



Corpus analysis in different genres: Academic discourse and learner corpora

María Luisa Carrió-Pastor (ed.)

New York: Routledge, 2020. 362 pages. ISBN: 978-0-367-41716-1

There has been a growing interest in academic and learner discourse over the last few decades. This burgeoning area of research has witnessed a boom and a diversification of methodological approaches, among which Corpus Linguistics stands out thanks to its advantage of allowing researchers to handle large volumes of authentic linguistic data. The fruitful combination of Corpus Linguistics and Discourse Analysis is being applied to more specific environments and communicative situations. While there are countless research articles of this kind published in top peer-reviewed journals such as *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* and *International Journal of Learner Corpus Research*, few scholarly books deal with this aspect, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Charles, Pecorari & Hunston, 2009; Römer, Cortes & Friginal, 2020). *Corpus Analysis in Different Genres: Academic Discourse and Learner Corpora*, edited by María Luisa Carrió-Pastor, is thus a timely collection that brings together diverse contributions focused on the application of the corpus methodology to academic discourse and learner discourse analysis.

The book contains an introduction and 18 specially commissioned chapters written by experienced practitioners in the field. These chapters are grouped thematically and cover various academic genres (Chapters 1-8) as well as studies on learner discourses (Chapters 9-18). In the introduction, book editor María Luisa Carrió-Pastor provides an excellent overview of this collection and a succinct summary of each chapter.

The first section of the volume concerns the application of the corpus approach to different genres of academic discourse: staple ones such as research articles, book reviews, and abstracts are joined by others less commonly seen, such as journal descriptions and book prefaces. The section starts with a chapter by Carrió-Pastor, in which she looks at the use of self-

mentions across three broad disciplines: Engineering, Linguistics, and Medicine. Her quantitative analysis shows that first-person singular self-mentions practically occurred only in Linguistics, and that the most frequent self-mention form in all three corpora was exclusive *we*. The qualitative analysis implies that authorial presence in all three fields was intended to achieve specific rhetorical purposes.

In Chapter 2, Alonso-Almeida discusses the expression of gratitude as a routinized writing procedure within an overlooked academic genre: book preface. Based on an analysis of 72 prefaces in linguistics books, the author identified six major forms of thanking expressions and ten specific functions that these expressions perform. In contrast, in the third chapter Kriukova compares the expression of criticism (i.e., negative evaluation) in the book reviews by Soviet and post-Soviet Russian academic communities. Her findings show a surprising “increased amount and relative directness of criticism in modern reviews” (p. 72) and a much higher incidence of conceptual criticism over textual criticism in terms of the targets for criticism.

The next two chapters focus on stance in scientific writing. Quintana-Toledo and Sánchez Cuervo (Chap. 4) explore authorial stance in the use of modal verbs by medical researchers. Having analyzed 48 medical abstracts, they found that epistemic and dynamic modals were more commonly employed by researchers to express possibility and potentiality. In Chapter 5, Álvarez-Gil specifically takes an interest in the adverb *fairly* as a metadiscursive element and in its use in late modern English scientific writing. After scrutinizing textual materials from two disciplines (Astronomy and History) between 1700 and 1900, the author reveals the mitigating effect of *fairly* as an indicator of authorial presence in scientific texts. Another remarkable finding is the existence of disciplinary differences, such as the more frequent co-occurrence of this adverb with a modal verb in historical texts. Also interested in disciplinary differences, Giannoni (Chap. 6) looks into lexical bundles (LBs) in journal descriptions (JDs) from four disciplines and identifies 24 LBs in his self-compiled corpus. Further functional analysis indicates an overall limited disciplinary variation of LB use in the JDs, as well as a predominance of referential bundles.

The last two chapters of the section are more methodology-oriented and encourage qualitative methods in academic discourse studies. In Chapter 7, Herrando-Rodrigo highlights the importance of an ethnographic approach

in corpus compilation. As an illustration, after conducting pilot interviews and delivering questionnaires to medical experts, she drew on the information about their reading behavior of medical popularizations to compile comparable corpora of medical popularizations and scientific articles. This kind of expertise-informed corpora is “meaningful to both EAP and ESP users and language mediators, and teachers” (p. 128). The closing chapter, by Bocanegra-Valle, discusses the potential of applying computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to academic discourse research. She first introduces the concept of QDA and the two most popular CAQDAS packages: ATLAS.ti and NVivo. She then surveys the application of these two packages in academic discourse-related studies. Her findings suggest a growing trend towards CAQDAS, although it remains underestimated in general and by non-Anglophone scholars in particular.

