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Review of Frazе.it: a multilingual sentence concordancer

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Abstract: Technological advancements have facilitated access to corpus tools, which are significant in language learning and teaching. One way to harness corpus tools is through concordancers that grant access to authentic language usage. With corpus-based language learning growing in significance, this media review evaluates Frazе.it – a multilingual online concordancer, characterizing its features, highlighting its pedagogical affordances, and outlining its technical capabilities. It, thereby, aims to propose a critical review of the platform and recommend relevant instructional activities and technical improvements. More specifically, this review intends to introduce an under-researched corpus tool at the disposal of foreign language learners and teachers. Findings reveal that Frazе.it allows for contextualized vocabulary learning, better grammatical/syntactical understanding, pronunciation awareness/improvement, and collocational awareness. However, inappropriate/irrelevant images, malfunctioning of multilingual translation, synonyms, and definitions are among its downsides. Notwithstanding the limitations, Frazе.it might be a promising tool for vocabulary expansion, reading comprehension, writing enhancement, speaking/pronunciation drills, listening/dictation activities, and grammar/syntax. Nevertheless, further research is urged to corroborate the results and explore the tool's applications across diverse contexts.

Keywords: concordancing; data-driven learning; language learning

1 Introduction

Technological advancements have brought about alternative and innovative teaching approaches, including data-driven learning (DDL). Unlike traditional teaching approaches based primarily on teachers and textbooks, DDL treats language as data and learners as researchers (Boulton 2010). This pedagogical approach is informed by a lexicogrammatical approach to language (Leńko-Szymańсka and Boulton 2015). In this regard, the fundamental task in DDL is to

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identify patterns as formulaic language at all levels (e.g., grammar and vocabulary) (O’Keeffe 2023). Foreign language learners adopting DDL can observe contextualized and authentic language and thus use these natural expressions in their writing and speaking (Gilquin and Granger 2010).

Correspondingly, corpus linguists and researchers devise diverse corpora (e.g., British National Corpus and Corpus of Contemporary American English) for linguistic analysis and language learning and teaching. Several corpus tools, such as Sketch Engine (Gilgarriff et al. 2014), allow users to access a wide range of corpora across different genres, contexts, and languages (e.g., Catalan Web Corpus (caTenTen) and ParlaMint corpora of parliamentary debates). Accordingly, such various corpora appeal to stakeholders, from foreign language learners and teachers to academic writers and translators. Some tools have specifically been designed for DDL, such as SKELL (Sketch Engine for language learning, <https://skell.sketchengine.eu/>), WriteFull (<https://www.writefull.com/>), and LansBox (<https://lancsbox.lancs.ac.uk/>).

One such tool is Fraise.it (<https://fraise.it/>), a powerful online concordancer harnessing millions of sentences from manifold authentic sources. Unlike conventional concordancers relying on static corpora, Fraise.it continuously updates its database with sentences from famous quotes and news articles. This distinguishes Fraise.it from others and makes it a dynamic resource for contemporary language use. Language learners can use this platform to see how vocabulary items (e.g., formulaic language) and grammatical structures are used in diverse contexts, thus fostering these skills, along with writing improvement and fluency development. The relevant literature review has revealed scant research on this platform (Çakır and Özer 2020; Hirata and Hirata 2019), reporting promising results for academic writing improvement among Turkish EFL learners and high values attached to it by Japanese EFL learners. To this end, using Topal’s (2022) framework, this review critically evaluates Fraise.it by characterizing its features, outlining its pedagogical affordances, and recognizing its limitations. By assessing its pedagogical potential, the review aims to serve as a guide for foreign language learners and teachers, as well as prospective researchers.

Despite the scantiness of research on SKELL, previous studies on other corpus tools showed pedagogical benefits. For instance, Yanjuan (2014) found vocabulary improvement through British National Corpus (BNC) among Chinese EFL learners. Similarly, Koçak (2020) reported positive student views on using COCA for vocabulary learning. In another study, Gilquin and Laporte (2021) indicated enhancement in writing through the Process Corpus of English in Education. In addition, Bennett (2024) revealed corpus awareness among EFL teachers although few used in language teaching. Equally, Kavanagh (2021) noted usability and complexity issues of corpus tools. Accordingly, the user-friendly feature of Fraise.it might encourage more teacher participation in corpus use for language education.

2 Description

Frazе.it is a user-friendly online concordancer that can serve as a reference tool for foreign language learners. The platform currently supports key phrase searches in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. With its easy-to-use interface and a main search box (Figure 1), Frazе.it allows its users to conduct lexical and grammatical inquiries easily.

