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Fixed phrases in English and film discourse

The proposed work-in-progress reports on the formulaicity of contemporary American and British film dialogue with a view to identifying frequent phrases, their distribution and function in this particular type of spoken interaction.

The study focuses on the English component of The Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue. The Pavia corpus is a small parallel corpus of American and British films released from 1995 onwards and their Italian dubbed versions, which has been compiled at the University of Pavia during a government-funded research project (cf. Freddi and Pavesi 2009), and currently in the process of being updated and enlarged under the auspices of another interuniversity project involving Pavia, Malta and Loughborough Universities. Based on the findings from previous studies of the same corpus (Freddi in press), which revealed how the language of film dialogue is characterised by a certain amount of fixedness as a result of its diegetic nature (thus genre-specificity) as well as simulated spontaneity meant to reproduce natural conversation, a range of expressions are investigated. These include wh-questions, okay-phrases (Are you okay? and It's okay / That's okay), response forms such as all right, that's fine, utterance launchers and attention getting devices, e.g. I'm telling you, tell you what, guess what, and thing is, all known to characterise spontaneous conversation (Biber et al. 1999), together with other frequent formulas and idiomatic expressions typical of film discourse, idiomaticity being employed in the loose sense of fixed or semi-fixed pragmatic function linked to the interactional dimension of dialogic discourse.