Review of Zihan Yin and Elaine Vine eds. 2022. *Multifunctionality in English: Corpora, Language and Academic Literacy Pedagogy.* London: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-367-72509-9. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003155072

Pascual Pérez-Paredes
University of Murcia /Spain

This is an edited volume that examines multifunctional forms in English. For the editors of the volume, Zihan Yin and Elaine Vine, the study of multifunctionality involves the analysis of "context, register and discipline variations, together with pedagogical implications and applications" (p. 2). Over 20 researchers from different institutions worldwide have contributed to the book. The studies in the volume use corpora of different varieties of English across an array of contexts and disciplines using, for the most part, similar analytical frameworks. Each chapter offers practical teaching advice, which could be considered as a specific feature of this collection of contributions.

The volume contains an introduction and 13 chapters divided into four parts entitled: 1) "Multifunctionality – Utterances and language play", 2) "Multifunctionality – Metadiscourse in disciplines and professional discourse", 3) "Multifunctionality – Verbs in disciplines and textbooks" and 4) "Multifunctionality – Discourse markers in registers." It is this last part of the volume that includes the largest number of chapters, five in total, which makes it the core of the book. In the introductory chapter, the editors advocate the combination of corpus linguistics, pragmatics, register/disciplinary variations, and language and academic literacy education. The first part consists of two chapters, while the second and third parts are composed of three chapters each. I will look at each of the four parts in the following paragraphs.

The first part of the volume looks at interactive discourse (Chapter 2) and linguistic creativity in two written academic genres (Chapter 3). Chapter 2 is an important contribution to understand how pragmatics can shed light on the multifunctional meaning of utterances in interactive discourse. I find that corpus linguists not familiar with pragmatics might benefit from this chapter most. The chapter discusses forms of multifunctionality in spoken interaction using dialogue act samples from the *DialogBank Corpus* (Bunt *et al.* 2019).[1] The chapter provides a well-informed introduction to the dialogue act theory analytical framework and its related dimensions, showing an "empirically based multidimensional approach to communication […] only marginally been considered in speech act theory" (p. 26). Note that multidimensionality in this context is not linked in any way to Biber's (1988) multidimensional analysis. These dimensions are central to the discussion of multifunctionality in the chapter and include: 1) dialogue acts that advance the task or activity, 2) self-feedback which informs about the processing of previous utterances by the current speaker, 3) allo-feedback, dialogue acts that provide/obtain information about the processing of previous utterances by the current addressee(s), 3) turn management, contact management for establishing and maintaining contact, 4) time management in the interaction, 5) discourse structuring related to topic management, opening and closing dialogues, 6) interlocutor communication management, and 7) management of social obligations, that is, the social conventions such as greeting or thanking found in any interaction. The chapter explores multifunctionality based on a conceptualization of utterance based on the ISO 24617-2 standard annotations used in *DialogBank* and the standard definition for Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs), as highly contextualized in interaction. They are seen for the most part as entailment relations where update operations on information states are pivotal: "Entailment relations between communicative functions turn up when discourse is analyzed in terms of communicative functions taken from an inventory where some functions are specializations of others" (p. 18). The chapter also discusses implicatures of topical progression, partial feedback and processing level-specific feedback (attention, perception, understanding, evaluation and execution). Despite the implications for the pragmatic analysis of conversational data, the framework presented in this chapter is not incorporated in the rest of the chapters, which mostly draw on functional analyses of personal pronouns, verbs and discourse markers which have been more widely adopted in corpus studies.

