

Shorter notices

The 18th ICAME conference in Chester, England (21-25 May 1997)

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A gathering of 'corpies'¹

The town of Chester was certainly a beautiful setting for the 18th ICAME conference, which was organized by Antoinette Renouf and her team at the University of Liverpool. Coming from the railway station across the road, as I believe most of us did, we received a royal welcome at the Queen Hotel, which was suitably English, suitably Victorian, and definitely very well chosen as a conference venue.

The ICAME conference is growing. This year there were 98 participants (of whom four were registered as ICLE visitors and eight as local participants), a nice mixture of old and new faces. In spite of this large number, all sessions were plenary. With 35 papers and twelve poster presentations the schedule was rather packed, but there was a certain amount of spare time during which we could enjoy a software demonstration or go to ICLE sessions in the evenings, where yet four papers and two posters were presented.

Academic life

As the use of corpora is spreading to more and more branches of linguistics, we see a growth of specialized corpora with accompanying special-interest groups under the ICAME umbrella. We have become used to having the historical workshop in advance of the conference itself, and a network for contrastive corpus studies has been in operation for a few years. A new addition at this conference was the ICLE workshop, organized by Sylviane Granger, which confirmed the widespread interest in learner corpora, the corpus now having grown to include

learner English from eleven different language backgrounds.

New developments on the corpus scene were visible in many of the papers. The BNC has already gained a solid position among corpus linguists. There was a question session on the BNC by Lou Burnard, Claire Warwick and Guy Aston in which the BNC sampler was discussed, which is no doubt going to be a valuable research tool for all of us. There was a subsequent software presentation of the new version of SARA, the search tool that has been designed for the BNC.

The number of papers that were partly or wholly based on the BNC shows that the advent of this corpus has inspired a lot of interesting work. A group from Zürich presented an alternative search tool for the BNC to be used over the Internet, and Dieter Mindt talked about 'Using the BNC without SARA'. The papers exploring BNC material reflect the highly diverse research interests of Gisle Andersen (Pragmatic markers in teenage and adult conversation), Sebastian Hoffmann (*That*-omission in mandative sentences), Magnus Levin (Concord with collective nouns), Ylva Berglund (*Gonna* and *going to*), Christian Mair (on the use of *which* with human antecedents), Geoffrey Leech & Paul Rayson (Social differentiation in the use of English vocabulary), and Andrea Sand (Customized subcorpora of the BNC and their use in variation studies).

A new historical corpus has been completed, namely the Lampeter Corpus of Early Modern English, which contains 1.1 million words of non-fictional prose published between 1640 and 1740. The corpus was presented by Claudia Claridge and Rainer Siemund, who promised that the corpus would be made available soon through ICAME.

The Helsinki group is still impressively active in their work with compiling diachronic corpora of various kinds. Anneli Meurman-Solin reported on progress with her corpus of women's Scots, with some preliminary findings. Furthermore, Jukka Keränen gave a progress report on the Corpus of Early English Correspondence, spanning the period 1420-1680. The corpus at its present stage is already in use, as evidenced by Minna Aunio and Arja Nurmi's paper.

Another type of corpus which has established itself in ICAME circles is parallel corpora for use in contrastive analysis and translation studies. Reports were given on work with the Swedish-English Parallel Corpus by Bengt Altenberg (adverbial connectors) and Jennifer Herriman (tense in English and Swedish), and with the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus (now complete) by Hilde Hasselgård (information structure in translation).

A number of papers were dedicated to lexis. Michael Hoey suggested an analysis of 'colligations', a term used for the grammatical company

a word keeps, in contrast to the more familiar collocational patterning. Pam Peters explored Brown and LOB 'in quest of International English'. Harald Baayen gave a paper on lexical innovation by means of productive suffixes, and Alex Collier and Mike Pacey described a system for identifying the thesaurus in text, a new application of the ACRONYM system. Magnus Ljung presented a study of hedges in a corpus of newspapers and Göran Kjellmer one of American personal names from a diachronic perspective. Also diachronic in its perspective was Manfred Markus's discussion of '*a*-adjectives' in postnominal position.

