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Review

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The book *Learner language, discourse and interaction: A corpus-based analysis of spoken English* by Tony McEnery, Isobelle Clarke & Gavin Brookes investigates spoken, interactional learner language in the Trinity Lancaster Corpus (TLC; Gablasova et al. 2019), focusing on linguistic functions at a micro- and at a macro-structural level. A special interest of this volume lies in the exploration of narrative elements in learner discourse. Employing short-text Multi-Dimensional Analysis (MDA), the authors explore three corpora: 1) the TLC, which encompasses spoken learner language; 2) the TLC L1, representing a native-speaker near-equivalent to the TLC, and 3) the spoken part of the British National Corpus 2014 (BNC2014; Love et al. 2017).

Chapter 1 (pp. 1–32) situates the present study within the context of Learner Corpus Research and outlines the TLC. This large-scale corpus is based on spoken tasks included in the Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE), where learners of English interact with L1 examiners across various tasks. The focus of this book lies on learners from grades 6 to 8 (corresponding to CEFR levels B1 and B2). Comparing the regular TLC to the TLC L1 (consisting of GESE tasks completed by native speakers with no prior preparation) and to the Spoken BNC2014 facilitates accounting for contextual factors, such as task effects or exam preparation. Introducing their methodological approach, the authors advocate the use of an adapted version of Multi-Dimensional Analysis (MDA; Biber 1988) they label “short-text MDA”. In **Chapters 3** to **7**, this method is applied to the abovementioned corpora, analysing linguistic functions in singular turns and in larger discourse units. Finally, **Chapters 8** and **9** evolve around a discussion of narrative, emerging from a bottom-up approach, as narrative functions could be observed across multiple micro- and macro-level units.

Chapter 2 (pp. 33–69) evaluates “the efficacy of the short-text approach to MDA” (p. 33), following a bottom-up approach to exploring the corpora. Short-text MDA involves the analysis of language units with regard to presence and absence of features and the subsequent interpretation of resulting functional dimensions. At the micro-structural level of conversational *turns*, this method yields five interpretable dimensions: 1) Long Turns versus Short Turns; 2) Involved versus Informational; 3) Irrealis versus Realis; 4) Infer versus Reveal; 5) Narrative vs. Non-Narrative. This chapter further investigates interactions between these dimensions and learner variables (grade, proficiency level, cultural/linguistic background), and explores the interplay between learner and examiner turns.

Chapter 3 (pp. 70–101) asks the question of whether co-constructed discourse units bear functions distinct from those at the turn level. Here, short-text MDA produced the following dimensions: 1)

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Long versus Short Discourse Units;[1] 2) Descriptive and Affective versus Informative and Instructive; 3) Unknown (Irrealis) versus Known (Realis). The authors discuss the variation of these dimensions across tasks and proficiency levels. Moreover, they discover that certain functions are dominated by examiner speech, whilst others mostly occur in examinee speech. Generally, macro-level functions do not correspond directly to those at the turn level, except for macro-structure functions that are 1) dominated by one of the speakers and 2) mono-functional in nature at the micro-structural level.

Chapter 4 (pp. 102–132) resumes the investigation of macro-level functions, introducing dimension 4) Informational Narrative versus Seeking and Encoding Stance, and 5) Persuasion versus Information Seeking. Scrutinizing the relationship between turns and discourse units, this chapter addresses the concept of scaffolding, arguing that proficiency is essentially a result of the learner's discourse strategies and the examiner's expectations and guidance aligning. This observation is particularly visible with regard to the two dimensions examined in this chapter. However, the authors point out that the cooperative principle (Grice 1975) that shapes such interactions is constrained by the social pragmatics (Leech 1983) of the exam situation.

Chapter 5 (pp. 133–159) asks to what extent the established functions can be attributed to learners' proficiency, and to this end compares the TLC to the TLC L1 (native speakers of British English completing the GESE tasks without prior preparation). The authors survey similarities in function at the turn level and evaluate the acquisition of four features (demonstrative determiners, numeral nouns, passives and relatives), which increasingly spread across the population, paralleled by increasing diversity of usage. Furthermore, this chapter initiates an investigation of the overlap of macro-structural features between the TLC and TLC L1, which is continued in more detail in **Chapter 7**.

Chapter 6 (pp. 160–176) sets out to analyze the Spoken BNC2014 for functions at both the micro- and macro-level. At the discourse level, the functions largely coincide with those established at the turn level – with nine functions being shared[2] – although some changes in the polarity of paired functions can be observed. The authors suggest that the size and relative homogeneity of the BNC may explain the similarity between functions. Nevertheless, some variability exists. For instance, dimension 7 (Advisory versus Personal Narrative) of the micro-level may contribute to multiple macro-level functions.

In **Chapter 7** (pp. 177–205), the authors connect previous findings by comparing micro- and macro-level functions across all three corpora, finding that three discourse functions are shared across the set: Information Seeking, Informative and Instructive, and Seeking and Encoding Stance. Three (additional) functions[3] are shared between the TLC and TLC L1, indicating a higher concord than between the TLC L1 and the Spoken BNC2014 (two shared functions[4]), whereas other functions solely pertain to one of the corpora. Concerning the L1-only exam functions, the authors reason that the lack of these functions in the regular TLC does not necessarily indicate lower proficiency; instead, L1 and L2 speakers tend to fulfill different speaker roles. In this context, Politeness Theory and the concept of *face* (Brown & Levinson 1987) may explain differences in the prevalence of functions between L1 and L2 speakers. Moreover, the authors revise their interpretation of the negative dimension 1 of the TLC (Short Discourse Units), analyzing it for meso-structures and inferring that its general function represents *discourse management*. Finally, this chapter accentuates the importance of narrative functions and concludes that the GESE exam – with some contextual constraints – aptly represents interactional conversations.

