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Corpus pragmatics is an emerging field that, over the past decade or so, has received increasing attention from linguists. The reviewed volume is the first handbook under this sub-discipline, bringing together a multitude of studies investigating pragmatic features with corpus linguistic methods. As such, it is of interest to newcomers to the field of corpus pragmatics on all academic levels as well as scholars from any field that are interested in new approaches. The chapters are great resources on individual pragmatic features and can be used as stand-alone references with the handbook as a whole serving as a remarkable collection of avenues taken within this new discipline.

Pragmatics, fully established in the late 1970s, investigates how language is used for communicative purposes. It, therefore, includes foci not on the literal meanings of words and sentences alone, but also on social and cultural readings of the utterances and their speakers. Research within pragmatics usually follows a “horizontal reading” of text (further detailed in the introductory chapter, p. 3), meaning close analyses of the immediate linguistic context of an utterance in which it appears as well as broader situational contexts. With such intricate analyses needed, data for pragmatic research has usually been quite limited to very specific text samples. The broad-sweeping comparisons across different texts have hence been difficult. The utterance-context specific interpretations seemingly limited the field to small-scale analyses—that is, until corpus linguistics found ways to not only comprise large amounts of language data, but also offer specialised corpora with sophisticated methods of annotation accommodating to the needs of pragmatics. More and more corpora are constructed that include not just text fragments, but whole texts, providing background information on speakers and listeners, as well as situational and conversational contexts (cf. Chapman 2011: 187). Further, with

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technological advances, annotation and tagging of existing texts have become more
and more versatile and applicable in various research areas, from historical
linguistics over stylistics to linguistic anthropology. For pragmatics in particular this
offers the possibility to find patterns across texts and further our knowledge of how
certain features are used for communicative purposes in a wider sense, not just
within limited contexts.

Both pragmatics and corpus linguistics are relative newcomers to the broad field
of linguistics and corpus pragmatics as the intersection of both, albeit currently still
rather small in comparison to other sub-disciplines due to the need for specialized
corpora, offers invaluable insights into how language is used for communicative
purposes. Corpus Pragmatics—A Handbook is a collection of studies that presents
recent work in this field and aims to “look at how the use of corpus data has
informed research into different key aspects of pragmatics” (summary from the
back of the book). I will give an evaluation of whether this was attained after a brief
summary of the contents of the volume itself.

After the introductory chapter, which highlights the particularities of corpus
pragmatic research in general, the volume is divided into six parts, each focusing on
a particular theme from pragmatics (speech acts, pragmatic principles, pragmatic
markers, evaluation, reference, and turn-taking). With the high number of individual
contributions, 16 studies by 21 researchers, it would be impractical to give detailed
accounts on all of these. Instead, I will highlight the ways in which they are
embedded within corpus pragmatics as a new methodological field and how they
enhance given pragmatic theories.

Part 1: Corpora and Speech Acts

Speech acts have been investigated through corpus linguistic methods in a number
of studies (mentioned here are for instance Aijmer 1996; Weisser 2003; Adolphs
2008) and the investigations in this section add substantially to what is currently
known of general patterns of speech acts and, in particular, how corpus pragmatics
as a field can be used to further explore this area. Problems arising, as pointed out in
the first study by McAllister (pp. 29–51) on indirect directives, are that speech acts
are not easily defined by a given set of lexical features. They need to be sought and
coded manually, a time-intensive endeavour that cannot yet be sidestepped with
corpus methods. Annotation or tagging of corpus data and issues connected to this
are a reoccurring theme, not only reiterated by the other two studies in this section
of the book [Kohnen on a diachronic perspective on speech acts (pp. 52–83) and
Weisser on annotation of speech acts (pp. 84–113)], but throughout the volume.
A trend throughout most of the studies included here seems to be a combination of
annotation methods with initial automated coding followed by manual proofs.

The studies presented in this chapter offer new insights into pragmatic theories,
both as corpus pragmatics as a new methodological field. In terms of theory, both
McAllister and Kohnen present new findings of speech acts in synchronic as well as
diachronic language use respectively. Methodologically, Weisser investigates semi-
automatic annotation models for pragmatic research in general and how they apply...
to speech acts in particular. This chapter stands out for its very thorough treatment of technological challenges to a corpus approach.

