Comparing and Contrasting Expressions of Asking Opinions

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Abstract: This study aims at comparing and contrasting expressions of asking opinions in the textbook and corpora. It, moreover, gives a suggestion which expressions could be given for English learning purposes based on the findings in the corpora. Corpus-assisted discourse study was used as the method. The corpora used in this study are COCA, BYU-BNC, SOAP, and Strathy. The frequency, positions, and characteristics of dialogues in which the expressions occur are the focus of the investigation. Some expressions for instance what is your point of view about… never occur in the corpora. The textbook only presented the expressions to occur in initial positions. However, other positions also can be found in the corpora. Based on the corpus finding, the interlocutors tend to find more information related to the topics, extend the topics, and make comparison when they ask opinions. Other expressions such as do you have an opinion … and in your opinion … were possible to use based on the findings in the corpora.

1 INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is a complex process that depends on several aspects such as learning activities and materials. When it is conducted in a formal education such as in higher education, most activities are designed to be conducted in the classroom. A learning material was also provided by a course developer. Tomlinson (2011) gave a definition of learning material as follows: "it can be linguistic, visual, auditory, or kinesthetic and they can be represented in print through live performance, or display, or a cassette, CD-ROM, DVD, or the internet." A textbook is commonly used as the source of learning in which the foreign language learners get input of the target language. A textbook provides texts in which the students can observe vocabulary, phrases, text structures, and sociolinguistic aspects of the target language. It provides both spoken and written language input. This study focuses on conversations in the textbook used in a university. As conversations belong to spoken language use, the language used in the conversations is expected to represent the characteristics of spoken language.

Learning materials in the textbook are designed for language learning. The language can be different from the language used in real conversation. Studying the language in the textbook could be conducted by comparing and contrasting the language in the textbook with the ones in the corpus/corpora. Corpus is a group of texts that are compiled and saved using an electronic device (Conrad, 2005). Corpus can be general or specific. The general corpus contains language in various registers such as in Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). COCA has spoken, fiction, magazine, newspaper, and academic registers. The language of the specific corpus is only in one particular register such as in SOAP corpus which covers language of soap operas. The language variation in the corpus might consist only in one specific variety. For instance, COCA has American English,and BYU-BNC (Brigham Young University British National Corpus) has British English.

The language of the corpora mentioned above is authentic language in which language users use it for communicative functions. Using authentic texts in selecting materials will give input that is appropriate for the students when they use language for communication (Gottheim, 2010). Therefore, the purpose of corpus study in language learning is to see whether the language in the textbook is natural or unnatural. Based on the corpus findings, learning materials developer get suggestion what should be given or not (Walsh, 2010).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Some elements that might be the focus of a corpus study are words or phrases. The frequency of a word in the textbook and corpus can be studied to see whether the words are commonly used. It might also be used to find the words that become the main features in a register. Counting the word frequency in a specific register also gives pictures which words are important to be learnt by the students.

Some words tend to co-occur with other words. Such kinds of words are called collocations. Collocations of the words tend to be investigated especially the ones in learners' writing and corpus. The use of appropriate collocations makes learners' writing sounds natural. For instance, to describe applying research, word research can be used with conduct. It forms the collocation conduct research. Words that become the members of collocations might occur in sequence or another element might occur between them. The span is four or five words to the left or right. Sometimes, the learners do the translation when dealing with collocations. They translated the phrases word by word in their mother tongue into the target language. It might result in unnatural language.

Investigating collocations might reveal the characteristics of language function in conversation. Studying collocations of disagreeing shows that the speakers tend to have respected and give reasons in giving disagreement (Mutiara, 2017). These two functions are related to maintaining the relationshipbetween the speakers and the interlocutors. This finding can be accommodated when developing the syllabus and learning materials. By doing so, the learners are exposed to the nature of disagreement in real life. They become to realize that language is not only structures but also social functions.

