

Using Corpora in the Classroom

Cristina Morgado

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A Corpus is

- *A corpus is a collection of texts, written or spoken, usually stored in a computer database.*
- *Written texts in corpora might be drawn from books, newspapers, or magazines that have been scanned or downloaded electronically.*

Michael McCarthy (2004)

A Corpus is

A corpus, then, is simply a large collection of texts that we can analyze using computer software, just as we can access the millions of texts on the Internet. It is not a theory of language learning or a teaching methodology, but it does influence our way of thinking about language and the kinds of texts and examples we use in language teaching.

Michael McCarthy (2004)

Using Corpora in the Classroom

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Teaching Context

- Young learners (10 and 11 years old)
- At a beginner level – 5th and 6th Grades
- English is a compulsory national curriculum subject
- They have English classes twice a week (two 90 minute sessions)
- This schedule must be enough to teach the whole syllabus
- Reasonably good computer users
- ICT room available, but not always

Teacher's Aims

In particular

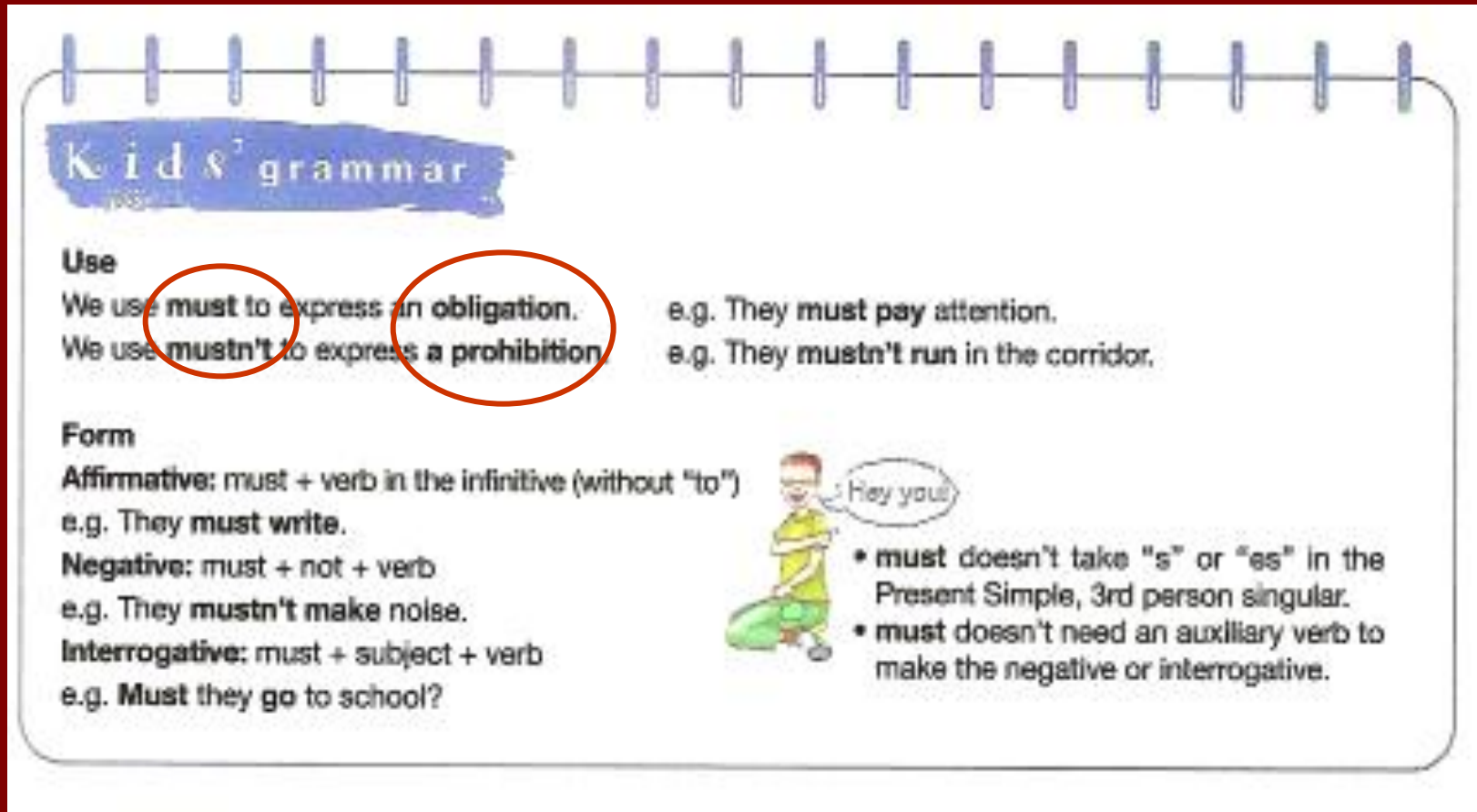
- To consolidate new lexis and grammar
- To help students getting over their difficulties
- To avoid/correct several lexis mistakes
- To avoid fossilized errors