In **Chapter 8** (pp. 206–221), the authors underline the observed relevance of narrative structures and their functional diversity, inquiring whether different narrative functions coalesce at a macro level beyond discourse units. To explore this proposition, the study follows the narrative model by Labov & Waletzky (1997), which operationalizes narrative as temporal sequences consisting of different stages (abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, results, coda). This book aims to analyze narrative

1 The Short Discourse Units function was later reinterpreted to represent Discourse Management.
2 These functions are: Discourse Management, Elaborated Speech, Informational Recounts, Information Seeking, Narrative, Non-Narrative, Opinionated Narrative, Reveal, and Situation-Dependent Commentary.
3 Informational Narrative, Irrealis, and Realis.
4 Discourse Management and Situation-Dependent Commentary.

structures as co-constructed units "of functionally heterogeneous turns, working in concert to deliver a macro-structure" (p. 219) and to discuss learners' narrative competence.

Chapter 9 (pp. 222–254) applies the aforementioned model to a sample of the TLC, with a particular focus on learner variables. The use of narrative elements – which were analyzed independently from micro- and macro-structures – was found to differ between learners with various cultural backgrounds, with Hindi L1 speakers in particular using narrative elements extensively. The authors further suspected the prevalence of narrative elements to depend on the factor *age*, but subsequent analyses showed no uniform effect of age alone, nor can the frequent use of narratives by Hindi L1 speakers solely be explained by the mean low age of their sample. Furthermore, the authors discover the application of *initiating* and *mid-narrative* prompts that may entail a scaffolding function and that reflect that examiner's use of the Information-Seeking function in their interaction with learners.

Chapter 10 (pp. 255–267) provides an evaluation of short-text MDA, concluding that the technique proved valuable for delivering interpretable functional dimensions. The authors add that the additional analysis of the 100 most prototypical examples for each function aided in determining distinct functions. The authors further advise that the applicability of short-text MDA to longer discourse units is limited due to the constrained interpretability of the presence/absence of features. Moreover, the authors emphasize the complex relationship between micro- and macro-level structures, as well as the co-construction of discourse units by examiner and examinee. They argue that discourse is not merely determined by learner proficiency, but task requirements and communicative competence. Finally, the authors highlight the perspective on cross-linguistic interference at the macro-structural level that their exploration of narrative has yielded, and they conclude with promising suggestions for follow-up research endeavors.

The appendix (pp. 268–295) includes a full feature set with elaborate explanations of features (those constituting less than 5% of the data) that were pooled with others or deleted. Moreover, the feature set employed for the short-text MDA, as well as the tagset based on Clarke (2020) are outlined. This extensive overview is laudable in terms of open science and replicability.

Taken together, the book is characterized by elaborate exploratory analyses that demonstrate how linguistic functions may both vary and align across tasks and corpora, and how (learner) discourse is co-constructed by speakers. Hence, it provides an insightful perspective on the relationship between form and function in spoken British English, whilst emphasizing communicative competence demonstrated by L2 speakers.

Not only does this volume provide a novel perspective on learner language, but it also manages to keep the balance between analysing large-scale corpora and concrete textual examples of interlocutors using certain functions. Within these analyses of ample datasets, connections to theoretical frameworks such as Labov & Waletzky's Narrative Model (1997) or Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson 1987) facilitate the reading experience and help connect the dots between this current study and other linguistic perspectives. Transferring the narrative model to interactive learner language has proven interesting, especially regarding the (potential) effects of learners' cultural/linguistic background. Following these insights, it might be valuable to explore the narrative patterns discovered in other contexts, such as ELF interactions.

While the various functions, their scope and interactions at multiple levels may be hard to follow at times, this complexity is aptly met through the discussion of illustrative examples that highlight one of the many strengths of this volume, viz the emphasis on interactive patterns. Here, I would like to refer back to a fitting simile adduced by the authors, comparing a conversation to a house made of red (speaker one) and white (speaker two) bricks – in other words, the constituents of language cannot be regarded solely on their own, but rather as a co-constructed whole (i.e. the house) that relies on speakers interacting.

Another limitation has already been addressed by the authors themselves: when investigating co-constructed language, learners' communicative competence may potentially trump other linguistic capabilities. Hence, the functions discovered can solely be interpreted with regard to interactive, spoken language. Any issues that L2 speakers might experience in other contexts, such as EFL writing, would go unnoticed in this spoken linguistic environment, where scaffolding may offset some of these difficulties. Nevertheless, it is not the objective of this book to explore written or monologic language, and this

deliberate focus on interactive spoken English is praiseworthy, especially since this type of language is sparse in Learner Corpus Research (Tracy-Ventura et al. 2020).

In summary, this book follows a transparent and expedient methodological approach and offers a valuable contribution to the field of (Learner) Corpus Research. What should be highlighted in particular is that this volume, while following a rather traditional approach of comparing learner and native language, persistently emphasises the functional proficiency of learners instead of portraying the language of L2 speakers as deficient. In the last chapter, the authors hint at a follow-up analysis of learner discourse at the A1/A2 level of the CEFR; hence, another intriguing facet of learner language is about to be explored.

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