Book review: Ten Lectures on Corpora and Cognitive Linguistics

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Abstract

Michael Barlow's Ten Lectures on Corpora and Cognitive Linguistics is an insightful addition to the field, offering a unique examination of the intersections between corpus linguistics and cognitive linguistics. Readers may find themselves questioning what sets this volume apart from existing works on the subject. This volume is part of the Distinguished Lectures in Cognitive Linguistics series published by Brill in 2023 and captures the essence of Barlow's lectures at the 21st China International Forum on Cognitive Linguistics. Structured as a cohesive series of ten lectures, each chapter addresses specific aspects, such as grammar and grammatical relations, corpus and cognition, frequency patterns, collocations, and the interplay between culture and cognition. Barlow not only examines traditional linguistic paradigms but also invites critical engagement with contemporary cognitive linguistic theories, making it an essential resource for scholars in the field.

Keywords: *Cognitive linguistics; Corpus analysis; Frequency patterns; Cultural cognition*

Content overview

In the inaugural lecture on grammar and grammatical relations**,** Barlow addresses the foundational aspects of grammar within cognitive linguistics. He traces the historical trajectory of grammatical theories from 19th-century Neogrammarians to Saussure's structuralism and Chomsky's generative grammar, emphasizing the need to rethink grammar from rule-based systems to mental representations of linguistic knowledge. Barlow's principles for evaluating theories, asserting that all theories are inherently flawed, vague, and incomplete, highlight the necessity of continual reinterpretation. In conclusion, Barlow emphasizes

innovation over gap filling, encouraging the use of modern methodologies such as machine learning and multimodal models to challenge existing frameworks. Building on these foundational concepts, Barlow then explores the practical applications of corpus analysis in the following lectures, showcasing its indispensability in cognitive linguistics

In the second lecture, Corpus and Cognition**,** Barlow demonstrates how corpora, by analyzing large datasets, reveal linguistic patterns often overlooked by traditional text analysis. Therefore, he

introduced the use of corpora, showing its effectiveness in comprehensive linguistic analysis. He argues that frequency data from corpora influence cognitive representations, which is a central theme in his work. Barlow also highlighted the practical applications of corpus analysis in language teaching and academic writing, stressing its role in clarifying subtle linguistic distinctions. He highlighted the utility of his own corpus resource at corpuslab.com, which includes research articles from various disciplines as examples. This resource is valuable for writing articles and collaborating with advanced academic students.

Having established the critical role of corpus analysis, Barlow turned his attention to the intricate relationship between grammar and frequency patterns in lecture 3. He examines the connection between grammatical structures and their frequency of use. He provides data-driven insights based on corpus analysis, suggesting that frequent exposure to specific linguistic patterns significantly shapes cognitive grammar schemas. He discussed statistical learning, where users unconsciously learn patterns based on frequency, aiding grammatical prediction and understanding. For language teaching, Barlow focused on high-frequency constructions to enhance grammar acquisition. In conclusion, Barlow affirmed the validity of usage-based linguistics while noting individual differences in culture and history of use.

In the fourth lecture, on collocations and constructions, Barlow explores the critical role that collocations and constructions play in language use and cognitive processes. He demonstrated how to identify and analyze these patterns through corpus analysis, revealing their frequency, distribution, and use. Barlow argued that frequent exposure to these patterns strengthens their cognitive schemas, which are essential for nuanced communication. He added that focusing on collocations and constructions can help learners attain a more native-like command of the language. Barlow highlights the interplay between the cognitive and social dimensions of language in large datasets, urging further research to understand their combined effects on language use.

In the fifth lecture, on usage, grammar, and blends, Barlow underscores the significance of real-world language use in shaping the grammatical theory and cognitive processes involved in comprehension and production. Advocating a usage-based approach, Barlow posited that grammatical structures evolve with their frequency and context of use. He showed how elements from different structures merge to create new meanings, with corpus data revealing these patterns. Using historical changes and speech errors to support his claim that linguistic creativity comes from blending or changing chunks instead of following rules, he shows how important cognitive blends are for flexible language use.

