

## Review of *LEARNER ENGLISH ON COMPUTER*

Learner English on Computer  
Sylviane Granger (Ed.)

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Reviewed by [Michael Barlow](#), Rice University

### OVERVIEW

Second language research has been dominated largely by a single issue for several years now, namely, the role played by UG (universal grammar) in the learning of a second language. Despite the clarity of this question, the results forthcoming from a considerable research effort within the field of SLA have not thrown much light on the multifaceted nature of L2 learning. It is, therefore, perhaps a good time to initiate an alternative data-driven paradigm based in part on the investigation of spoken and written language produced by L2 learners. The prerequisite for this alternative line of inquiry is the existence of thoughtfully constructed learner corpora and software tools for corpus analysis. These topics, along with preliminary analyses based on learner corpora and the comparison of learner corpora with native speaker corpora, are covered in *Learner English on Computer*. As Geoffrey Leech notes in the preface, "this is the first book devoted to the idea of collecting a corpus of the language produced by foreign language learners" (p. xiv) and "we may claim that the concept of a learner corpus is an idea 'whose time has come'" (p. xvi). While this may be an idea "whose time has come," even now, two years after the publication of this book, the concept of a learner corpus is still largely unknown within the SLA and TESL communities (especially in the U.S.). For those who want to explore this promising avenue of research, this volume provides a solid source of information and ideas.

Sylviane Granger, editor of *Learner English on Computer* and Director of the [Centre for English Corpus Linguistics \(CECL\)](#), has also been closely involved with the creation of the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE), which is featured in various articles in the volume. The volume begins with a preface by [Geoffrey Leech](#) and an introduction by Sylviane Granger. The main body of the book is divided into three sections:

### Part 1: Learner Corpus Design and Analysis

This short first section covers the basics of learner corpus design and corpus analysis.

In chapter 1, "The computerized learner corpus: a versatile new source of data for SLA research," to provide a setting to the volume, Sylviane Granger situates the use of learner corpora within the field of SLA research and discusses issues related to the construction of corpora.

In chapter 2, "Computer tools for the analysis of learner corpora," [Fanny Meunier](#) provides a general overview of different kinds of corpora and approaches to text analysis, followed by descriptions of their relevance to the investigation of learner corpora.

## Part II: Studies of Learner Grammar, Lexis and Discourse

Part 2 contains a variety of case studies investigating learner lexis, discourse, and grammar, among other topics. This section forms the heart of the book and includes a wide range of types of learner corpora studies. Many of these are based on analyses at the word level: word frequencies, comparisons of words found in different environments, and so on. While there is also some discussion of collocations and prefabricated units in this section (especially in chapter 5), I would like to have seen more studies on the use of chunks and multi-word units by learners. However, since the ICLE is designed in such a way that there are 200,000 words per national subcorpus, a comprehensive study of the use of collocations by learners may have to wait for the construction of larger learner corpora.

In chapter 3, "Vocabulary frequencies in advanced learner English: a cross-linguistic approach," Hakan Ringbom examines differences in the frequency distribution of words by NSs and NNSs showing, for example, that NNSs tend to overuse the verbs *think*, *get*, *find*, *want* and *know*.

In chapter 4, "Overstatement in advanced learners' writing: stylistic aspects of adjective intensification," Gunter Lorenz discusses possible reasons for the overuse of adjective intensification by German advanced learners of English.

In chapter 5, "An automated approach to the phrasicon of EFL learners," Sylvie De Cock, Sylviane Granger, Geoffrey Leech and Tony McEnery describe the use of automatic collocation extraction utilities to investigate the use of prefabricated forms by NSs and NNSs and to analyze differences in the use of these forms by the two groups.

In chapter 6, "The use of adverbial connectors in advanced Swedish learners' written English," Bengt Altenberg and Marie Tapper offer a preliminary study of advanced Swedish learners of English which shows an underuse of resultatives (e.g., *hence*) and contrastives (e.g., *however*). According to the authors, this may be related to a lack of awareness of register differences on the part of the students.

In chapter 7, "Direct questions in argumentative student writing," Tuija Virtanen describes the frequency and placement of direct questions in the writing of NSs and NNSs.

In chapter 8, "Writer/reader visibility in EFL written discourse," Stephanie Petch-Tyson examines the presence of the writer in the written discourse of NSs and NNSs and finds that learner writers tend to more overtly mark their presence in discourse through the use of *I*, for example.

In chapter 9, "Automatic profiling of learner texts," Sylviane Granger and Paul Rayson report various results from the automatic analysis of learner corpora, including the fact that NNSs tend to overuse determiners, pronouns, and adverbs, and to underuse conjunctions, prepositions, and nouns. On a more detailed level, they note that learners often exhibit a higher use of *a* and a lower use of *the*.

In chapter 10, "Tag sequences in learner corpora: a key to interlanguage grammar and discourse," Jan Aarts and Sylviane Granger make use of tagged corpora and extract tag trigram frequencies (such as PREP ART N) with the aim of discovering correlations between tagtrigram frequencies and different learner varieties.

## Part III: Pedagogical Applications of Learner Corpora

Part 3 describes how Computer Learner Corpus (CLC) based studies can be used to improve pedagogical tools such as grammars, textbooks, and electronic tools.

In chapter 11, "Comparing native and learner perspectives on English grammar: a study of complement clauses," Doug Biber and Randi Reppen discuss various sources of information about the target language available to teachers and learners, and exemplifies the use of corpus data with a discussion of the NS and NNS use of different kinds of complement clauses.

In chapter 12, "Using learners' corpus in compiling ELT dictionaries," Patrick Gillard and Adam Gatsby describe the use of learner corpora, and the Longman Learner Corpus in particular, in compiling dictionaries for language learners.

In chapter 13, "Enhancing a writing textbook: a national perspective," Przemyslaw Kaszubski gives a brief description of the use of information from learner corpora to complement material in writing textbooks.

In chapter 14, "Exploiting L1 and interlanguage corpora in the design of an electronic language learning and production environment," John Milton offers an interesting chapter showing how data from NS and NNS corpora can be used to create "electronic learning" experiences and writing assistants for NNS writers.

In chapter 15, "Learner corpus data in the foreign language classroom: form-focused instruction and data-driven learning," the final chapter, Sylviane Granger and Christopher Tribble provide an overview of the methodological issues connected with the use of corpus material in the classroom.

Overall, *Learner English on Computer* provides an excellent introduction to the field of learner corpus analysis. I recommend the volume both as a description of a variety learner corpus projects and as a source of ideas for learner corpus compilation and analysis. I believe that interest in this area will continue to grow over the next decade and that this volume will be the main source of reference for studies in this area for some time to come.

As a final comment, readers interested in Websites related to learner corpora might be interested in the list of [learner corpora](#) and other resources compiled by Yukio Tono, who is currently at the University of Lancaster.

### **ABOUT THE REVIEWER**

[Michael Barlow](#) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Languages at Rice University. He has written articles on corpus linguistics and has created text analysis tools of different kinds. Michael Barlow's website lists a variety of resources related to corpora.

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