Phrases are also investigated in the corpus. Some phrases are formed by definite words,and it was realized as a unit. According to Gläser (1998), it is "a phraseological unit is a lexicalized, reproducible bilexemic or polylexemic word group in common use, which has relative syntactic and semantic stability." Therefore, such phrases have forms like a sentence that carry language functions. They have essential roles in texts (Biber and Conrad, 1999). They can consist of three, four, or five words. For example, do you agree with me is a phrase consists of 5 words and I strongly disagree is a phrase that consists of 3 words.

Those phrases occur in the textbooks as language models. They are labeled as expressions, for instance, expressions of giving agreement, requesting, asking opinions, etc. Expressions in the textbook can be compared and contrasted to the ones from the corpora. Sznajder (2010) studied words and phrases that carry metaphoric meanings. It was found that almost a third of the words and phrases in the textbook do not occur in the corpus. In another case, Seto (2009) examined expressions of agreement in 5 textbooks and corpus. He focused on similarities and differences among them. Out of 54 expressions, there is 7 percent of expressions that can be found in the corpus. Furthermore, the expressions in the textbook tend to appear as a long phrase while the ones in the corpus are in the forms of one-word expressions.

For comparing and contrasting language elements, the corpus must be selected carefully. Some corpora cover both spoken and written languages while the others only include one of them. For the corpus study, the similar characteristic of the language in the textbook and corpus is necessary. For instance, when studying phrases in the spoken language, the language in the corpus is the spoken language. Thus, a balanced comparison can be established. This study focuses on phrases that are used to ask opinions in spoken language.

Asking opinions is one of the expressions in the textbook. In interaction, asking opinions is a way to give an opportunity for the interlocutors to speak up their mind. Two ways interactions are developed in such a way. In a conversation, they give equal position both for the listeners and speakers in the dialogues. To accommodate this issue, it is necessary to examine the characteristics of dialogues in which asking opinions occur. It deals with what other language functions that the speakers produce when they ask opinions. Having information about it will be an advantage for developing the learning materials. Dialogues constructed in the textbook will have the same characteristics as the ones in the corpus. Besides, finding other possible expressions of asking opinions is necessary to provide more various expressions to enrich language input for the learners.

Based on the discussion above, the study sought to answer some questions as can be seen below. Do expressions of asking opinions in the textbook occur in the corpora? How are the positions of the expressions in the textbook compared to the ones in the corpora? How are the characteristics of the dialogues in which the expressions of asking opinions occur? What are possible expressions to ask opinions based on the findings in the corpora?

3 RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, analyzing texts is conducted through corpus-assisted discourse study. Corpus linguistics, thus, is applied to study discourse. The focus of corpus linguistics is finding the frequency of the words/phrases, analyzing the concordance lines, and finding any other patterns of the words/phrases such as collocations and n-grams (Romero-Trillo, 2013). The data was taken from COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English), BYU-BNC (Brigham Young University-British National Corpus), SOAP, Strathy, and HKCSE (Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English). COCA, BYU-BNC and Strathy have spoken and written language sections. In comparing and contrasting language to those corpora, the written language was excluded. The expressions from the textbook exist in the context of spoken language.

The data were gathered by listing all of the expressions in the textbook and the corpora. Then, those expressions were checked in the corpora. The findings from the corpora were then analyzed to see the occurrences, positions, and language functions that tend to co-occur with expressions of asking opinions. The categorization of position is divided into two namely initial and non-initial positions. Initial means it is located in the first part of the utterances such as in *what do you think, guys?* While in non-initial, the expression is not the first words uttered. For instance, in *if so, what do you think, guys?* The expression of asking opinion occupies the non-initial position. Besides, by using words namely *opinion* and *think*, other expressions that were possible to be used in asking opinions were used.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are some differences of expressions in the textbook and corpora. Several expressions were not found in several corpora. For the positions of the expressions, several expressions occur in initial and non-initial positions. Some others can be found only in one of the positions. Finding any other relevant information from the interlocutors, extending the topics, and comparing can be found when the speakers ask opinions. Furthermore, there are some possible expressions of asking opinions in the corpora.