The platform offers users six main features: usages, definitions, synonyms, pronunciations, and images (Figure 2).

First, it lists the results of how the inquiry item is used in diverse contexts. The frequency of results may vary according to the search item (e.g., 3,730 for “estudiar”). Second, it provides web definitions of the vocabulary item retrieved from various online sources. Users are thirdly presented with the part of speech and relevant synonyms. The platform also allows users to translate the target item into 52 languages. Another main feature is that it provides images from the Microsoft Bing search. Users are further allowed to listen to the pronunciation of the searched words via this platform, which directs learners to YouGlish (<https://youglish.com/>).

The distinctive feature of Frazе.it lies in its filtering options (Figure 3). The platform enables users to filter their search by source (daily, famous quotes, or my content), form (interrogative, negative, and exclamative), tense (active and passive), rule (starts with and ends with), zone (US and UK), and context (19 fields from art to zen).

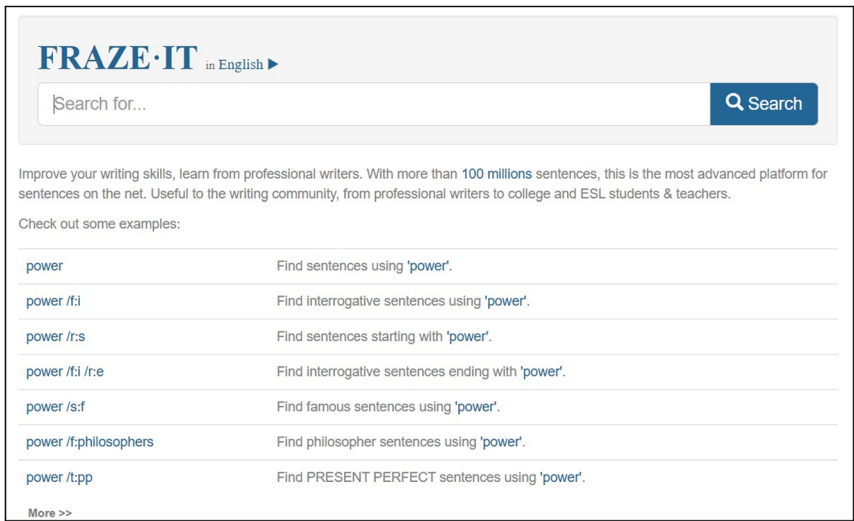


Figure 1: Search box.

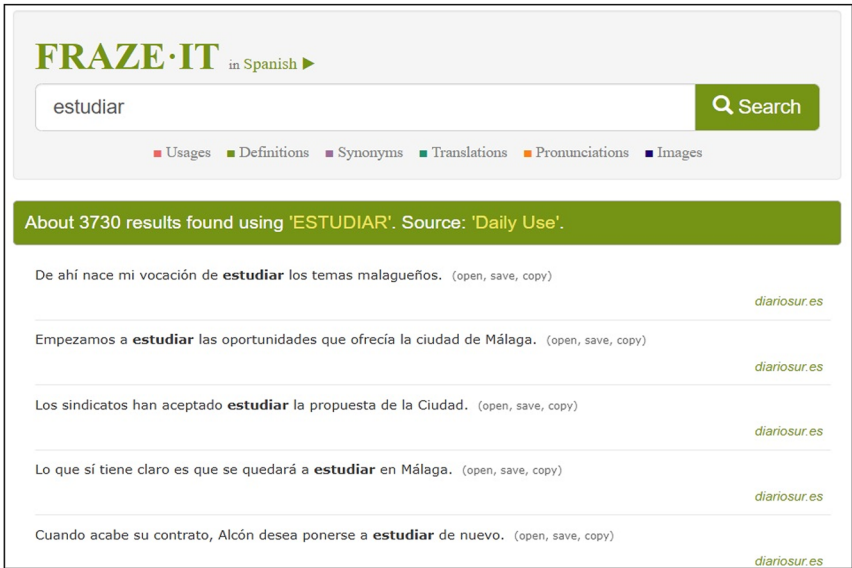


Figure 2: Main features of Fraise.it.



Figure 3: Filtering options.

Figure 4: My Content.

In addition to the sources Frazz.it recommends, users can also add content under “My Content” (Figure 4) once they are signed up. This allows users to personalize the content.

