Review of Patterns and Meanings in Discourse: Theory and Practice in Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies

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Abstract

This paper reviewed the new book *Patterns and Meanings in Discourse* by Alan Partington, Alison Duguid and Charlotte Taylor, published in 2013. In this book, Partington et al. put forth the new ideas of corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) and modern diachronic corpus-assisted discourse studies (MD-CADS) and demonstrate them with practical case studies.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, CADS, MD-CADS, Comparison

1. Introduction

Corpus linguistics in recent years has gradually become an important learning; it is no longer confined to the traditional study of word chunk, collocation, and word frequency, but has been extended to the study of discourses, and even to the study of human cognition and ideology. *Patterns and Meanings in Discourse: Theory and Practice in Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies* (CADS) is the 55th volume of the *"Studies in Corpus Linguistics (SCL)"* published by John Benjamins Publishing Company. In this book, the authors Partington et al. (2013) put forward the new ideas such as corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) and modern diachronic corpus-assisted discourse studies (MD-CADS), to highlight the importance of the comparative study, which is in accordance with the idea that the interaction between the differences and similarities is an important part of all the corpus-based comparable discourse studies. On the basis of theoretical analyses and the literature review, Partington et al. (2013) carried out a number of specific case studies using the latest technologies of corpus linguistics, which are a full demonstration of the most recent development of corpus linguistics in discourse analyses.

2. Contents

This book includes 13 chapters. The introduction chapter defines relevant terms in this book, including discourse, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics and its tasks, corpus-assisted discourse studies and its aims, the differences between traditional corpus linguistics and CADS, corpus and corpus tools, etc. The first chapter "The two principles of discourse Organization" proposes that the formation of communication discourse follows the two basic principles proposed by Sinclair in lexico-grammar, i.e., the idiom and the open choice. The former can be interpreted as schema or script recollections, that is to say, in the form of schema or lexical chunks to recall familiar everyday things, while the latter is the inductive or rule driven reasoning, that is, to summarize from the grammatical rules we know. The second chapter investigates the functions of evaluation in discourse. The collective attribution of one can be seen from the expression of evaluation, which can also be taken to guide and control the others' behaviors. Evaluation is the engine of persuasion, which can explicitly or implicitly give one a value system. Evaluation exists in various communicative discourses, and it can to a great extent promote the cohesion of a text. Evaluation has explicit markers, such as the lexical, grammatical and discourse markers, but in many cases it is implicit or embedded. In addition, this chapter also refers to the concept of evaluative prosody, holding that it can be described from the lexical, textual, psychological and statistical perspectives. The third chapter "Evaluation and control" is about the continuation of relevant evaluation topics. The control of the event or the environment is often associated with the evaluation. If they are under control, positive evaluation rises; otherwise, negative evaluation occurs. Through corpus retrieval, this chapter examines the semantic scope of control as a unit of language and the relation between control and power, which further illustrates the positive or negative psychological construction roles that control assumes in shaping the language form and language interaction. And finally, this chapter verifies the cognitive-semantic features of control through experiments and ends the debate on the existence of evaluative prosody.

The fourth chapter carries out three investigations about the nature of functions of irony based on the corpus constructed with the real-life data of the White House press briefings and the UK political interviews. The first two investigations are about the explicit and implicit ironical expressions, and the third is about the phrasal ironies. Explicit ironies are lexically marked, such as, *ironically, the irony is, it is ironic that,* and both sides of the ironic utterance are present in the discourse. Implicit ironies are marked by judging whether there are (1) laughter and (2) lexical or grammatical intensifier, and only one of the two sides is present. Whether explicit or implicit, the ironies are mainly used to blame and persuade the audience, or to accuse the third party with the speaker and the audience bundled together, as a friendly mockery or as a self-mockery. Phrasal ironies are normally composed by constituents of mutually contradictory evaluations, used to reverse the audience's normal expectation, indirectly criticize or blame, and sometimes express unusual things but not necessarily ironic. The fifth chapter mainly discusses how to investigate the two functions of metaphor using the corpus assisted method: (1) to make the abstract and unfamiliar more tangible and comprehensible; and (2) to make the common and familiar appear novel, interesting and entertaining. In this chapter, the authors first analyze the method of the corpus assisted study of metaphor, point out the challenges and potential defects of studying metaphor using corpus linguistics, and then offer two specific cases of corpus assisted studies. In addition to these two functions, Partington et al (2013) also found that metaphor has an extremely strong function of evaluation. Chapter six analyzes the dialectical relationship between corpus assisted stylistics research and careful reading, and investigates, in particular, the writing style of the British humorous novelist P.G. Wodehouse. The study shows that a large number of contractions, slang, colloquialisms, etc. are used in Wodehouse's works, which show the strong interactive-dialogue nature. The humorous effect of Wodehouse's works is achieved mainly through simple words, complex constructions, hyperbole, plural forms, litotes, simile, metonymy, vagueness and bathos, etc.

Chapter 7 "Cross-linguistic discourse analysis: Investigating the representation of migrants in the UK and Italian press" carries out a three step comparative analysis of the immigration information by the British and Italian newspapers using practical examples. The research shows that the media possibly study the attribution of information, and display different voices through letters from the readers, to express the sympathy of the views of prejudice. The British broadsheets are similar to the Italian national newspapers as the British tabloids to the Italian regional/local newspapers.