4.1 The Occurrences of Expressions of Asking Opinions

There are six expressions in the textbook that were checked in the corpora. *What is your point of view about…*and*what is your comment about…* never occur in the corpora. *As far as you know, what…* occurs one in BYU-BNC. The frequency of *what can you say about* in the corpora is as follows: 23 (COCA), 1 (BNC), 4 (SOAP). While the frequency of *what do you think about* is as follows: 1,517 (COCA), 38 (BNC), 606 (SOAP), and 11(Strathy). The occurrence of *what is your opinion about…* was only found in COCA. It occurs for 4 times. The frequency of *as far as you know, what ...*was only found in BYU-BNC. It occurs only in a single occurrence. *What is your point of view about…*and *what is your comment about ...* were not found in all corpora. Based on the findings in the corpora, it can be said that *what do you think about…*and *what can you say about…* ? are the common expressions in real life.

All the expressions in the textbook occur with preposition *about*. I suggested that the occurrences of prepositions in the expressions made the frequencies lower. I, thus, removed the prepositions from the expressions. The findings show that the frequencies of the shorter expressions are higher.

The frequencies of *what do you think …* are as follows: 10,397 (COCA), 506 (BYU-BNC), 11,025 (SOAP), and 86 (Strathy). *What can you say ...* also can be found in all corpora with the frequencies as follows: 101 (COCA), 6 (BYU-BNC), 21 (SOAP), and 1 (Strathy). *What is your comment* now occurs in three corpora as follows: 11 (COCA), 1 (SOAP), and 2 (Strathy). *What is your opinion* appears in two corpora as follows: 38 (COCA) and 5 (SOAP). *What is your point of view ...* occurs only once in BYUBNC. It can be concluded that the existence of the prepositions limit the frequencies of the expressions. In the real use of language, the use of the expressions without prepositions is more common.

4.2 The Positions of Expressions of Asking Opinions

For the next investigation, the expressions of giving opinions without prepositions were used in the query. In the textbook, all expressions occur in the initial position. Among six expressions, five expressions begin with question words *what*. However, the findings from the corpus show that it is possible for the expressions to occur in non-initial

position. Table 1 until Table 6 shows all possible positions were reported.

What is your opinion occupies two possible positions.

Table 1: The positions of *what is your opinion*

Corpus	Initial	Non-initial
COCA	√	√
BYU-BNC		
SOAP	√	√
Strathy		

What do you think also occurs in initial and non-initial.

Table 2: The positions of *what do you think*

Corpus	Initial	Non-initial
COCA	√	√
BYU-BNC	√	√
SOAP	√	√
Strathy	√	√

What is your point of view only occurs in non- initial position.

Table 3: The positions of *what is your point of view*

Corpus	Initial	Non-initial
COCA		
BYU-BNC		√
SOAP		
Strathy		

What can you say occurs in both positions in COCA, BYU-BNC, and SOAP. However, it only occupies initial position in Strathy.

Table 4: The positions of *what can you say*

Corpus	Initial	Non-initial
COCA	√	√
BYU-BNC	√	√
SOAP	√	√
Strathy	√	

What is your comment occurs in both positions in COCA and Strathy but it was only found in initial position in SOAP.

Table 5: The positions of *what is your comment*

Corpus	Initial	Non-initial
COCA	√	√
BYU-BNC		
SOAP	√	
Strathy	√	√

As far as you know was found only in BYU-BNC in non-initial position.

Table 6: The positions of *as far as you know, what*

Corpus	Initial	Non-initial
COCA		
BYU-BNC		√
SOAP		
Strathy		

In the case of the expressions that only have one occurrence such as *what is your point of view…* and *what can you say ...* , they are in non-initial positions. The other expression that has one occurrence is *what is your comment ...* in SOAP. It is in initial position.