**Part 2: Corpora and Pragmatic Principles**

In this section pragmatic principles and corpus investigations thereof are introduced: Kaltenböck focuses on processibility (pp. 117–142), Andersen on relevance theory (pp. 118–168), and Diani on politeness (pp. 169–191). Here we find studies highlighting the advantages of conducting large-scale research. Given the availability of data (in Kaltenböck’s study for instance, appropriate texts from different time periods that will allow for investigations on language change), a corpus can give insights into pragmatic principles not only on “the level of individual usage but also on a more general structural level” (p. 118). Andersen, in the following study, argues for corpus methods that not only broaden our understanding of pragmatic principles, but that broaden our understanding in a way that is unachievable by other, more traditional methods for pragmatic research (p. 143). Looking at incoming discourse markers, Andersen shows how to systematically investigate relevance theory and argues that existing literature focuses too much on more traditional markers in a field ripe with innovation. He suggests that corpus pragmatics offers possibilities to conduct research cross-linguistically and to look into the development of items such as discourse markers through processes of borrowing, etc.

The third study of this section, by Diani, follows this notion in examining mitigated criticism strategies across two sets of cultural contexts: Italian and English academic book review articles. In terms of employing cross-cultural studies through corpus-pragmatic methods, it is pointed out here that the quantitative aspect of using corpora is not the only advantage. As has been highlighted in sections before, the opportunity to identify pragmatic patterns is one of the greatest assets of this new sub-field of study, one that needs to be further exploited.

**Part 3: Corpora and Pragmatic Markers**

With reference to pragmatic principles, as covered in the previous part, this chapter of the volume investigates corpus-led studies of pragmatic markers (Aijmer, pp. 195–218) and stance taking (Gray and Biber, pp. 219–248), areas that have seen a fair share of corpus treatment before. Both studies reflect on the versatility of markers, either for their unclear set of definitions, their various functions, or their possible implicitness. All of these present challenges to corpus pragmatic studies in that they demand manual annotation where this is missing, as well as appropriate background information about the situational context of the utterance for tagging and coding, all depending on the feature. As mentioned in the final study of this section (Norrick, pp. 249–275), corpus investigations are not always straightforward, not even with those features that are relatively clearly defined in their form and function, such as the here discussed interjections (including primary
interjections *oh* or *uh*), as well as secondary interjections (such as *gosh*, *yuck*, or
*golly*). With automated tagging often inconsistent across corpora, manual analysis is
seemingly inevitable, particularly in the case of secondary interjections (those that
belong to other word classes). Norrick presents a thorough portrayal of corpus work
that has been undertaken in terms of interjections, including notes on corpora of
various sizes and why both small and big corpora deserve a place in corpus
pragmatic methodologies.

**Part 4: Corpora and Evaluation**

The two papers in this part of the volume present corpus-pragmatic work on prosody
(Partington, pp. 279–303) and tails (Timmis, pp. 304–327). Partington specifically
highlights the advantages of corpus methods when introducing his study, which
investigates evaluative prosody and how patterns can be traced in both synchronic
and diachronic contexts. He concludes by stating that corpus methods allow for
“more rigorous and more subtle analysis” (p. 301) than what was previously
possible in tracking co-occurrence of lexical items with reference to evaluation.

Timmis’s study illustrates considerations of comparability between three corpora
and how one can use corpora in socio-pragmatic research. He also compliments the
opportunity to trace systematic feature uses and their functions in communicative
contexts with new and advanced corpus methods. Both studies highlight the
potential of corpus methods in pragmatics and how they advance the field in finding
structure in language use that was previously difficult to map appropriately across
corpora with reference to genre and time.

**Part 5: Corpora and Reference**

The two papers presented under the research area of reference emphasize the need
for specialized corpora for corpus-pragmatic research. The first (Rühlemann and
O’Donnell on deixis, pp. 331–359) is highly reliant on the thorough annotation of
texts going beyond POS tagging and into various layers including for instance
participant status or discourse presentation (see p. 342). They call for furthering the
annotation of corpus data in order to truly benefit from corpus methods in pragmatic
research.