In general

- To expose students to authentic language not sheltered from unknown lexis/grammar structures
- To expand students language knowledge

Teacher's Aims

- Because their coursebook doesn't tell the whole truth ... Take this example:




Kids' grammar

Use
We use **must** to express an **obligation**.
We use **mustn't** to express a **prohibition**.

e.g. They **must** pay attention.
e.g. They **mustn't** run in the corridor.

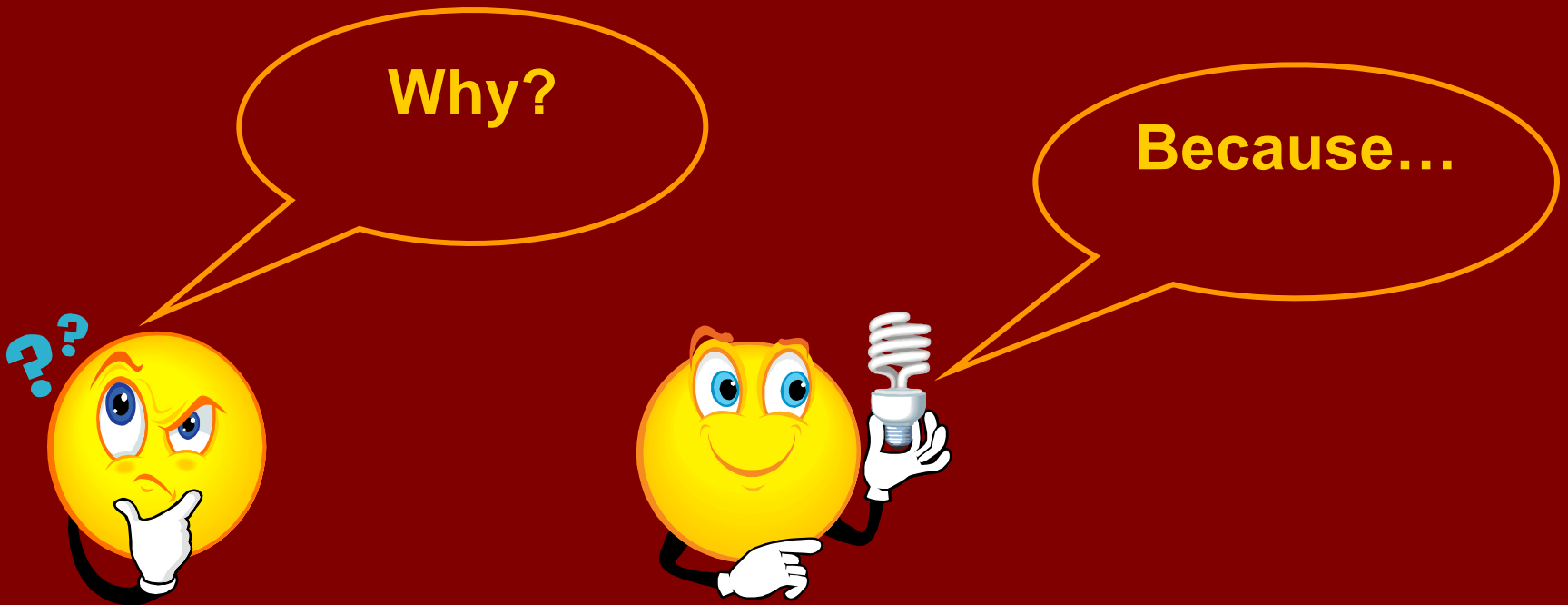
Form
Affirmative: must + verb in the infinitive (without "to")
e.g. They **must** write.
Negative: must + not + verb
e.g. They **mustn't** make noise.
Interrogative: must + subject + verb
e.g. **Must** they go to school?



