Shorter notices

The 19th ICAME conference in Newcastle, Northern Ireland (20–24 May 1998)

Ylva Berglund
Uppsala University

A warm May sun welcomed the participants of the 19th ICAME conference as we arrived at the Slieve Donard Hotel, Co. Down. The beautiful surroundings, the luxurious hotel and all the familiar faces arouse expectations of a highly enjoyable conference. As it turned out, the conference was not only socially enjoyable, but also packed with interesting, substantial presentations showing the width and depth of the research performed by the ICAMErs.

The conference was officially opened at a reception at the Queens University, Belfast on the evening of May 19th. The participants that had arrived that afternoon were taken to the venue after an escorted sight-seeing walk of the sites of Belfast. At the reception, Hugh Magennis gave a highly appreciated talk entitled 'Drink and Drunkenness in Anglo-Saxon Writing'. Having learned how drinking confirmed social relationships in Anglo-Saxon times, the conference delegates then showed how eating seems to have obtained that role in our times.

Early in the morning on the following day, the first bus-load of ICAMErs left Belfast for Newcastle, on the East coast of Northern Ireland, and the venue of this year's conference, the luxurious Slieve Donard Hotel.

First on the programme was the one-day Historical Corpora Workshop, which this year had some 20 participants. The workshop was opened by Matti Rissanen who gave an enlightening presentaion of 'English Historical Corpora in 1998: An Overview'. Through the presentations by Irma Taavitsainen ('Metatextual Comments and the Evolution of Early Medical Writing'), Terttu Nevalainen ('Recent Work on the Corpus of Early English Correspondence') and Jukka Keränen ('*CEEC and Ye Shall Find:* The Corpus of Early English Correspondence') we learned about some of the work done in Helsinki.

The birth, or completion, of the Lampeter Corpus of Early Modern Tracts was announced at the ICAME conference in 1997. This year we learned more about this interesting new resource. Lou Burnard talked about some issues related to the corpus and, in particular, about the on-going effort to encode the text according to TEI standards. Claudia Claridge presented some of the research done on the corpus in Chemnitz ('Early Modern Science: Authorial and Factual Styles of Writing'). Interesting presentations were also given by Douglas Biber ('Dimensions of Variation Among 18th Century Speech-based and Written Registers'), Anne Curzan ('When *It* Became All Things: Results of a Helsinki Corpus Study on the Rise of Natural Gender in English'), Christer Geisler ('*A Person to Help You:* Postmodifying Infinitives in a Diachronic Perspective'), and Gerry Knowles ('In Search of the Origins of Northern English'), showing that research on diachronic corpora is a fruitful and rewarding area. Initiated by discussions at ICAME-97, the workshop this year consisted not only of paper presentations but concluded with a discussion session on 'Tagging and Parsing Historical Corpora', chaired by Anne Curzan and Merja Kytö.

The main conference started with a reception on the Wednesday evening, sponsored by The British Council. The conference organizer, John Kirk, gave one of his much appreciated speeches, making us all feel welcome to this gathering of the ICAME family. The family keeps on growing. This year the list of participants included one hundred names and the packed programme listed some sixty formal papers, twelve posters and ten software demonstrations.

The presentations had been grouped into a number of themed sessions. There were a number of sessions on linguistic topics such as 'Verbs', 'Vocabulary' and 'Syntactic Topics', illustrating the great width and variety of linguistic research based on the study of corpora. Other aspects of corpus related work were also presented, for example in the session on 'Tagging and Parsing'. Some sessions focused on the work at a particular unit, such as 'Lancaster', 'Liverpool', and 'Birmingham and COBUILD'. These sessions showed that even if a unit is specialised in some way, the research there can be varied and diversified.

A couple of sessions were devoted to work on a particular type of corpus. In the 'Learner Corpora' session, we were invited to hear about the research done with Russian (Natalia Gvishiani), Norwegian (Angela Hasselgren), and French, Dutch, Polish, English and Spanish (Sylviane Granger and Martin Wynne) learner corpora. The 'Newspaper Corpora' session this year included presentations by David Minugh ('*You People Use Such Weird Expressions:* The Frequency of Idioms in Newspapers'), Hans Lindquist ('*A Little More Curvy at the Corners:* Syntactic and Contextual Factors Influencing the Comparison of

Disyllabic Adjectives'), and Vincent Ooi ('Asian or Western Realities? Collocations in Singaporean-Malaysian English').

A number of papers were based on some of the new corpora that we hope to see more of before long. Bas Aarts and Gerry Nelson presented 'New Developments in ICECUP', and Charles Meyer showed how the corpus had been used for syntactic analysis. Sean Wallis demonstrated his 'Fuzzy Tree Fragments' that can be used to specify grammatical queries in parsed corpora like ICE-GB. Christian Mair and Magnus Levin presented research done on the Freiburg corpora FLOB and Frown. These interesting new corpora will surely be a valuable resource for research of various kind, and we are looking forward to hearing more about them at the next ICAME conference in Freiburg.