---

[1] https://dialogbank.lsv.uni-saarland.de/

Chapter 3 explores linguistic creativity "on the lexical and phrasal levels" in 30 replies/responses, a less central academic genre, and 30 research articles "published by the same authors in peer-reviewed academic journals" (p. 31). The author understands linguistic creativity as a manipulation of linguistic patterns "at all levels for both serious and humorous effects" (p. 34). The chapter examines formality incongruities and idiom variants as the most frequently used creative resources in the data. Formality incongruities happen when colloquial phraseology such as *what's wrong with X* is found in an otherwise formal context or text. They create rapport with readers and "project an image of a witty intellectual" (p. 37), strengthening the author's position and weakening the criticism/ alternative approaches. For the author, it would be desirable to include these resources in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curriculum.

The second part of the volume looks at stance markers in the soft sciences (Chapter 4), the use of *we* in hard sciences (Chapter 5) and the use of personal pronouns in student writing (Chapter 6). These three chapters adopt a similar corpus linguistics methodology where frequencies and functional categories are discussed and interpreted across disciplines.

Chapter 4 examines authorial stance in two disciplines: Applied Linguistics and Psychology research articles. The authors look at the frequency and function of hedges, boosters and self-mentions in the post-method sections of the articles, paying attention to whether different research methods play a role in explaining the differences. They use a corpus of 0.5 million words from eight research journals and a total of 120 articles. The authors find significant differences in the use of boosters and first-person determiners between the two disciplines. Differences are found between the quantitative and mixed-methods articles and between the qualitative articles. The authors conclude that there is a more explicit authorial presence in the quantitative articles.

Chapter 5 studies the frequency of *we* in terms of the semantic reference across 14 hard disciplines including Mathematics, Chemistry, Environmental Science or Computer Science. The researchers also looked at the discourse functions performed and the co-selection patterns and collocating verbs of *we* in each of the functions. The authors used the *Collection of Academic Research Essays Corpus* (CARE; Wei and Zhang 2020). The four functions analyzed are self-reference *we*, author-reader *we*, discipline *we* and general *we*. The authors find that self-reference *we* is in 87 percent of the 4,137 attested uses retrieved from the corpus. For them, this use reflects the writers' point of view when recounting their research process, methods or procedures and when analyzing data. The authors suggest that

language teachers could provide students with "the concordance lines of *we* in published hard science articles with the same function and reference" (p. 93).

Chapter 6 uses a corpus of university lectures for undergraduate students from science and arts disciplines and English lessons in secondary schools in Malaysian institutions. The authors focus on lecture introductions and different functions for the personal pronouns that are coded. The results show that *you* is the most frequently used pronoun. *We* and *I* are the least used pronouns in the lecture introductions. For the authors, the high frequency of *you*-audience uses show "the lecturers' attempts to narrow the social distance with their students" (p. 103). In both university and secondary school contexts, the *you*-audience pronoun is more frequent than *you*-generalized uses.

Part 3 of the volume showcases research that examines the use of different types of verbs across disciplines and contexts. Chapter 7 discusses the use of English modal auxiliaries in L2 and L1 English writing. The author discusses the uses of modals of necessity and obligation in laboratory reports written by year 1 English as a Second Language (ESL) science students in South Africa, and in laboratory reports by L1 writers in the *British Academic Written English* corpus (BAWE; Nesi and Gardner 2018). While the author acknowledges the different competence levels in both corpora, she suggests that this type of comparison can increase register awareness in the classroom. The ESL data was collected between 2003 and 2006, which arguably takes us back almost two decades to a time when the ecology of writing was very different from today's. ESL writers use deontic meanings significantly more frequently than BAWE writers. *Must* is used significantly more frequently in ESL reports than in the BAWE data.

Chapter 8 also explores modal verbs. The author studies the use of *be able to* in the *British National Corpus* (BNC)[2] and in the *New Headway English Language Learner* coursebook series.[3] In this chapter there is an effort to conceptualize the analysis of *be able to* as an explicit multifunctional form, something which has been missing so far in the preceding chapters. The low occurrence of this quasi modal in the analyzed coursebook suggests that language learners are deprived of fundamental input to acquire the different contexts of use between *can* and *be able to*.

