Book Review

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Learner Language, Discourse and Interaction: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Spoken English. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025, 314pp., $114 (paperback), ISBN: 9781009208932

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Abstract

This review discusses how this book systematically presents a series of studies employing short-text MDA and the innovative findings related to micro- and macro-structures of spoken corpora through combining corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, which future research can take as a reference.

Keywords

learner corpora, spoken discourse, short-text MDA

In Learner Language, Discourse and Interaction, the authors provide insights into both micro- and macro-structural levels of spoken interaction in L1 and L2 speech. The novelty of this book lies in how small discourse units are analyzed by short text multi-dimensional analysis (MDA), alongside large-scale corpora, including the Trinity Lancaster Corpus (TLC), the Spoken British National Corpus (BNC) 2014, and the Trinity Lancaster L1 Corpus, exploring how language learners construct discourse in conversational settings. Studies in the book flow from one to the other based on coherence and rigorous logic, which makes this work a proper choice for people interested in corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, and second language acquisition (SLA) to implement immersive reading.

The book comprises 10 chapters that fall into four main sections. The first section (chapter 1) elaborates on the importance and complexity of exploring learner corpora and the necessity of the short-text MDA approach. It demonstrates how these systematically examine learner language in interactive contexts and obtain functions of both micro- and macro-structures in the data. The authors conceptualize the primary annotations used in this book, discourse units and narratives, alongside

shedding light on how they present a basis for in-depth analysis, contributing to the interpretation lying within six dimensions of aggregated linguistic co-occurrence patterns (informational versus involved production, narrative versus non-narrative concerns, explicit versus situation-dependent reference, overt expression of persuasion, abstract versus non-abstract information, and online informational elaboration). This section illustrates the framework for studying large-scale corpora and its innovation compared to existing research, which highlights the efforts researchers put in a series of studies in this book.

Section II (Chapters 2 to 7) provides studies using short-test MDA. Chapter 2 validates that micro-structural discourse analysis can capture nuanced functional patterns by proceeding with short-text MDA that serves as a robust technique for little data. The analysis shows that discerning discourse functions associated with grouped data at the turn level is a part of short-text MDA application, which reveals a link between form (the basis on which the grouping occurs) and function (the discourse functions assigned to learner and examiner speech). Following such findings, Chapter 3 discusses how such discourse functions can be affected by the role of the interlocutor, proficiency and task (p. 87). The authors accentuate a detailed qualitative and quantitative investigation of discourse units in learner-examiner interactions, focusing on macro-structural functions and their connections with micro-structural turns. However, the dense statistical analysis may be challenging for readers unfamiliar with MDA techniques. The chapter reflects some overlap functions, such as the informative and instructive elements, but macro-structural functions are generally distinct, which emphasizes the co-constructed nature of discourse units.

Accordingly, chapter 4 probes the relationship between macro- and micro-structural discourse functions, considering narrative and persuasion in learner-examiner interactions via short-text MDA, which facilitates readers' understanding of discourse dynamics in spoken language assessment in the TLC (p. 103). It also becomes especially clear that the influences of interplay between social context, learner proficiency, and task requirement are indispensable to differentiate the functions of discourse. Concerning the previous findings, Chapter 5 zooms in on how sociopragmatics closely relate to the selection of macro-structures in the examination context on which the corpora are based (p. 131). Although it extensively addresses a merge and a divergence of micro- and macro-structures in discourse, the chapter could be more referential from clearer practical implications for language teaching or assessment.

In chapter 6, the analysis identifies seven dimensions representing contrasting discourse functions such as elaborated speech versus discourse management, interactive information exchange versus attitudinal descriptions, and epistemic stance versus informational recounts (p. 164). It suggests the effects of data size and homogeneity on functional stability, comparing the Spoken BNC 2014 with a more diverse TLC corpus. Chapter 7 further compares discourse functions across three corpora—TLC (L2 exam), TLC (L1 exam), and Spoken BNC 2014 (L1 conversation) concerning macro-structural discourse units (p. 189). It specifically depicts, for example, three core functions (information seeking, informative and

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instructive, and seeking and encoding stance) that are common to all corpora, while others are context-specific.

Section III (Chapters 8 and 9) gives an overview of how narrative functions in SLA from a sociolinguistic perspective (p. 208). To illustrate, the authors test the use of narratives in L1 and L2 speakers of TLC by an exploratory approach in a more focused way through which they find L1 Hindi speakers perform well in terms of narrative frequency and complexity. The evidence supports the assumption that the cultural background of storytelling and the status of English in India play significant roles in L1 Hindi speakers.

In the last section, the conclusion, the authors reflect on the key findings, highlighting the application of short-text (MDA) to learner corpus research. The technique successfully analyzed linguistic units like discourse units and turns across varying text lengths, proficiency levels, and situational contexts. While short-text MDA proved effective for texts under 200 words, its limitations emerge with complex and multi-modal interactions because it prioritizes lexico-grammatical patterns rather than stressing crucial contextual information delivered through non-verbal cues that are also critical for discourse functions.

This book would be of interest to scholars working in language education, linguistics, and discourse analysis. The authors with their expertise in corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, lay a great foundation for future research into cross-linguistic and cultural influences and give confidence to people interested in employing short-text MDA in their studies.