Corpus-based discourse analysis was evident in many papers, some of which have been mentioned already under different headings. John Kirk reported on an investigation of subordinate clauses as register markers, based on the Northern Ireland Transcribed Corpus of Speech along with two corpora of written English. A joint paper by Martin Wynne, Mick Short and Elena Semino tackled the question of speech and thought representation in narrative text. Perhaps less corpus-based, but highly discourse-analytical, were Anne Wichmann's reflections on intonation as a marker of attitudes in conversation.

Papers were also offered on topics of a methodological nature. Alex Chengyu Fang talked about the automatic determination of the syntactic functions of prepositional phrases, a well-known problem for automatic parsing. Harald Baayen gave a paper about word frequency statistics, and Charles Meyer presented a paper (written jointly with Bill Kretzschmar) on statistical measurement. In a different vein, but still of great interest to corpus compilers was Kristine Hasund's discussion of whether or not to change the names of informants in spoken corpora to protect their identity. Inge de Mönnik reported on elicitation experiments in connection with her work on discontinuous noun phrases.

With the proliferation of different corpora with varying degrees of tagging and diverse tagsets, the developing of a multitagger, the work of Eric Atwell and the rest of the Leeds group is certainly very useful, in that it allows linguists to have a text tagged (through an e-mail server) with any of eight different English Corpus tagsets. This service will clearly simplify and improve comparisons across corpora.

The Internet represents a new challenge to corpus linguists. While Gunnar Bergh presented a paper on the Internet as a language resource, Bas Aarts and Gerald Nelson reported on their work with an Internet grammar for use in teaching and research.

Social life

The 18th ICAME conference will go into the books as the conference with the highest possible number of receptions. One can only admire the social network Antoinette must have made use of in order to persuade the British Council, the Mayor of Chester, and the University of Liverpool respectively to offer free drinks to all the ICAMERs.

The conference excursion naturally went to Liverpool, to offer ICAMERs a view of the city which was rejected in favour of Chester as a conference venue. The annual boat trip was 'on a ferry 'cross the Mersey', which of course had to be done in Liverpool. Most of the party then took a stroll round the Albert docks on the Mersey river to enjoy its selection of nice little shops and cafés and perhaps even the Beatles museum. After this we were welcomed by the pro-vice-chancellor of the University and the head of the English department, Professor Kelvin Everest, in the university's own charming art gallery. Antoinette will probably also remember with delight or horror the five minutes when her office was suddenly full of about fifty people curious to see the place.

The words 'gala supper' on the programme raised expectations, and we were not let down. At the reception preceding the supper, Gunnel Tottie was presented with a Festschrift on the occasion of her 60th birthday. During the dinner itself, an excellent four-course meal, Gerry Knowles and Andrew Hamer enlightened us all in a very entertaining manner about the intricacies of Scouse. Surprisingly enough, most of us could still walk after the meal, and the disco entertainment that followed produced great activity on the dance floor.

Outside of organized activities, the meals and tea/coffee breaks gave ample opportunities to talk to old friends and colleagues and make new acquaintances. So did late evenings in the Queen Bar, or in one of the pubs in town. As is so often said about conferences: One of the most important things about them is the informal contact with colleagues from different universities and different countries.

New words

Whereas new words emerging from the last couple of conferences have mainly been supplied from the COLT corpus, this year's addition to everyone's vocabularies came from other sources. We learned from Matti Rissanen's thank-you speech in Chester Town Hall that a mayor's wife should be entitled 'Lordess Mayoress'. Furthermore, if corpus linguistics had been widespread in the Scouse area, we would all have been called

'corpies', if Andrew Hamer guessed right.

Thank you

Finally I would like to extend warm thanks to Antoinette Renouf and Linda Miller and the rest of the Liverpool team for all the work they must have done before the conference and behind the scenes in order to create such a relaxed atmosphere in spite of the heavy schedule and make this ICAME conference such a success.

Notes

1 See explanation under 'New words'!