---

[2] http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk
[3] https://elt.oup.com/student/headway/?cc=global&selLanguage=en

Chapter 9 examines the functions of *make* in L1 conversations and in textbooks. The author used the conversation subcorpus of the *Textbook English Corpus* (TEC–Conv; Le Foll 2021) and the spoken component of the second *British National Corpus* (Spoken BNC2014; Love *et al.* 2017). The textbook data analyzed comprises the period 2006–2018. The 'produce' meaning of *make* in the textbook dialogues is the most frequent use of the verb (29% of all occurrences), while in the Spoken BNC2014, the *causative* meaning is the most frequent semantic category (almost 33% of all occurrences). Among other findings, textbook dialogues contain fewer phrasal verbs with *make*. This study pays special attention to delexical *make* collocations, offering sound methodological considerations on the limitations about data analysis and corpus representation.

Part 4 of the volume examines discourse markers. Chapter 10 analyzes *well* from a multifunctional perspective, distinguishing between pragmatic and syntactic functions. Using data from the BNC conversational sub-corpus (BNC-C), the authors offer insights into positional analysis and occurrences in conversational turns. They also use a corpus of the *Time Magazine* over nine decades to study the emergence of new meanings such as predicative-*well* (e.g., *One possible explanation is, well, simple opportunism*). This function is not found before 1950s. For the authors, "systematic descriptions of specific items demonstrating connections between typical functions and their contexts are therefore required" (p. 180). As for language teaching, they suggest that awareness of multifunctionality of items such as *well* is associated with higher levels of proficiency.

In Chapter 11, we find an analysis of the frequencies and functions of *so* in native and non-native speakers of English (this is the terminology used in the chapter) in Hong Kong. The author uses the *Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English* (HKCSE; Cheng *et al.* 2008), a corpus that shows "intercultural encounters in Hong Kong […] between Hong Kong Chinese and speakers of languages other than Cantonese, mostly native speakers of English" (p. 208). The functions which prevail in the two groups of speakers mentioned above differ in subtle ways. The turn management function is more frequent in English native speakers. For the author, this can be explained "in terms of linguistic performance, pragmatic competence and cultural preference" (p. 218).

Chapter 12 examines the uses of *like* in 25 non-native speaking international students on the Michigan State University campus (MSU). The researcher uses the functional taxonomy developed by D'Arcy (2017), which differentiates between discourse particle, discourse marker (initial position only), quotative and approximator uses. The researcher

found that 60 percent of the speakers displayed the full range of *like* functions during the interviews. The chapter offers an interesting discussion on the learners' register and stylistic awareness of these uses, which is rarely found in this type of study, and it is a welcome addition to the quantitative findings in the chapter.

Chapter 13 looks at the uses of *and* as a coordinator and linking adverbial in academic writing, academic lectures, written news, broadcast news and conversation from the *Wellington Corpora of New Zealand Spoken and Written English* (Holmes *et al.* 1998). *And* is used more frequently as coordinator than as linking adverbial in written registers. No significant difference between the frequencies in written academic prose and written news are found. The author links pronunciation and function in the spoken data analysis, which is infrequent in corpus analyses where the suprasegmental features of spoken language tend to be ignored.

The final chapter by the editors showcases some of the main findings in each chapter. The authors conclude that when teaching multifunctional forms, context-specific teaching materials might benefit from the authenticity and relevance of the analyses provided in studies like those found in the present volume.