Chapter 8 investigates the essence of spoken discourses through self-constructed corpora, the White House briefings and the Hutton Inquiry. The two concepts, forced priming and priming competition, are mainly examined in this chapter. The former refers to the realization of the explanation that benefits the discourse users by repeating certain words and structures, while the latter, to the competition between groups in their attempt to force the other side or the beneficiaries to accept their information. The result is that different agencies are different in trying to make the audience accept their point of view. Chapter 9 proposes that the polite discourse has not only the function of respecting the speaker's face but also various functions of buffering the face threatening acts and the face attacking. This chapter first reviews the

corpus and the (im) polite discourse research, and then delves into the negative polite discourse functions and their markers.

Chapter 10 proposes that MD-CADS is a branch of corpus linguistics, which mainly studies how two corpora or more as similar as possible in content and structure can help analysts track the language form and meaning, and discourse practice in the modern changes in the short term. Through the SiBol/Port corpus and the 1993, 2005 and 2010 British broadsheet newspapers similar in content and structure, the authors analyzed the language changes of news reports and comments, and found that the language of the news was gradually becoming informal, the proportion of soft news and magazines are increasing relative to hard news, the proportion of positive coverage and promotion are increasing, and journalists often use dead metaphor and fixed expressions, etc. Chapter 11 analyzes two cases. One is about the change of the report of the "antisemitism" by the British newspapers, and the other is about the diachronic change of "boy/s" and "girl/s" in the British newspapers. In the second case, the authors particularly discussed the importance to find similarities using corpus and provides several methods of doing so.

Chapter12 summarizes the realizations of the theories of the corpus assisted discourse studies, i.e., the two principles of the idiom and the open choice by Sinclair, the lexical priming theory by Hoey and the evaluation theory. The former two are considered as the description of the discourse organization, and the latter is the interpretation of the communicative purpose. The corpus assisted discourse study is not a simple addition of discourse analysis and calculation; rather it is to verify or disproof our subjective bias through repetition to make discourse analysis more valuable. The appendix part briefly introduces some resources of corpus linguistics, including the editing tools, the tagging or statistical tools, etc. It specifically introduces five corpus retrieval tools and the ways to access them, nine corpora and their application methods, and the method to download corpus data mentioned in the book.

3. Brief Review

Patterns and Meanings in Discourse (2013) is another contribution on corpus linguistics following *Patterns and Meanings* (1998) written by Partington. The characteristics of *Patterns and Meanings in Discourse* (2013) are mainly as follows:

(1) Equal Emphasis on Theory and Practice: There are two views on the understanding of corpus linguistics. One is methodologically oriented and the other is theoretically oriented (McEnery & Hardie 2013:727-728; Wei et al. 2014:2). This book puts equal emphasis on the theory construction, the practical application and methodological innovation. In theory, it puts forward the concepts of corpus assisted discourse studies and modern diachronic corpus assisted discourse studies, and combines corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, which plays a great role in promoting the development of both. Although corpus assisted discourse studies have made some achievements, there are few theoretical constructions from the scientific perspective. As a subcategory of corpus linguistics, CADS studies the form and function of language as interactive discourses with the aid of computerized corpus, to uncover the meaning which cannot be found with naked eyes from the researched discourse

types. CADS can help learners learn more discourse types, and can reveal and evaluate the unique characteristics of a certain discourse type through comparison with other discourse types. This book expands the discourse organization principles by Sinclair and the lexical priming theory by Hoey to the discourse level, holding that the semantic organization of discourse is also carried out in accordance with the two principles, which, combined with the different priming conditions, forms different discourse types and forms. When describing the discourse using lexical chunk recalling, inductive reasoning and lexical priming, this book also explains the communicative purpose of discourse based on the evaluation theory, in order to construct the corpus assisted discourse study theory. From this sense, this book is of great theoretical importance.

In practice, this book can be taken as a guide book for the corpus assisted discourse studies. In addition to several individual small examples, it especially analyzes nine major example cases, including irony, metaphor, evaluation, (im)politeness, stylistics, language change, social-political issues, and many other topic scopes and domains. It offers in detail the latest technologies and methods for discourse studies using corpus, such as Sketch Engine, and Lockwords, etc. Therefore, this book is very practical and operable. In addition, this book puts forwards further suggestions in every chapter in view of the related research topics. Moreover, in the appendix, the book authors provide available resources and tools for corpus assisted discourse studies; they are all strongly operable. Therefore, from the perspective of corpus linguistics as a method or tool of discourse study, this book is of great practical importance, and hence practicable.

(2) Unique Research Method. This book emphasizes the similarities of languages, and offers six specific methods to find similarities, i.e., word comparison, consistency analysis, key keywords, consistent (or wide - distribution) collocates, lockwords and the alternative keyword calculations. Partington et al. (2013: 303) propose three advantages to find similarities: the data are more comprehensive; they help against cognitive bias problems; they make analyses more powerful. On this basis, they put forth the research method of modern diachronic corpus assisted discourse studies. Corpus linguistics usually focuses on the study of language differences. However, the idea of difference and similarity interaction is realized in finding the commonalities between language forms using corpora, the textual forms of a certain discourse type, and the characteristics and meanings of language at a certain historical stage, etc. Therefore, the diachronic comparative research method is of great methodological significance for the corpus assisted discourse studies.

This book, however, has also a number of deficiencies. First, the evaluation theory passes through various main chapters in this book, trying to explain the common phenomena discovered from corpus retrieval, but these are far from enough. For example, research in Chapter 11 shows that antisemitism also appeared in Britain and Western Europe, but there is a lack of analyses of the reasons. The evaluation itself, however, has taken an important step forward. Second, discourse analysis still lingers at the lexical and phrasal level with the discourse, and there lack analyses on the textual structures. This is precisely the direction of corpus discourse linguistics.

In short, this book has not only the discussion of theory but also the explanation of the specific practices. It is a valuable reference book for the corpus assisted discourse studies.

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