Aside from these features, the platform has several tabs at the top and bottom pages. The top left tabs allow users to go to the main page, log in, sign up, see the API, and visit the blog. The tabs on the top right enable them to share posts on Tumblr, X (Twitter), and Facebook. The ones on the bottom page include home, about, contact, privacy and terms, API, and blog tabs. Users can contact the webpage administrator through email (frazeit@gmail.com) to compliment, recommend, or complain. The *About* tab contains broad information about the platform, with no details about the developers or administrators. It also includes a YouTube link (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPDPbZwz2n0&ab_channel=FRAZEIT) introducing the platform.

3 Evaluation

3.1 Theoretical basis

Pedagogically, Frazz.it can be grounded on several theoretical rationales. Exposing learners to authentic and contextualized language use serves as comprehensible input, aligning with Krashen’s (1985) input hypothesis. Observing the contextualized language use reinforces users’ understanding of formulaic language, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical structures. Accordingly, encountering vocabulary in meaningful contexts also accords with lexical approach principles (Lewis 1993) and incidental vocabulary learning (Nation 2001). The platform’s search-based functionality grants users ownership of their learning by filtering the search according to

their interests, siding with the principles of learner autonomy (Benson 2011). Repeated exposure to linguistic forms (vocabulary and grammar) in contextualized use facilitates users' ability to recognize these forms, agreeing with Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis. Fraise.it can further be grounded on two more theoretical bases with teacher support. It might be informed by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, specifically scaffolding, if teachers select level-appropriate sentences for their students. It can also be based on Swain's (1985) output hypothesis if teachers encourage learners to use the platform's input (sentences) as models in language production (writing and speaking).

3.2 Theoretical framework underpinning Fraise.it's use

Parallel to the above-cited theoretical bases, a key pedagogical benefit of Fraise.it is contextualized vocabulary learning, enhancing their understanding of how words function across diverse contexts (Laufer 2024). The sentences it provides expose learners to authentic language use, and thus ensures natural, idiomatic, and grammatically accurate language (Rodríguez-Fuentes and Swatek 2022). In addition, analyzing sentence structures might help develop a better grammatical and syntactical understanding and improve learners' ability to construct their own sentences (Liu and Jiang 2009). Although not necessarily aimed at pronunciation, the platform's link to YouGlish might also assist learners with pronunciation awareness and improvement, as previous research indicated (Mahmood 2024). Correspondingly, this feature might also help with listening development (Eom 2024). Learners can further gain collocational awareness through natural pairings presented on the platform. Previous research supports collocational awareness and accuracy through corpus tools (Ma and Mei 2021).

Despite the positive impact of multimedia on language learning, particularly vocabulary (Teng 2023), the images the platform provides may be irrelevant or inappropriate. For example, Figure 5 shows the images the platform provided for the keyword “ola” (*hello* in Portuguese).

Similarly, a distinctive feature of the platform is its multilingual support – however, the platform malfunctions when translating from languages other than English (Figure 6). Similarly, the features of synonyms and definitions suffer the same fate. That is, these features do not function in languages other than English.

Despite these limitations, teachers can conduct numerous teaching activities using Fraise.it, including vocabulary expansion, reading comprehension, writing enhancement, speaking/pronunciation drills, listening/dictation activities, and grammar/syntax. Concerning vocabulary expansion, learners can analyze contextual meaning by examining how meaning changes according to context. Equally, they

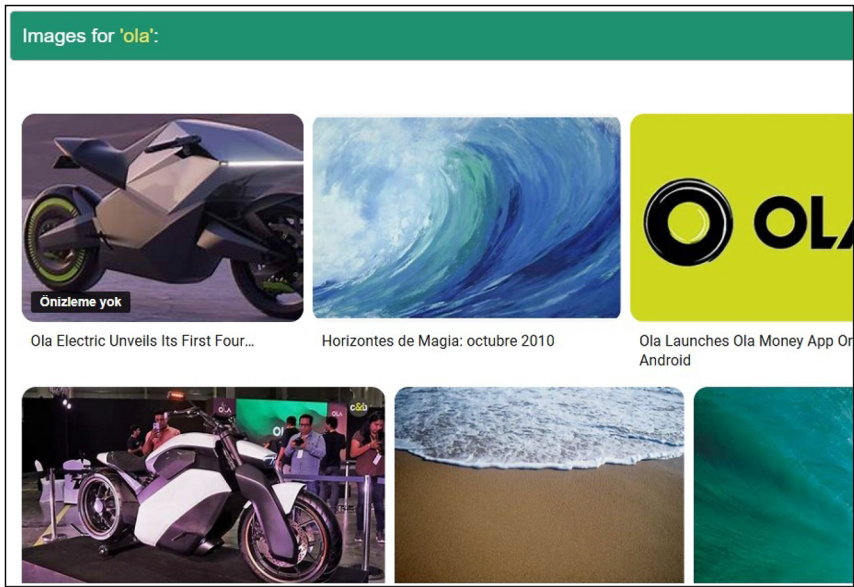


Figure 5: Images provided for “Olá” in Portuguese.



