
Book Reviews

Learner Corpus Research: New Perspectives and Applications

Brezina, V. & Flowerdew, L. (eds). (2018). Bloomsbury (179 pp.). ISBN: 978-1-4742-7288-9. (£85.00)

Reviewed by Jennifer Jordan

Kwansei Gakuin University

Learner Corpus Research: New perspectives and applications is part of a series called *Research in Corpus and Discourse*. This edited edition of eight studies has a wide scope covering a variety of approaches and uses for corpus linguistics with learner corpora. Learner corpora are computerized collections of learner language, written or spoken, analyzed using corpus software. The editors both have a long history in the field: Brezina is one of the developers of #LancsBox, a tool for corpus analysis (<http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/lancsbox/index.php>); Flowerdew has published numerous books and articles covering corpora and language teaching.

Overall, this is a thoroughly readable and well-organized book which provides those with some background in Learner Corpus Research (LCR) with a few ideas for deviation from what is usually seen in the field. Several chapters focus on spoken learner corpora which have been underrepresented to date in the research for the obvious reason that spoken corpora are more time consuming to compile. Several of the studies use the Trinity Lancaster Corpus (TLC) compiled from Trinity's Graded Exams in Spoken English (GESE) test. The TLC provides researchers with English as a second language (L2) contributions from native speakers from nine different first language (L1) backgrounds over

three different proficiency levels on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages scale. The argument for an increased representation of spoken corpora in the field is, as Myles (2005) argues, that spoken corpora allow for greater insight into interlanguage as the language is not “complicated by additional layers of learnt knowledge and monitoring process.” To this end, the TLC and the examples of how it might be used provided here, represent progress for those who would like to access and study learner language without the significant undertaking of creating a spoken corpus.

Additionally, the majority of the research in the book looks at learner language in its own right, avoiding the comparison with native speaker language whereas significant portion of LCR has used Granger’s Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA) introduced in 1996 (see Granger, 2015 for a discussion of CIA). For those unfamiliar with CIA, this involves a comparison of language in a learner corpus to either a) native speaker language or b) language from a similar group of learners with a different L1 background (Granger, 2015). Within the five chapters of this book dedicated to learner language, only one uses a native reference corpus in this way whereas the rest provide useful examples for those wishing to step away from the comparison of L2 learners to monolinguals.

In one of the remaining four chapters, there is a nicely designed study examining learners’ use of the ‘yes, but...’ construction for disagreement. The authors examine not only the construction itself, but also the hedging language surrounding it that learners use at various proficiency levels for their language to become increasingly pragmatically appropriate. Another study uses DocuScope software, which analyzes the rhetorical functions used in a corpus, to determine which were most prevalent in the executive summary genre, as indicated by model essays, compared to the FROWN corpus of more general language. This provides an indication of how learners use model essays as resources for language which the teacher researcher can extrapolate to other contexts.

There is only one longitudinal study, in the penultimate chapter, but it provides a useful resource for those seeking a model for examining changes in learner language over time. Because of the time-consuming nature of collecting data from the same group of learners on repeated occasions, lack of continuous

access to learners, and other constraints, researchers have opted for collecting data at a single point in time and comparing the language used at different proficiency levels in a pseudo-longitudinal design. To examine changes in interlanguage at different points however, longitudinal collections provide more data.

The final chapter presents a study worth replicating in the Japanese context. It looks at the English figurative language use of French L1 speakers. The researcher finds considerable transfer in this aspect of students' language. It would be interesting to see how the greater language distance between English and Japanese, compared to French and English, affects the results. For anyone interested in transfer, this chapter is worth the read.

In terms of organization, each chapter explicitly states the research questions and the results are presented in such a way that a reader can easily identify how the authors have interpreted the evidence to find their answers.

With the inclusion of *New Perspectives and Applications* in the title, I was hoping for perhaps more in terms of dealing with some of the other problems that tend to appear in LCR. First, learner corpora are often necessarily small and it is difficult to justify generalizations when the data is taken from a small population of learners. More work needs to be done before it will be possible to say that language from one group of learners is representative of others from the same L1 or proficiency level. Nonetheless, researchers sometimes wish to apply conclusions from one set of data to other learners in different contexts. I felt that there are times in this book as well when the conclusions or potential pedagogical implications were not thoroughly justified. Many potential LCR researchers are teachers wanting to know more about their learners' abilities and needs. To this end, more useful than the conclusions drawn about learners' language or abilities are the methodologies and the operationalization of various key terms used in the studies. Miller and Pessoa's use of DocuScope software to analyze the rhetorical functions used in a corpus could easily be a model for other researchers. Expansion on how this could be used by the teacher-researcher is potentially more useful than the actual answers to their research questions. Likewise, in their chapter, Götz & Mukherjee, wishing to examine fluency,

accuracy and vocabulary development, operationalize these in terms that can be searched in corpora in ways that can be usefully applied by others wishing to examine similar features.

There is much to be learned from learner corpora. They are useful tools for studying how to better serve specific learners in a context and they provide a means to better understand language acquisition. This book provides examples of how researchers might approach either of these goals, and the increased focus on spoken corpora and longitudinal corpora is a good addition to the field.

References

- Granger, S. (2015). Contrastive interlanguage analysis: A reappraisal. *International Journal of Learner Corpus Research, 1*(1), 7-24.
- Myles, F. (2005). Interlanguage corpora and second language acquisition research. *Second Language Research, 21*(4), 373-391.
doi:10.1191/0267658305sr252oa

Author bio

Jennifer Jordan is an Assistant Professor at Kwansei Gakuin University. She is currently developing a learner corpus as part of her PhD studies at Cardiff University. She's been teaching EFL in Korea and Japan for the last 20 years. jordan.jen@gmail.com

Date Received: February 1, 2018

Date Accepted: March 17, 2018