



Review of *Exploring spoken English learner language using corpora: Learner talk*

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Exploring spoken English learner language using corpora: Learner talk

Friginal, E., Lee, J. J., Polat, B., & Roberson, A.

2017

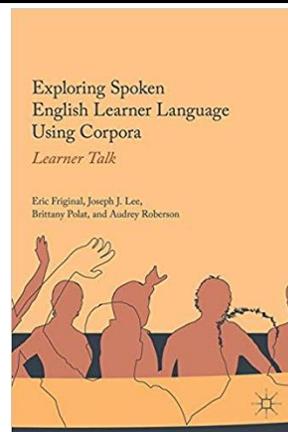
ISBN: 9783319598994

US \$ 119.99

300 pp.

Palgrave MacMillan

London, UK



With the innovation and development of computational technology and learner corpora, authentic language has become unprecedentedly accessible in the classroom. It is especially beneficial for teachers who need to have an in-depth knowledge of learner language to conceptualize classroom activities and understand the relationship between classroom interlocutors. It is equally significant for researchers who would like to embark on studies in this field. As a university language teacher and researcher myself, I am very lucky to have come across *Exploring spoken English learner language using corpora: Learner talk*, authored by Friginal, Lee, Polat, and Roberson. With the aim of offering an in-depth exploration and analysis of learner spoken language, this book presents an impressive corpus-based study of learner spoken language produced by university-level students of English as a second language (ESL) in the classroom. Using contemporary theories as a guide and employing the latest corpus analysis tools and methods, the authors analyze a variety of learner speech to offer many new insights into the nature and characteristics of the spoken language of college ESL learners.

A total of 14 chapters are divided into five parts, encompassing theory review, empirical studies, and future directions. Part I, including Chapters 1 and 2, provides a preliminary account of corpus-based research of spoken learner language. The opening chapter presents a brief overview of studies of spoken English learner language as well as an introduction to corpus linguistics and tools and approaches that are particularly applicable for comparing a wide variety of speakers and learning contexts. Teachers and interested researchers without a solid foundation in corpus linguistics will find these chapters very accessible and useful.

Chapter 2 discusses a total of eight recently collected corpora of spoken academic discourse and learner oral language in English. The authors provide descriptions of the texts and types of student oral language and some examples of corpus-based studies using these corpora. They serve as very good resources for interested readers and researchers since some of them are publicly available, while others may be purchased online from their developers. The authors also highlight specialized spoken second language (L2) learner corpora collected by various research groups globally, reflecting an internationally growing interest in the area of corpus-based research of classroom language and the combination of second language acquisition (SLA) and corpus approaches.

The next four chapters constitute Part II, addressing empirical studies of learner talk in the classroom. To begin, Chapter 3 provides an overview of approaches to L2 classroom discourse and describes the Corpus of Second Language Classroom Discourse (L2CD) as well as its two sub-corpora L2CD-S and L2CD-T, using them to investigate various linguistic dimensions of learner and teacher talk in classrooms of English for academic purposes (EAP). The two sub-corpora are again utilized in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 to explore and compare different linguistic features of learner and teacher talk.

Chapter 4 digs into how learners' and teachers' classroom use of EAP suggest their stances toward propositional content and interlocutors by means of evaluative language, particularly hedges and boosters. The analysis finds significant differences in the distribution of these interpersonal resources between learner talk and teacher talk. For example, teachers, with more hedges and relatively fewer boosters, seem to maneuver caution and certainty more effectively than learners, who, by contrast, seem to be more committed to the statements they make (p. 264). Meanwhile, learners also appear to have limited available options for expressing certainty and uncertainty. For all the differences, teacher and learner discourse have much in common with regard to the top five hedges and boosters. The authors attribute this striking similarity to a few possible reasons. One possibility is that learners are frequently exposed to the linguistic resources used by their teachers, so they tend to imitate their teachers to some degree. The second one is that these hedges and boosters are so widely used in classrooms, that learners lack a wider range of alternative vocabulary to express certainty. The authors suggest that teachers need to use other hedges and boosters to help learners enhance their linguistic repertoires, so that they can have wider options for showing stance and engage in more sophisticated interactions.

Chapter 5 explores the use of personal pronouns in learner and teacher talk. The much more frequent use of *I* and *you* than *we* by both teachers and learners suggests that EAP classroom communications are highly interactive and interpersonal. The analysis also reveals the different ways in which learners and teachers use these pronouns to position each other. For instance, teachers use the inclusive *we* to signal to learners that the classroom lesson is a jointly accomplished endeavor (Lee, 2016), while learners prefer to exclude the teachers in their use of *we*. They also find that while teachers use *you* and *we* more frequently to increase learner involvement and participation, learners prefer to use *I*, thus situating themselves at the center of the conversation. The authors suggest that teachers need to raise students' awareness of their use of personal pronouns to express their ideas more effectively, so that they can be more involved in classroom interaction and establish more intersubjective relations, which are crucial for university classes.

As the last chapter of Part II, Chapter 6 examines the ways in which learners and teachers use spatial deixis to conceptualize classroom space. The analysis reveals that *that* is the most common demonstrative used by EAP teachers, adding evidence to previous findings that demonstratives are the primary spatial deictics used in face-to-face interactions (e.g., Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999). Certainly, the present findings also differ from previous studies in many aspects. For example, *this* is also frequently utilized by teachers in EAP classrooms. The findings also show that learners and teachers conceptualize the classroom space in different ways. For instance, learners tend to use spatial deictics to position objects and class participants within their speaker territories, comparable to the way they use pronouns to locate themselves at the center of conversations in Chapter 5. By contrast, teachers prefer to shift the focal referent proximally to and distally from their territory (p. 266) with the aim of creating a more inclusive classroom space, also echoing their use of pronouns described in Chapter 5. Accordingly, the authors suggest that EAP teachers need to provide classroom instructions to help learners expand their informational space to connect with that of others, which is considered vital in university classroom interactions.