- **must** doesn't take "s" or "es" in the Present Simple, 3rd person singular.
- **must** doesn't need an auxiliary verb to make the negative or interrogative.

Teacher's Choice

- To use corpora directly to prepare worksheets for the students
- Not to teach them how to use corpora



Teacher's Choice

- It would take a long time to teach them what are corpora about and how to use them:
 - ✓ Different corpora
 - ✓ Different uses
 - ✓ Different ways to search for information (principles of queries)
- It would demand lots of teacher supervising:
 - ✓ Students are too young: 11 years old
 - ✓ They are computer literate but not autonomous enough to learn how to use corpora

Teacher's Choice

- ICT room wouldn't be available for the English lesson
- It wouldn't fit their timetable or the syllabus
- It isn't what these students really need

Examples of Teacher's Choice

The teacher can select the most suitable passages from the most suitable corpora:

✓ Avoiding/adapting passages difficult to understand:

Billions of pounds held by town halls must be freed to provide housing, said Labour.

in BYU-BNC

✓ Filtering language mistakes

Examples of Teacher's Choice

✓ Avoiding offensive or sensitive language:

Sex and drug trafficking are listed as serious sins. The catechism says homosexuals must abstain from sex, but should be treated with respect and compassion.

in **BYU-BNC**



Examples of Teacher's Choice

In language reception

- To highlight the different meanings of confusing words:
 - ✓ library/bookshop
 - ✓ young/new
- To highlight differences between English and Portuguese:
 - ✓ False friends
 - ✓ Different word, same translation
 - ✓ Different concept, same translation
 - ✓ Different rules for plurals



Parallel corpus COMPARA

Examples of Teacher's Choice

In language production

- To make tailor-made exercises, included in worksheets

✓ To consolidate vocabulary and grammar:
choose the sentence where **must** means the
same as **have to**.

It must have been a great game to watch.
He must report to police again on May 5.

Examples of Teacher's Choice In language production

- ✓ To clarify confusing items: **library** or **bookshop**?
You will probably be able to buy it in your local _____.
- ✓ To correct mistakes: **new** or **young**?
She was rather _____ when she married.
That is a _____ word to me.



Monolingual corpora
BYU – BNC and BNC simple search

Examples of Teacher's Choice

Exposure to authentic language



Unknown lexis and grammar structures



Expands language knowledge

Examples of Teacher's Choice

These are some examples which prove it!

1. He went that way! - said the younger *child* a heavily-freckled girl who looked about twelve years old.
2. The *men* are very strong rowers.
3. Philip blinks up at the young *woman* who has stopped in the aisle.
4. Two *women* were embroidering the fabrics.
5. Under the Dangerous Dogs Act, all pit bulls *must* be registered, neutered, and have an identification number tattooed on their inner rear.
6. They were queuing for gallery seats at the Globe theatre to see Graham Greene's *new* play.

In COMPARA, BYU –BNC and BNC simple search

Conclusion

- Teachers can be creative and innovate, building up their materials with the aid of corpora
- Students will be exposed to authentic language
- When teachers use language utterances from corpora, they are providing learning opportunities, which will allow students to expand their language knowledge in a different and motivating way.

Conclusion

Corpora can provide opportunities for language learning in many areas, and can do so in ways which are motivating, and which complement and integrate other sources.

If the two necessary conditions for language learning are motivation and opportunity for language use, then corpora would appear to be tools which many teachers and learners should consider adding to their range of pedagogic options, particularly as more corpora and more user-friendly software become available in an overall context of increasing computer literacy.

Guy Aston (2001)

References

Aston, G. (2001) *Learning with Corpora*. Houston: Athelstan.

McCarthy, M. (2004) *From Corpus to Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

cris.morgado@netcabo.pt

The goal of this book is to make the ideas of corpus linguistics accessible to teachers and, most important, provide ideas, instruction, and opportunities for teachers to use the applications of corpus linguistics in their classrooms. *Using Corpora in the Language Learning Classroom* is intended for graduate students who are studying applied linguistics or TESOL, for teacher-trainers working with language instructors, and for practicing language teachers who want to better understand corpus linguistics and how to incorporate it into their classroom.