The second section of the volume focuses on learner corpora and on how researchers or teachers can make use of them to benefit the language learning process and their pedagogical practices. It begins with a chapter coauthored by Pavičić Takač, Kružić and Vakanjac Ivezić, in which they explore the use of contrastive discourse markers in argumentative essays produced by learners of English and German. Based on two self-compiled learner corpora, their analysis shows that those non-native students tended to overuse or misuse certain contrastive connectives and employed them with a limited variation. The study also offers some teaching advice. In Chapter 10, Núñez-Román goes beyond the basic contrastive discourse markers and shifts his attention to the broader concept of metadiscourse. By drawing upon Ädel’s (2006) reflexive model, the author investigates the use of personal metadiscourse markers (PMM) in final degree dissertations (FDD) from 16 Spanish universities. The results reveal that student’s PMM use varied depending on the typology of FDD, and that text-oriented discursive functions were the predominant dimension. The author further suggests raising FDD writers’ awareness of participant-oriented metadiscourse. In Chapter 11, Tasso goes deeper into the topic of metadiscourse but building her study on Hyland’s (2005) interpersonal model instead. Her analysis of 55 essays produced by Spanish advanced EFL learners indicates that despite the limited range of interactional devices employed by the student writers, engagement markers were the most frequent resource.

In Chapter 12, Sánchez-Jiménez sets out to examine the rhetorical functions of citation from cross-linguistic, cross-cultural, and expertise level perspectives. To this end, he compiled 24 master’s theses and another 24

research articles in both English and Spanish. Findings reveal that all these factors (language, culture, and level of expertise) influence the use of rhetorical functions of citation by different writer groups. Interested in the correlation between language proficiency and linguistic complexity, Pérez-Guerra, in Chapter 13, uses statistical techniques to analyze English essays produced by non-native and native students at different levels. Results suggest that complexity in writing is not always incremental as the proficiency increases. Chapter 14, by Montesinos-López and Romero-Forteza, presents CALEC, a newly developed corpus for the learning of Catalan for specific purposes. They first introduce the background, educational settings, importance, and methodology for building CALEC. They then demonstrate how the corpus can help them analyze the errors produced in students' specialized writing.

In Chapter 15, Fuster-Márquez and Fernández-Domínguez look at a set of LBS that are overproduced by Spanish EFL learners but absent or rarely used by native speakers. Based on Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA) of one learner corpus and two native reference corpora, the authors detect 77 frequently overused four-word LBS and then classify them according to three discourse functions. They conclude the chapter by pointing out possible reasons for the overuse of these LBS and by discussing the implications. Skorczynska, in Chapter 16, investigates the metaphorical senses of three vision verbs (*regard*, *see*, and *view*) from a cognitive linguistics perspective and assesses the extent to which their patterns of use in English academic writing vary across three corpora: L2 non-expert, L1 non-expert, and L1 expert. She suggests that more attention be paid to the problematic areas when teaching the non-literal senses of these three verbs. Mestre-Mestre shifts her attention to the emotional aspect of academic discourse in Chapter 17, where the use of emotion-loaded expressions in master's theses produced by native and non-native English speakers is under analysis. Her results indicate that native students are more prone to convey emotions in their writing than L2 learners. Finally, she suggests raising pragmatic awareness of emotional expressions in classroom teaching. The final chapter, by Torrado-Cespón, addresses the lack of proofreading and foreign language anxiety among English learners when writing online. The author's analysis of online posts allows her to classify students' apology utterances reacting to mistakes and finally leads her to conclude that it is important for teachers to advise students on the correct use of language in online settings.

This collection has met the objective of providing up-to-date corpus studies on academic and learner discourses. Authors have skillfully demonstrated how corpora can be applied to academic discourse research and to foreign language learning and teaching alike. What I consider particularly innovative and meaningful is the inclusion of two methodology-oriented chapters (Chap. 7 and 8). Both the ethnographic approach to corpus compilation and the application of CAQDAS to academic discourse are under-discussed and under-explored topics in this field. Additionally, this volume breaks the English-centric circle, covering other languages such as Spanish, Catalan, Russian, and German.

However, the major flaw in this edited volume may be an apparent lack of research on spoken academic discourse. Since the central theme of the collection is academic discourse, readers might expect to see studies on oral academic interactions. In addition, while the chapters in both parts are balanced with a well-defined and logical theme, some chapters seem to be outliers within that coherent whole. For example, Chapters 7 and 8, which do not actually aim to research a specific academic genre, seem to be incoherently related to other contributions in Section 1.

Overall, this edited volume is a valuable resource for postgraduate students and researchers engaged in the corpus approach to academic discourse, especially in written texts. It could also be of practical use to pre- and in-service foreign language teachers and EAP educators in classroom settings.

Received 09 November 2020

Accepted 16 November 2020

Reviewed by **Gang Yao**
 Universidad de Murcia (Spain)
 gang.yao@um.es

References

- Ädel, A. (2006). *Metadiscourse in L1 and L2 English*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Charles, M., D. Pecorari & S. Hunston (eds.) (2009). *Academic Writing: At the Interface of Corpus and Discourse*. London/New York: Continuum.
- Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: Exploring Interaction in Writing*. London/New York: Continuum.
- Römer, U., V. Cortes & E. Friginal (eds.) (2020). *Advances in Corpus-based Research on Academic Writing: Effects of Discipline, Register, and Writer Expertise*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.