It is obvious that the British National Corpus is being used increasingly in the research community. Not only were there three sessions explicitly centered around work on this particular corpus, but the corpus was also used for a number of presentations in other sessions, such as the one on 'Spoken Corpora and Discourse Features' and the poster session, for example. A couple of the software presentations also related to the BNC, with Lou Burnard showing the SARA/BNC Online and a demonstration of the impressive BNCweb produced by Sebastian Hoffmann, Hans Martin Lehmann, and Peter Schneider in Zürich.

One morning started with a special plenary in which Junsaku Nakamura introduced us to the 'Semantic Universe of the LOB Corpus'. He showed how he and his team investigate text types on the basis of the frequency distribution of linguistic items by a method called Correspondence Analysis or Quantification of Contingency Table. One great benefit of this method is that it is relatively simple and can be used for processing a large number of samples, larger than the LOB corpus used for their present pilot study. Interestingly, another investigator of text types, Douglas Biber, chose to talk about 'Variation in the Form and Use of Complement Clauses'. Like the next speaker, Geoffrey Leech ('Corpus Grammar and Spoken English'), he based his presentation on on-going research for the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*.

In addition to the paper and poster presentations, the programme included software demonstrations. We were excited to hear Knut Hofland talk about the new ICAME CD-ROM that will be released soon, with many new, interesting corpora on it. We also got a chance to learn more about some of the programs/tools that were mentioned in some of the papers. Atro Voutilainen, for example, presented and demonstrated 'Helsinki Taggers and Parsers' and Pasi Tapanainen talked about 'Automatic Tools for Lexicographers'. They closed their presentation with a quick demonstration of a new parsing program, where the un-parsed segments of a sentence floated around on the screen. That arose much interest,

especially triggered by the clever illustration of the new 'ping-pong effect'. It took a while before all of us realised that the new effect had nothing to do with linguistics, but was just an ingenious trick performed by skilful programmers. The interest was not diminished by that – the demonstration was given again and again in the bar throughout the conference.

The social programme was as full as the scholarly one. The participants were entertained, among other things, at receptions hosted by The British Council, the Down District Council, and John Kirk himself. As it happened, the referendum when the people of Northern Ireland voted about the peace process, took place during the ICAME conference. This added a special touch to the conference and we all felt priviledged to be given this opportunity to be present in Northern Ireland at such a historic time.

In addition to the conference programme and the conveniences at the hotel, the surroundings and marvellous weather contributed to our enjoyment during the conference. The beautiful Mountains of Morne proved an irrestistible temptation for many delegates, who walked the short distance through the small town to ascend the mountain slopes and enjoy the spectacular view of the Irish landscape, framed by rhododendron in full blossom. As the food was delicious and served in generous portions, this exercise was indeed something that many of us needed badly.

The conference closed on Sunday, and some of the delegates then went on a very interesting excursion to Giants Causeway. The diminishing crowd, together with the weather that suddenly turned cold and rainy, made us all realise that the fun was over for this year. It was generally agreed that the conference had been a success both on the scholarly and social level. Our warm thanks go to the friendly people in Newcastle for making us feel welcome, the staff at Slieve Donard for catering for our needs with neverending patience and, last but not least, to John Kirk and his crew for their toil to make this conference one we will always remember with pleasure.

The Computer Clearinghouse Project

Evelyn S. Firchow and Anna A. Grotans
The Ohio State University

The Computer Clearinghouse Project for computer-aided studies in all areas and periods of German Language, Literature and Language Pedagogy and in Medieval Scandinavian invites all colleagues working in these fields to list ongoing, completed and/or projected work with the Project Director, Professor Evelyn S. Firchow, University of Minnesota, 219 Folwell Hall, 9 Pleasant Street S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455-0123, USA (email: firch001@maroon.tc.umn.edu)

Only projects using the computer for calculations and research can be included – not word processing. All projects will be listed in the *International Annual Newsletter for German Computer Research* published in the first annual issue of the *Germanic Notes and Reviews*. Yearly subscriptions to this journal are U.S. $14 domestic and U.S. $16 international. All checks or inquiries should be sent to Professor Richard Krummel, Editor, *Germanic Notes and Reviews*, 2801 Arrowwood Circle N.W., Bemidji, MN 5660I, USA.

An abbreviated version of the *Newsletter* appears in the first yearly issue of *Germanistik* (Niemeyer, Tübingen). This list does not include projects in German Language Instruction or the Items of Interest sections.