Another four chapters comprise Part III, revolving around learner talk in language experience interviews. Chapter 7 introduces the L2 Experience Interview Corpus, describing participation information, data collection, transcription, content analysis programs, and data analysis, providing the analytical foundations for Chapters 8, 9, and 10. The first two studies in Chapters 8 and 9 examine the corpus horizontally to identify themes or dimensions of L2 learning experienced by most learners. Chapter 8 focuses on the three salient themes (i.e., classroom, communicating, and studying), which appear across all texts in the corpus.

For each theme, the authors provide the 30 most-representative lemmas that are linked to L2 learning experience. The analysis indicates that most learners identify learning with classroom learning since most of their time spent in learning English is at school. Classroom is in turn related to grammar and exams, suggesting that the grammar-translation teaching method is frequently employed in their home countries. Learners want to interact with native English speakers and see it as an important part of their learning experience, but they are unsure of their own skills and find interaction uncomfortable. Finally, learners link studying with reading and writing, showing that vocabulary and written skills may not be easily integrated into oral communication skills or at least that learners view them as two very different subsets of the L2 experience (p.147).

Chapter 9 is concerned with four psychosocial dimensions experienced by L2 learners (i.e. positive-learning, negative-anxious, social-participatory, and education). The education dimension mainly relates to external impacts or study habits, in contrast to the first three dimensions, which focus on the internal aspects of the language learning experience. This chapter aims to provide inspiration for learners to understand their own psychological state during the learning process and for instructors to dynamically understand and interpret challenges encountered by learners. This study suggests that although the four dimensions are separately investigated, L2 learning should be regarded as a whole that is influenced by many aspects of the learner's life, including factors that teachers may not know about or may not have considered important (p. 165). In order to enhance L2 proficiency and the enjoyment of the learning process, both students and teachers should maintain this level of awareness and see learning as a long-term investment.

Applying semantic content analysis methods to the L2 Experience Interview Corpus, Chapter 10 vertically analyzes and compares the psychosocial traits of each interview participant, namely narrative, cognitive, and affective. The analysis finds basic distinctions in the levels of abstraction with which students describe the learning process, either surface level or deep level. Surface-level learners accept information passively without thorough reflection on its relevance to a learning situation. Deep-level learners tend to relate new material to previous knowledge and experience with the intention of understanding the situation for themselves (Benson & Lor, 1999). The authors describe several limitations that need to be further investigated in future studies and also point out that semantic content analysis should be further confirmed and expanded as a methodology for corpus-informed L2 studies.

Part IV, comprised of Chapters 11 to 13, concentrates on learner talk in peer response activities. Chapter 11 explores findings on collaborative dialogue in SLA and reviews peer response studies in the L2 writing tradition. While the literature suggests that working collaboratively is beneficial for learners (p. 218), both SLA and L2 writing researchers have identified gaps in our current knowledge of how students experience collaboration in ecologically valid contexts. The authors indicate that there is a need for continued systematic analysis of the social and linguistic features of productive talk during peer response, which is then discussed in the next two chapters.

Drawing upon a qualitative analysis of author coding as well as stimulated-recall interviews with students, Chapter 12 presents patterns of social interaction in the corpus. It also explores the relationship between these patterns and revision outcomes, investigating whether students in some patterns use more feedback or have better performance (e.g., write better second drafts) than others.

To explore the linguistic features of collaboration, Chapter 13 digs into the use of modal verbs as stance markers in two sub-sections of the Second Language Peer Response Corpus (L2PR_C): collaborative and non-collaborative talk. After presenting the frequencies and communicative functions of six modals and semimodals, the authors explore the differences in modal use between the two subcorpora. The analysis reveals that collaborative writers, who tend to lessen the intensity of suggestions or to create a more polite tone, use more modals as stance markers in a variety of ways—nearly double the number that non-collaborative writers use. These findings are aligned with the observations of most other research that has been done on instructor and student spoken stance marking in academic contexts. With very few exceptions, investigations have found that learners use modals less frequently, or in less-effective ways, than native speakers or instructors (e.g., Shirato & Stapleton, 2007; Gu, 2014). In the L2PR_C, it is collaborative

students who seem to parallel instructor or native speaker use, while non-collaborative ones appear to use modals in a way that matches studies of learner talk.

Finally, Chapter 14 provides a comprehensive conclusion of each chapter in Parts II, III, and IV. It closes the book with some implications for future research directions, including multimodal annotation and phonetically transcribed corpora of learner talk, and more well-designed, well-collected spoken learner corpora and teaching applications.

Using a range of cutting-edge corpus tools and methods, the book highlights three specialized corpora collected for the three empirical parts of this book. The authors take historical and methodological perspectives to explore spoken learner corpora, and they also suggest pedagogical applications and discuss future directions in studying learner language. While research has begun to access authentic classroom spoken learner language, it has been less attended to than language use in other settings. Written in a practical and accessible style, this book offers valuable resources for interested teachers, students, and researchers, particularly for those who lack a solid academic background in corpus linguistics and SLA. This original and impressive work focuses on types of speech that are rarely examined and makes a significant contribution to the study and understanding of ESL spoken language at the university level. It will appeal to students and scholars of applied linguistics, corpus linguistics, SLA, and discourse analysis.

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