL words in their writing.

The second tool is Concordance. This tool allows teachers to demonstrate to learners how the words they encounter in poetry, both classic and modern, are actually used today. It also allows a demonstration of how words collocate, and whether the collocates the learners find in poetry are also found in common use. To do this, click Concordance, Corpus: English and the screen in figure 10 pops up.



Figure 10. Corpus concordance English.



Figure 11. Output of collocation analysis of Wander and Lonely in Brown Corpus.

Conclusion

In my present paper, I have explored the relevance of corpus tools in the poetry classroom. I have provided evidence that corpus-driven tools can provide valuable insights with regard to the selection of poems for the language class. Moreover, vocabulary from the poems selected need to be examined against the corpora of language use in order to decide their frequency and relevance to the learners' needs. The language in the poem examined 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' is quite simple in terms of vocabulary, but it contains words and collocations that are not frequently seen outside the poem. Tools such as the *Compleat Lexical Tutor* provide a better understanding of the different and unusual nature of language in poetry. They may serve to maximize the benefits from the introduction of poetry, classic or modern, into the language classroom.

References

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