The study following this (Cheng and O’Keeffe on vagueness, pp. 360–378)
exemplifies this call in lamenting the lack of vague language tagging, which causes
“meticulous trawling of general searches” (p. 365). Manual tagging aside however,
they conclude that corpus-based studies offer a better and more thorough
understanding of language patterns and are able to show how features are
embedded in various contexts.
Part 6: Corpora and Turn-Taking

The final part of the volume presents three studies on devices of turn-taking. Tottie (pp. 381–407) discusses the function of turn-medial fillers *uh* and *uhm* and adds to previous accounts that they function not only as turn-holding devices, but similarly as turn-planners (p. 399). Previous corpus accounts of the feature yielded a vast amount of comparable data; however, with most corpora missing utterance context—such as the subjective matter of turn position (p. 393)—definite pragmatic functions with reference to turn-taking and management are not easily assigned. Here it becomes apparent that not only the feature itself is difficult to find and to classify, but its surrounding context might be just as fickle. Moving on to backchannels (Peters and Wong, pp. 408–429) the notion of context clarification is further explored.

Here, not only the textual context is mentioned as vital in analysing pragmatic functions. Multimodal considerations, such as facial expression or gestures, are equally telling in corpus pragmatic analyses and should therefore not be ignored.

In their study, Peters and Wong highlight the technological advances of using corpus methods and including accurate timelines to their research, which advances previous accounts on the importance of backchannels for turn-management.

The final study in the volume presents the notion of co-constructed turn-taking (Clancy and McCarthy, pp. 430–453) and investigates patterns occurring at turn-boundaries. Similarly to many of the other studies discussed in the volume, they mention tedious tagging as part of the analysis process. Nevertheless, it seems that throughout the research presented here, the oftentimes lengthy manual annotation is worthwhile in terms of the findings gained.

This is one of the main implications that the book not only set out to achieve, but indeed presented thoroughly through detailed accounts of recent and relevant research. Even though many existing corpora have not (yet) been provided with the detailed contexts and annotations needed for pragmatic studies, it becomes clear that this is a mere setback that is made up for by explorations of new patterns, systematic structures and regulations that were previously undiscernible.

The studies chosen for the volume work well together and give a broad overview on the various areas pragmatics is interested in. The six parts are well structured and the individual chapters complement each other in a way that a range of views and methods are offered for similar foci. This enables the reader to get a rounded picture of the new methodological possibilities, as well as occurring challenges that might be of interest.

Unfortunately, not all studies manage to point out in detail where the advantages (or disadvantages) of corpus pragmatics in comparison to more traditional pragmatic methods lie. Further, it would have been welcomed to read more about constraints in choosing the right corpora for specific research areas that demand particular annotation. While most studies mention annotation as a problem in terms of context-bound analyses, they do not go into detail as to what that means for corpus pragmatics as a field. This volume being the first handbook on this emerging
research area especially, it would have been appreciated to see more methodological reflection on this part.

In terms of offering an overview of the main areas of pragmatic research, however, the handbook excels in giving thorough examples of corpus methods. It remains exciting to see how the increasing availability of new corpora, as well as new methods of annotating pragmatic functions will further this field. As Rühlemann alludes to in the introduction, the expansion of this field is highly dependent on advancement of technological means, aiming towards (semi-)automatic annotations “that are not only more resource-economic but also more efficient” (p. 13). Regarding this point, it was surprising not to see more mention of multimodal research. Apart from some studies employing time-stamped corpora, there is a lack of accounts on multimodal means that are surely applicable and possibly further progressive to current theories. This is especially surprising considering Rühlemann’s previous call for multimodal methods as being inevitable challenges in future pragmatic endeavours (2010: 298–299).

While an inclusion of multimodal methods would have certainly added another layer of theoretical considerations to this volume, it is clear that as it stands it already offers a vast amount of research to the reader, making this a small complaint of an otherwise thorough and expertly presented handbook. In conclusion then, Corpus Pragmatics—A Handbook provides a well-rounded and thorough overview of major pragmatic areas and their take on corpus linguistic methods. It enriches the field in expanding as well as challenging common theories through new findings, guiding the reader through the process of combining two fields of linguistics that have been thought to be “not unproblematic” (Rühlemann 2010: 289).

The handbook introduces a new field of linguistic study, promising for its exciting new insights into pragmatics and challenging for further developments of corpus methods.

References

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