In the sixth lecture, corpus, and text, Barlow shows how corpora can reveal patterns in text construction, including paragraph structure, sentence complexity, and thematic development, emphasizing the significance of coherence and cohesion through devices such as conjunctions and lexical ties. Barlow investigated discourse analysis, uncovering markers and interaction patterns, as well as stylistic features such as register and tone. He posits that combining corpus and text approaches can help us understand how texts work cognitively and communicate more clearly by looking at things such as text position, information flow, and discourse sequencing.

In the seventh lecture, individual differences in language use, Barlow demonstrated, using corpus data, practical examples, and case studies, how unique linguistic patterns emerge among individual speakers or writers influenced by factors such as age, gender, education, profession, and cultural background. He argues that acknowledging these individual differences is fundamental to developing accurate linguistic theories, as traditional models often overlook this variability, suggesting that curricula should also cater to diverse learner needs.

In the eighth lecture, Individual Differences and Grammar, Barlow continues by showing how individual differences impact grammatical structure within a usage-based framework. Analyzing data from White House press secretaries, Barlow linked personality traits to language use, correlating bigram frequencies with traits such as extroversion and neuroticism. Additionally, he discusses priming, where the repeated use of words or constructions leads to consistent speech patterns. Revisiting the Exemplar Theory, Barlow posits that linguistic knowledge is a data cloud of memory traces that links contextual information with linguistic units. Finally, he suggests the need for a bidirectional processing model to address production and comprehension differences, arguing that entrenched routines in language production resist ambient usage patterns, resulting in individual consistency.

In the ninth lecture, frequency patterns in discourse, Barlow examines the sequencing and frequency of words in discourse. He critiques the historical separation of grammar research from actual language use and discourse, noting differences, such as element ordering in Chinese versus English. Using corpus-based approaches, he shows that frequent words usually appear at the beginning of sentences, followed by less frequent ones, and highlights the differences between turn-initial and non-turn-initial utterances. Barlow concludes by calling for further exploration of semantic preferences and construction of meaning over time, as proposed by Langacker (1987).

In the tenth and final lecture, culture, cognition, corpus, and Barlow explored the connections between culture, cognitive processes, and corpus data using COVID-19 metaphors in New Zealand as a case study. He compared media coverage from the New Zealand Herald, China Daily, and New York Times, using Mark Davis' extensive COVID corpus and press conference data to analyze metaphor use. He discussed the practical aspects of corpus investigation, including data cleaning, tagging, and tools such as web scrapers, LancsBox, and Wmatrix for semantic analysis. Barlow demonstrates how these practices reflect broader cultural and communicative strategies in political and media discourse, as well as how metaphors use ties in cultural communication strategies, revisiting earlier concepts such as the categorization of masks and the routinization of phrases.

The level of difficulty and prerequisite knowledge required varies across lectures. The volume is not intended as a basic introduction to cognitive linguistics; rather, it is designed for advanced students and researchers who already have a foundational understanding of the field. Barlow's emphasis on usage-based linguistics and frequent exposure shaping cognitive grammar schemas offers a compelling framework and an excellent resource for developing research-led teaching materials and courses in cognitive linguistics, although it may benefit from further elaboration of individual learner variability in cognitive representation. Each lecture was rich in detail and assumed a certain level of familiarity with linguistic concepts and terminology. Barlow's efforts to make complex topics accessible and relatable were evident throughout the book. He used numerous non-linguistic examples to clarify

these concepts. This approach, combined with data-driven insights from corpus studies, makes lectures more engaging and informative.

In conclusion, Barlow's *Ten Lectures on Corpora and Cognitive Linguistics* makes an important contribution to cognitive linguistics. The blend of theory and corpus analysis provides a valuable framework for future research, making it an essential reading for scholars in the field. Each lecture introduced theoretical approaches and methodologies, illustrated with authentic examples and case studies. This makes the book an excellent resource for developing research-led teaching material. This volume is must-read for students and researchers, offering insights into the dynamic interplay between corpus analysis, cognitive linguistics, and culture. This book fills a niche in linguistic education, making it a valuable addition to any advanced course in cognitive linguistics. Instructors will find it particularly useful for developing research-led courses, while researchers can benefit from a comprehensive and accessible presentation of complex linguistic theories and methodologies.

References

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