Figure 6: Translation from five supported languages to English.

can create a personalized vocabulary bank using their interest’s example sentences. Regarding reading comprehension, learners can understand sentence structure better by splitting the sentences into their elements (subject, verb, and object). At the same time, they can infer the meanings of new words based on contextual clues.

In terms of writing, learners can rewrite or paraphrase the platform’s sentences while maintaining grammatical accuracy or expand the sentences into paragraphs using descriptive details. As for speaking/pronunciation drills, learners can use Fraise.it to practice sentence intonation by reading aloud the example sentences. Likewise, the sentences may also prompt discussions or debates on various topics. With respect to listening/dictation, teachers can read out the sentences and ask learners to transcribe them before cross-checking on Fraise.it. With regard to grammar/syntax, teachers may ask learners to identify and categorize grammatical structures (e.g., active and passive voice).

3.3 Technical ability

Technically, Fraise.it is an easy-to-use platform with its user-friendly interface. However, a lack of interactive and gamified features (e.g., quizzes and games) undermines active student engagement. The simple search functionality is another strength of the platform. Equally, results from reliable sources add to its accuracy and authenticity. Additionally, advanced search filters allow users to personalize lexicogrammatical inquiries. However, the platform’s filtering feature is limited in languages other than English. More specifically, these filters are reduced to source, form, and rule in languages other than English (Figure 7).

The lack of unnecessary distractions helps learners to have a focused learning practice. The platform is easily accessible through mobile devices and computers, but

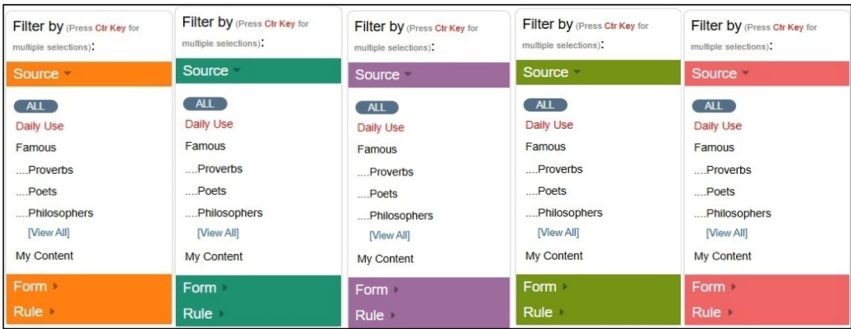


Figure 7: Filtering options in languages other than English.

a lack of mobile application dedicated to the platform limits its usability and offline access. Similarly, the platform's responsive design secures readability across all screen sizes, albeit with minor inconsistencies on smaller screens. Another technical strength of Frazе.it is its integration with other tools, allowing teachers to copy the content to other platforms or combine it with external tools (e.g., dictionary apps and grammar checkers). Still, there is no direct integration with any learning management system (e.g., Google Classroom and Moodle).

Likewise, it does not allow users to save their favorite searches and create word lists, although it enables them to create content from external sources. Free access to the platform without sign-up requirements is another technical strength ensuring immediate use. Learners, however, might benefit from a text-to-speech function embedded into the platform.

A final limitation might be the inaccessibility of some social media platforms (Tumblr, X (Twitter), and Facebook) in China. However, this feature is neither essential nor a barrier to language learning since language learners and teachers will use the platform not for online interaction but for language education. Still, the platform developers might consider adding alternative sharing platforms for countries with limited or no access to social media networks.

4 Conclusions

From a pedagogical perspective, Frazе.it stands out as a versatile and practical instructional resource in foreign language teaching, providing authentic examples for language skills (e.g., vocabulary development, sentence understanding, and overall language skills). Teachers can design engaging lessons to assist learners in improving these language skills. Technically, Frazе.it is a well-organized and efficient tool for contextual vocabulary learning, featuring an easy-to-use search function and real-life sentence examples. Nevertheless, its technical drawbacks (e.g., a lack of interactive elements, integration capabilities, and a mobile application) suggest that teachers can use Frazе.it as a supplementary resource rather than a standalone language learning tool. Future research is needed to corroborate the review's findings.

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