Reviews of edited volumes are challenging as they do not always present thematic or methodological coherence explicitly in the way one would expect from a volume that contains one, and only one, well-defined research project, written by a single author, or a single group of authors. Most of the studies in this volume do present a similar analytical framework and a similar interest in examining the multifunctional nature of specific items across data. However, not all parts of this volume present methodological or even terminological similarities. Although most of the studies in this volume adopt a similar approach in their use of corpora and the analysis of frequency and function, this is not the case of Part 1. What most of the chapters do agree on is to establish links between formal analyses of lexico-grammatical features and pedagogies that encourage awareness about the use of language, primarily English, and the presence of the notion of 'multifunctionality' in classroom pedagogy. Clearly, this idea has a very long tradition in the community of corpus linguists who have been advocating this approach for almost three decades now (McCarthy *et al.* 2021). Fortunately, we now know that the implementation of corpus-informed pedagogies has a positive impact on language learning in formal contexts (Boulton and Cobb 2017). The specificity of the studies collected in this volume, however, will require

research in classroom contexts that favor conversations between teachers, researchers, material developers and learners.

The volume presents relevant findings that contribute to the analyses of pragmatic-aware corpus studies across written and spoken registers, disciplines and speakers. Despite the contributions of the different chapters to increasing our knowledge about the use and functions of, for example, discourse markers or verbs, the volume does not present either new methodological or pedagogical contributions or a new theory of multifunctionality. Although this theoretical reflection is not the stated focus of the volume, such theorization would be incredibly useful to corpus linguists in learner corpus research and would spark conversations around the role of frequency analysis in corpus data. There is arguably further work to be done in bridging the gap between pragmatic analyses and lexically driven corpus methods. Besides, as argued by Rühlemann and Aijmer (2015: 3), the focus of pragmatic research is the individual text, which calls for qualitative methods, that is, "the focus is not on the number of occurrences but on the functional behavior observable in the texts of the phenomena under examination." As these authors observe, corpus-pragmatic research is expected to become more relevant as long as new corpora facilitate the analysis of pragmatic phenomena "in ever greater detail, depth and subtlety" (p. 23).

REFERENCES

Biber, Douglas. 1988. *Variation across Speech and Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boulton, Alex and Tom Cobb. 2017. Corpus use in language learning: A meta-analysis. *Language Learning* 67/2: 348–393.

Bunt, Harry, Volha Petukhova, Andrei Malchanau, Alex Fang and Kars Wijnhoven. 2019. The DialogBank: Dialogues with interoperable annotations. *Language Resources and Evaluation* 53: 213–249.

Cheng, Winnie, Chris Greave and Martin Warren. 2008. *A Corpus-Driven Study of Discourse Intonation: The Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English (Prosodic)*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

D'Arcy, Alexandra. 2017. *Discourse-Pragmatic Variation in Context: Eight Hundred Years of* Like. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Holmes, Janet, Bernadette Vine and Gary Johnson. 1998. *The Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English: A Users' Guide*. Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington.

Le Foll, Ellen. 2021. Register variation in school EFL textbooks. *Register Studies* 3/2: 207–246.

Love, Robbie, Claire Dembry, Andrew Hardie, Vaclav Brezina and Tony McEnery. 2017. The Spoken BNC2014: Designing and building a corpus of everyday conversations. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 22/3: 319–344.

McCarthy, Michael, Tony McEnery, Geraldine Mark and Pascual Pérez-Paredes. 2021. Looking back on 25 years of TaLC. In Pascual Pérez-Paredes and Geraldine Mark eds. *Beyond Concordance Lines: Corpora in Language Education*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 57–74.

Nesi, Hillary and Sheena Gardner. 2018. The BAWE corpus and genre families classification of assessed student writing. *Assessing Writing* 38: 51–55.

Rühlemann, Christoph and Karin Aijmer. 2015. Introduction. Corpus pragmatics: laying the foundations. In Karin Aijmer and Christoph Rühlemann eds. *Corpus Pragmatics: A Handbook*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1–26.

Wei, Naixing and L. Zhang. 2020. Introducing the Beijing CARE Academic English Corpus. *Corpus Linguistics* 7/1: 72–77.

Reviewed by
Pascual Pérez Paredes
University of Murcia
Facultad de Letras
Departamento de Filología Inglesa
Plaza de la Universidad s/n
30001 Murcia
Spain
E-mail: pascualf@um.es