When it does not occur in initial position, some conjunctions such as *so* and *but* exist in the beginning of the utterances such as in the examples below.

So what do you think about that? (BYU-BNC) *So, what do you think the Board should do with that kind of information?* (Strathy)
But what can you say? (COCA)

A clause such as I mean might occur in the beginning of the utterance.

I mean, what can you say? You know, you messed up. (SOAP)

Also, names of the interlocutors might appear at the beginning of the utterances such as in the following example.

Ms Schwartz, what is your comment on the solutions you have heard from the experts and the policy makers? (COCA)

4.3 The Characteristics of the Conversation

To find the characteristics of a dialogue of asking opinions, the collocations of *what do you think* and *what can you say* were obtained. These two

expressions are the commonest expressions compared to other expressions. *What do you think* were investigated in all corpora while *what can you say* were searched only in COCA due to its low frequencies in the other corpora. Table 7 until Table 9 shows information about the collocates and their frequencies of *what do you think.*

Table 7: Left collocates of *what do you think*

Corpus	Collocate (frequency)
COCA	so (345) and (292) but (151)
BNC	well (22) and (10) said (6) but (6)
SOAP	so (917) and (169) but (58) now (25) just (19) then (17)
Strathy	and (4) or (3) so (3)

Right collocates of *what do you think* are prepositions as can be seen in the table below.

Table 8: Right collocates of *what do you think*

Corpus	Collocate (frequency)
COCA	of (1,900) about (1,697) that (1,356) is (1,151) to (712) this (665)
BNC	of (114) that (57) about (47)
SOAP	that (825) about (797) doing (794) is (692) to (670)
Strathy	about (13) of (11)

The following table shows collocates to the left and right of *what can you say* in COCA.

Table 9: Left and right collocates of *what can you say*

Left collocate	Right collocate
but (6)	to (34) about (25) that (12)

Based on the collocations, three characteristics that can be found in which the expressions of asking opinions occur are finding more information from the interlocutors, extending the topic, and comparing. Those characteristics cannot be seen in the dialogues of asking opinions in the textbook. In the textbook, asking opinions is a single language function in the dialogue.

Speakers might ask two questions in an utterance. Therefore, conjunction *and* was used to add another question.

A: *Was it a painful decision for you? And what do you think looking at JetBlue now?* B*: Well, it was extremely painful.* (COCA).

Another example shows the speakers used various question words.

A: *How did you learn the news and what do you think?*
B: *I first heard the news, I had heard about the… .* (COCA)

Asking opinions might occur with another question.

Giving two questions in one utterance means that the speakers tried to find as much information as possible from the interlocutors. While discussing an issue, the speaker did not only care of the speaker's opinion about the issue but also he focused on other information related to it. In the utterance *how did you learn the news and what do you think?,*the speaker was curious to know about how the interlocutor learn the news.

Furthermore, the speakers tend to extend the conversation by using conjunction *so*. Before asking opinions, the speaker asked another question. Based on the answer to that question, the speaker asked a related issue.

A: *This your first child?*
B: *Yeah.*
A: *So what do you think of motherhood?*
B: *I love it.* (COCA)

After the speaker got information that the speaker has a child, he connected this information with

another issue that is motherhood. The speaker built coherence in the dialogue.

In another example, the speaker talked about eating. Then, he continued with asking speaker's opinion about breakfast bar.

A: *Eat your dinner. So what do you think of my breakfast bar then Sue?* B: *It'svery good.* (BNC)

In another case, speaker A mentioned about setting up a date. Next, speaker B asked an opinion about Christmas. She connected the information given by A to extend the topic.

A: *And we have already set a date.*
B: *So what do you think about Christmas?*
C: *Yay!*
B: *Oh, she likes it.* (SOAP)

In the dialogue below, speaker A stated his judgment toward a group of people. Speaker B realized that A has a positive attitude. He, then, continued to extend the topic by asking an opinion of hanging out with them.

