

Corpus pragmatics across genres: Commitments in emails and spoken language

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- What can corpus pragmatics do for us?
- How do we do commitments in workplace conversations?
- Can we come up with cross-genre generalisations about speech acts?

What can corpus pragmatics do for us?

Social interaction is inescapable:

- decoding social intent
- learning to make and recognise commitments (EFL)
- learning the rules of a workplace

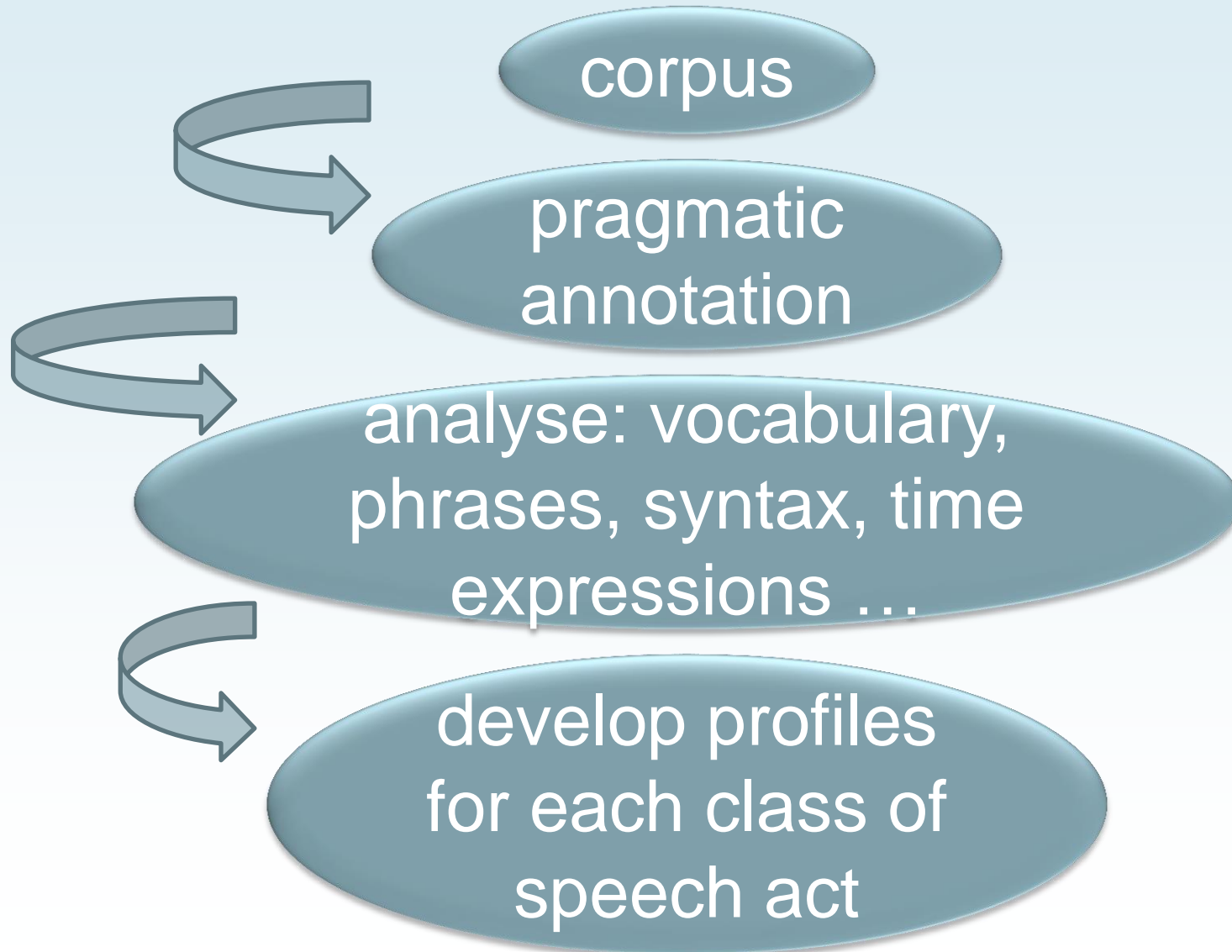
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We can find out by looking at real data rather than relying on intuitions.

