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Michael Hoey, Michaela Mahlberg, Michael Stubbs, and Wolfgang Teubert,  
*Text, Discourse and Corpora*  
 (Continuum, 2007) pp. 253.

Reviewed by LAURA STRAKOVA

Ph.D. candidate in Applied Linguistics, University of Birmingham

*Text, Discourse and Corpora* is not corpus linguistics ‘as usual,’ marked as it has been by lateral explorations of linguistic features and functions using general and specialised corpora. Although the book contains plenty of conventional corpus analysis, its chapters move well beyond the margins of convention to address some of the deeper conceptual challenges of the discipline. Through theoretical discussion and illustrative case studies, the four authors, all leading corpus linguists, show how, from the base of empirical data, corpus linguistics fits with larger issues in psycholinguistics, social theory, epistemology, and literary stylistics. Each author devotes two chapters to exploring the relationships between lexis and text (Mahlberg), lexis and grammar (Hoey), corpus linguistics and discourse (Teubert), and the configuration of a model of language that accounts for both language system and language use (Stubbs).

Hoey demonstrates how his corpus-based theory of lexical priming (*Lexical Priming* 2005) can account for the creative literary choices writers make and, in his second chapter, examines how personal grammars come to “exist as a product of our primings” (31). Priming, for Hoey, is a psychological concept: Frequent and repeated encounters with how words, structures, or patterns behave in the past will lead individuals to expect, and hence produce, the same kind of lexical behaviour in the future. A corpus is a record of those primings. Mahlberg’s innovative final chapter links with Hoey’s first chapter in explaining what stylistics stands to gain from the creative use of a specialised literary corpus. She utilizes a custom-built corpus of Dickens’ work creatively by producing several reference corpora and by automating a search for recurrent phraseology; what she finds are distinctive stylistic patternings and characterizations which would be unobservable to the unaided eye, and which show up important differences between Dickens and his literary contemporaries. Stubbs posits a four-part model of language that accounts for both language system and language use, an uncomfortable dichotomy never adequately resolved by corpus linguists. To exemplify the link between system and use, he analyses the phraseology of *world* in the British

National Corpus, and so takes a synchronic view, whereas Teubert takes a diachronic, intertextual perspective on meaning and discourse and builds a specialised corpus of Catholic social encyclicals. Like Hoey, Teubert prioritises the way in which previous communicative events shape current ones. But whereas Hoey focuses on the individual's private language experience and the construction of a personal grammar, Teubert focuses on social language experience, as it is only in society, in the discourse, where meaning is found.

Stubbs and Teubert attend closely to the conceptual, theoretical foundations of corpus linguistics as a discipline by arguing for its relevance beyond being a bundle of methods. They abstract from the "tight, empirical world" (1) of data to the theoretical world of epistemology and social constructionism. These two, taken together, make a powerful and persuasive case, so it is unfortunate that some indecision about the status of corpus linguistics should seem to infringe on Mahlberg's final chapter of the book. Mahlberg, for example, writes that "corpus stylistics *can do more than simply apply computer methodology* to the study of literature" (240, my italics), yet a paragraph earlier she states that "what it can do is highlight features that are made visible *with the help of corpus linguistic tools . . .*" (239, my italics).

Teubert argues that experts "have to discuss the data they are confronted with, with the aim of agreeing on an interpretation of this data" (59). Although all the case study analyses are rigorous and transparent, interpretations of the data seemed to be on occasion stretched, generalised, and hasty. Hoey's analysis could be read to imply that individuals get primed by everything – we serve as passive receptacles for primings ("we receive primings" 51), in spite of a large number of caveats to the data on which his conclusion is drawn. A plausible alternative, that primings may be in part construed, is oddly absent for an argument that claims that primings may be self-consciously overruled. Similarly, Mahlberg's first chapter conducts an exemplary analysis of *sustainable development*. For data handling, she classifies the lexical item into eleven functional groupings, some with very low frequencies. Although she qualifies her conclusions to match the limited data, there may be diminishing returns in assigning interpretative value to smaller and smaller pieces of data.

Relating corpus linguistics to wider issues also entails creating new descriptive categories, both on the conceptual level (Hoey's theory of lexical priming, Mahlberg's concept of local textual functions) and on the methodological one (Mahlberg's eleven functional classifications of the use of *sustainable development*). But such expansiveness and plurality moves the field in new directions while leaving several longstanding questions without an agreed interpretation, such as what corpus linguists mean by 'discourse' and even by 'meaning.'

But these points are not demerits against the scholarly value of the study; *Text, Discourse and Corpora* is an outstanding and impressive book. In a discipline which unites empirical science and hermeneutic art, achieving a comfortable alliance is going to take time. The authors not only acknowledge this need for change, but embrace it by being both self-reflective, and expansive, about the directions that corpus linguistics might take.