A: *They're great.*
B: *So what do you think about hanging out with them more on a permanent basis?* (SOAP)

The other language function is to compare. Speaker A mentioned an issue about tulip then he compared tulip with roses in the form of asking an opinion.

A: *You know, tulips will not work, but what do you think about roses -- red ones -- for the church?*
B: *Yeah.* (SOAP)

Speaker A stated speaker's B attitude towards George Bush. Then, he compared it with Pat Buchanan and asked speaker's B opinion towards Buchanan.

A: *You'restrongly supporting George W. Bush for president, but what is your opinion of Pat Buchanan?*
B: *I think Pat Buchanan has strayed ... .* (COCA)

In the other case, speaker A mentioned the fact that the report is still being done. Then, he asked an interlocutor's opinion.

A: *I know the report is still classified, but what can you say about it?* (COCA)

It can be said asking opinions tend to occur in a discourse frame of comparing two issues.

4.4 Other Possible Expressions of Asking Opinions

Other three possible opinions of asking opinions were found in the corpora. They used various question words as in *how do you feel ... ?*; *in your opinion, what ...?*; and *do you have an opinion ... ?*. Based on the analysis of the concordance lines, not all occurrences of *how do you feel* means to ask opinions. When it functions to ask opinions, it can be seen as in the example below.

A: *When someone says ghetto, how do you feel about that?*
B: *I feel like they should be more careful in their choice.* (COCA)

In the example above *how do you feel*was answered with the phrase *I feel ... .* However, it can be omitted. Therefore, the speaker mentioned directly his opinion as can be seen in the examples below.

A: *How do you feel about the accident?*
B: *Awful. I'd like the law changed.* (BYU-BNC)

Like the examples taken from COCA and BYU-BNC, an example from SOAP shows that preposition*about* collocates with *how do you feel*.

A: *How do you feel about London?*
B: *It'smy new second favorite city.* (SOAP)

In your opinion, … occurs with several question words but most of them are *what*. It might occur in the initial position.

In your opinion, Chief, what mindset do you have to have when you're in the ... ? (Strathy)

The addressee term such as *chief* might appear as in the example above. In addition, the clause with question word might occur first. Then, it is followed by *in your opinion*.

What is the lure of that in your opinion? (COCA).

It is possible for *in your opinion* to be inserted in the clause structure. The questions occur with auxiliary verbs namely *did*.

Did he, in your opinion, accomplish what he set out to do to fuse politics and pop culture? (COCA)

Do you have an opinion could be applied to ask one's opinions.

A: Do you have an opinion?!
B: No. !
A: Youdon't?

When the speakers used *do you have an opinion*, the interlocutor might give more than just yes or no answers.

A: What about you, do you have an opinion?
B: I think you need to give Robin some room. (SOAP)

It occurs with another expression of asking opinion (*what about you?*). Moreover, using *do you have an opinion* seems that the speakers do not demand the interlocutors to give opinions. When they do not have opinions, they might easily say no.

Those three expressions are possible to be included in the textbook to enrich the learning materials. For in your opinion, it might be possible for the learning materials to include all the possible structures. By doing so, it makes the students get various models of language use.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Several expressions of asking opinions in the textbook have low frequencies in the corpora. It suggests that they are not common expressions in daily life. The occurrence of preposition about in the expressions in the textbook limits the occurrences of the expressions when the expressions were checked in the corpora. Based on the findings in the corpora, preposition of also occurs with an expression of asking opinions. In addition, that clause is also possible to occur with the expressions.

Positions of the expressions in the textbook are always in initial positions. However, corpus findings show various positions are possible. Based on the concordance lines analysis, finding more information, extending the topic, and comparing exist in dialogues in which the speakers ask opinions. It would be better if the dialogues in the textbook are developed by considering these characteristics. Other possible expressions are *how do you feel …, in your opinion …,* and *do you have*

an opinion …?. They can be presented in the textbook to provide various models. Further research can be conducted to develop learning materials based on the findings.

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