What can corpus pragmatics do for us?



	SOFT	HARD
ACTION	<p><i>I can + action + [delimiting clause]</i></p> <p>I can call and get the address. I can make the reservations if you want.</p>	<p><i>I will/am going to + action + timestamp</i></p> <p>I will email the report at 9.</p>
LOCATION	<p><i>I can + be/make + PP</i></p> <p>I can be reached at this number.</p>	<p><i>I am/will be + PP loc + time expression</i></p> <p>I'll be in at 7am tomorrow.</p>
SOCIAL (phatic)	<p><i>verbs of communication, no timestamp</i></p> <p>I'll let you know when I figure it out. I'll keep you posted.</p>	<p>-----</p> <p>(De Felice 2013)</p>

How do we do commitments in workplace conversations?

- Testing categories on spoken data: ICE-GB
 - 10 ‘business’ conversations
 - 2700+ turns overall

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- Testing categories on spoken data: ICE-GB
 - 10 ‘business’ conversations
 - 2700+ turns overall
- Manually identified 67 instances
 - Less than 3% of turns
 - In email data: 10.5%

How do we do commitments in workplace conversations?

- Uhm I'll have a look at that before I go just to...
- I'll ask around
- And I can make them
- I'll bring it don't worry

Vocabulary comparison – top 30 bigrams

- Phrases common to both:
I will – we will – will be – to you
I can – we can – I am going to

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→ prototypical commitment structure is pervasive

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 - I will – we will – will be – to you
 - I can – we can – I am going to
 - Phrases peculiar to spoken:
 - sort of – I mean – uhm I
 - I think – want to – now I
- spoken language has hesitation and disfluencies (unsurprising)
- perhaps more immediate

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- Phrases peculiar to spoken:
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 - I think – want to – now I
- Phrases peculiar to email:
 - be + PPs – at + time – as soon as
 - if you – will try to – happy to – will get
 - will let you know – will forward

Can we come up with cross-genre/cross-modal generalisations?

Action – I will finish the report tonight.

Location – I will be in the office at 8.

Social – I'll keep you posted.

Can we come up with cross-genre/cross-modal generalisations?

Action – I will finish the report tonight.

- Predominant type
- Lack of timestamps: contexts less time sensitive, not deadline-oriented
 - some vague ones: before I go; about September; until beyond the next meeting; at some point

Can we come up with cross-genre/cross-modal generalisations?

Location – I will be in the office at 8.

- Totally absent
- Evidence is inconclusive: feature of spoken language, or feature of these contexts?

Can we come up with cross-genre/cross-modal generalisations?

Social – I'll keep you posted.

- Seemingly absent - unexpected
- Other strategies used to build rapport in face-to-face interaction – laughter, jokes, banter...
 - Also possibly due to context

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Social – I'll keep you posted.

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- Other strategies used to build rapport in face-to-face interaction – laughter, jokes, banter...
 - Also possibly due to context
- Note also absence of 'if you (want)'

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How should the following be categorised?

- I was going to ask Rachel actually if she could just give us a breakdown of the questionnaire returns
- I'll say something about that after the report yeah
- Now I'm going to nominate Katherine

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- Commitment-like phraseology
- Reference to intentions and future actions
- Main function actually **discourse management**

Can we come up with cross-genre/cross-modal generalisations?

email

Location – I will be in the office at 8.

Social – I'll keep you posted.

Action – I will finish the report tonight.

spoken

Discourse management – I'll say something after the report.

...written?

To conclude

- Different modes of communication call for different types of speech acts
 - Some generalizations hold
- More data required
 - Comparison with non-business conversations
 - Written language
 - Business English from the BNC