



LexDog

# Developing a web application for improving academic writing

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Have you ever encouraged students to use a website for vocabulary learning?

Go to: <https://www.menti.com/>

## EAP pedagogical perspective

- Context
- Vocabulary at phraseological level
- Corpus building and phrase learning tools
- Purpose of LexDog

## MSc Computing team

- Technical overview and details
- Demonstration

# Context

## Teaching context

- Oxford Brookes International Pathway Courses
- Pre-Master's course
- English not the first language of most students

# Vocabulary at phraseological level

- Widely recognised need for students to recognise and use phraseological units in their academic writing (Davis and Morley, 2015)
- Fixed and semi-fixed phrases ('clusters') play an important role in academic writing (Hyland 2008)

...especially so in *student* academic writing (Hyland 2008)

# Corpus building and phrase learning tools

- Self-compiling corpora empowers students to take control of their own learning (Lee and Swales, 2006)
- Academic Phrasebank (University of Manchester, 2018)  
<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>
- Vocabulary learning app for Arabic learners (Bowles, 2016)
- Students often prefer online (rather than paper-based) tools

# Purpose

## Web and mobile based application

- Individually and collaboratively compile, edit and view academic phrases
- Develop their knowledge of academic discourse
- Efficiently access and copy phrases into their written assignments

# MSc Computing Team

- Yumi Bagge completed the OBU Pre-Master's course
- Discussed project with her in early stages; kept in contact
- Created for module assignment: 'Student support service'



## Technical overview

- Web application (i.e. not loaded onto a device)
- So ... need an internet connection
- Displays correctly on range of devices
- Hosted on a Brookes server (but could be hosted anywhere)

## Technical details

- Written in PHP (a web scripting language)
- Uses a database to store phrases (MySQL)
- Can store pretty much unlimited number of phrases

## Demonstration

1. In pairs, scan the abstract and underline or highlight phrases you think could be used in academic writing

1. Input one or two of these phrases into LexDog

<http://sots.brookes.ac.uk/lexdog/>

# Possible Answers

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are frequently portrayed as “agents of change” in higher education (HE), impacting on institutional practices, processes and structures throughout HE. However, these courses do not “fit” neatly with the established aims and functions of universities, and accounts of technology-led change in universities predominate, simplistically emphasising technologically determinist narratives with incidental social effects. This study aims to explore the consequences of introducing these courses into HE in terms of the roles of educators, learning designers and the socio-technical construction of MOOCs. The research takes a socio-technical perspective, combining the established analytical strategy of Socio-Technical Interaction Networks (STIN) with the social theoretical ‘third space’ framework of HE activity. The paper reports on the first of three institutional cases studies, finding that learning designers occupy a hub-like position in the networks of actors involved in MOOC development within an emergent ‘third space’ between academic and managerial roles. The analysis also reveals how the massive and open elements of these courses elicit involvement of seemingly peripheral actors, who exert a strong influence on course production processes and content, with educators taking a less central role. This work adds a socio-technical element to understandings of third space activity in higher education, and can inform the planning and development of online education projects in accounting for changing roles in HE where massiveness and openness are combined in a course.

# References

Bowles, K. (2016) Vocabulary on the go: An academic vocabulary learning app for Arabic learners on an English Foundation Program

Davis, M. and Morely, J. (2015) 'Phrase intertextuality: the responses of academics from different disciplines to students' reuse of phrases', *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 28, pp.20-35.

Hyland, K. (2008) 'Academic clusters: Text patterning in published and postgraduate writing. International', *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 18(1), pp.41–62.

Lee, L. and Swales, J, (2006) 'A corpus-based EAP course for NNS doctoral students: Moving from available specialised corpora to self-compiled corpora', *English for Specific Purposes*, 25, pp.56-75

# FLEXISTAGE:

## Two key findings from Hyland

‘It is clear that clusters play a key role in the main genres of the academy at different levels of writer experience and expertise’

‘The master’s thesis, for example, is essentially a pedagogic genre; and while its writers share a persuasive goal with doctoral and professional writers, the burden of assessment at this level puts greater emphasis on a discourse which displays the writer’s research skills and a practical disciplinary competence’

(Hyland, 2008, p. 60)

# FLEXISTAGE:

## On the question plagiarism

Table 1

Phrases which 90–100% of respondents felt could be legitimately re-used.

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Phrases

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Within the field

To account for this

It has been demonstrated that

The findings of this study

In this paper I argue that

Recent evidence suggests that

This discrepancy may be due to

The results of this investigation show that

A possible explanation for this might be that

Systematically review

Contrary to expectations

The majority of respondents

Several possible explanations

Approximately half of those surveyed

A large volume of published studies describing

The findings of the current study are consistent with

The main weakness of this study was the lack of

An issue that was not addressed in this study was whether

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From first stage  
of research:  
Survey from 45  
experience  
academics in a  
range of  
disciplines

(Adapted from  
Davis and Morley,  
2015, p. 24)