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Multifunctionality in English: Corpora, Language and Academic Literacy Pedagogy

Edited by Zihan Yin & Elaine Vine
New York: Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group), 2022, 282 pp.
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Corpora and corpus linguistics have made a significant contribution towards the evolution of language teaching (Timmis, 2015). A number of language research studies that employ corpus data and tools have offered valuable references for language and literacy teachers and learners (e.g., Aijmer, 2009). The timely edited book *Multifunctionality in English: Corpora, Language and Academic Literacy Pedagogy* adds another dimension to the body of studies by presenting a collection of research on multifunctionality in English, which is still scarce. It provides a wide range of studies on multifunctional forms in English in respect of context, register and domain differences and offers relevant implications (or applications) in the English language and literacy pedagogy. Understanding the multifunctionality of language units is salient for language researchers, language teachers, learners, and professionals who deal with language use as it equips them with sufficient knowledge of the nature of language. As EFL instructors and corpus-based language researchers, we benefit from this book in two aspects. First, this book enhances and supports our pedagogical knowledge in preparing teaching materials and designing EFL curricula. Second, this edited collection provides more empirical evidence on linguistic forms and their functions, as well as recommending critical issues for future corpus research.

The edited collection is structured in a reader-friendly manner. It comprises fourteen chapters which are thematically divided into four parts. Part 1 (Chapters 2 and 3) analyses the multifunctionality in utterances in interactive discourse and linguistic innovation in various genres by employing a novel method. By examining utterances in the DialogBank corpora, Chapter 2, written by Harry Bunt, identifies four main sources of multifunctionality. He argues that understanding the dimensions and pragmatic principles of communication is essential to the pragmatic competence of proficient language speakers, thus, crucial for language learning and teaching. Chapter 3, by Elena Afros, compares and contrasts the functions of linguistic creativity in two different genres in written academic discourses: replies/responses and research articles. This chapter has shed light on the significance of linguistic creativity in academic discourse. She

demonstrates that linguistic creativity serves multiple functions in both genres. The application of her findings in EAP class can also assist students in selecting appropriate rhetorical and linguistic devices in their own writing.

Part 2 (Chapters 4-6) discusses the multifunctionality of metadiscourse in scholarly writing and academic spoken discourse. Feng Cao and Guangwei Hu (in Chapter 4) study the multifunctionality of hedges, boosters and self-mentions in a corpus consisting of research articles published in applied linguistics and psychology journals. They demonstrate that “both disciplinary and paradigmatic influences on the distribution of the multifunctional stance features of hedges, boosters and self-mentions” (p. 4). Jingjie Li, Wenjie Hu and Huili Hou (in Chapter 5) address the multifunctionality of the first-person pronoun *we* in hard sciences research articles in the CARE (Collection of Academic Research Essays) corpus. In Chapter 6, Su-Hie Ting with her colleagues compares and contrast the use of personal pronouns in secondary school English lessons and university lectures in Malaysia. They suggest that using personal pronouns in lectures and classrooms aids interactive learning and indicates teachers’ efforts to build solidarity with students.

Corpora of learner and general English and textbooks are investigated in Part 3. It provides readers with research on the multifunctionality of certain verbs. Chapter 7, by Jean Parkinson, compares the use of obligation and necessity modal auxiliaries in science laboratory reports written by ESL and L1 English writers. Lauren Whitty (in Chapter 8) investigates the multifunctional form of *being able to* in the British National Corpus (BNC) and the *New Headway* student coursebook series. She reveals a considerable difference “in the amount of surrounding context between the two sources” (p. 6). The next chapter, by Elen Le Foll, compares the utilisation of *make* in the dialogues of EFL textbooks and the natural English conversations in the Spoken BNC 2014. She has shown that corpus data can help improve materials in EFL textbooks.

The last part of this collection investigates the multifunctionality of discourse markers across various registers. Chapter 10 examines the multiple functions of *well*-in-spoken discourse. It demonstrates how those functions can be utilised for planning EFL curricula and classes. By drawing on the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English (HKCSE), Chapter 11, by Phoenix Wai Ying Lam, compares the occurrences and functions of a discourse marker *so* by L2 English speakers (Hong Kong Chinese) and native English speakers. She then provides language and literacy educators with the implications of how her findings can be applied to improve second or foreign-language education. The following chapter by Irina Zaykovskaya ⁴ studies the multifunctional word *like* as a discourse-pragmatic feature by international students who are non-native speakers of English on the Michigan State University (MSU) campus. She argues that there is a possible need for more genuine input that would introduce students to *like* and for giving them chances to analyse the stylistic variations in the use of *like*. Chapter 13, by Zihan Yin, analyses the multifunctionality of *and* in terms of “its grammatical and pragmatic functions, frequency patterns of various functions in different written and spoken registers and the interaction between sound patterns and functions in spoken registers” (p. 242). She concludes that the occurrence and functions of each function differ across registers, and different functions indicate distinct sound patterns. The last chapter (Chapter 14) provides the editors’ brief summary of the topics and findings from the studies described in Chapters 2-13 to equip the readers with a more concise description of how this volume can contribute to broadening our understanding of the complexity of multifunctional forms in English and its pedagogical implications for language and academic literacy education.

Overall, this volume is comprehensive. The strength of this collection lies in its coverage of a wide range of topics and data. It investigates the multifunctionality in utterances, linguistic creativity, and a variety of genres or registers and uses data from different English varieties. Another useful part of this collection lies in the fact that it has succeeded in bridging theory and practice by providing practical examples of how to integrate the findings into EAP//ESP and/or academic literacy courses or classes to enhance the teaching materials and curricula. All chapters in all parts include detailed investigations of corpus data and discussions of pedagogical applications of the findings. Corpus-based and ELT researchers are also provided with possible topics for future research in the last chapter. However, a few significant topics, including studies on the multifunctionality of linking adverbials, have not been fully covered in this collection, which may only be due to space limitations. The inclusion of research that investigates adversative adverbials which are underused by L2 English learners (Lei, 2012) or linking adverbials that are canonically misused by L2 speakers (Larsen-Walker, 2017) would have enhanced the comprehensiveness of this collection.

Nevertheless, despite those minor limitations, this volume is worthy of recommendation. It serves as an invaluable resource and a must-read for researchers, educators, and students interested in understanding multifunctional forms in English. It should also be a comprehensive reference for (English) language and academic literacy educators and EFL textbook editors to improve the curricula and textbook materials, respectively.

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