

Think Local! On the Need for Text-Type Specific Lexical Grammars

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Abstract

The past few years have seen an increasing interest in studies based on new kinds of specialised corpora that capture an ever-growing range of text types. Now that more and larger collections of such specialised texts (or of “restricted languages” in Firthian terms) are becoming available, corpus researchers seem to switch from describing the English language as a whole to the description of a number of different language varieties and community discourses.

The present paper will argue that the careful empirical analysis of specialised languages is one of the futures of corpus linguistics. It will also argue that, since it is probably impossible to fully capture the ways in which meanings are created in language in general, it makes sense to focus on restricted sets of meanings and to identify what patterns are mainly used to express these meanings in particular types of texts. Suggesting to connect the corpus-based variationist tradition (e.g. Biber et al. 1999) with the corpus-driven pattern grammar approach (e.g. Hunston and Francis 2000), we will discuss the development of a local lexical grammar of evaluation that is based on a 3.5-million word corpus of English linguistic book reviews. Such a local grammar, which according to Hunston (1999: 11) “is simply a logical extension of the concept of pattern grammar”, will cover the patterns that are most characteristic of the text type under analysis and link these patterns with the most central meanings expressed in the specialised discourse.

References

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