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First Steps towards Multimodal Functional Concordancing

Abstract

The development of the *MCA (Multimodal Corpus Authoring System)*, Baldry 2005, Baldry/Beltrami 2005) online corpus construction and concordancing system, capable of investigating a variety of multimodal texts without denuding them of their distinguishing features, has led to extensive research on the integration of multimodal corpora, and multimodal concordancing in particular, into university syllabuses in the past few years (Baldry et al. 2005, Grunther 2005, Ackerley/Coccetta 2007b, Baldry 2007, in press, Grunther 2007, Coccetta in press, Dalziel/Metelli in press). This article describes a pilot project set up at the University of Padua (Coccetta 2004) which through the use of the *MCA* system made a small corpus of film texts, the English Language Learning Oriented (ELLO) film corpus, more easily accessible to language learners and allowed them to investigate: a) how a specific language function (van Ek/Trim 1998a, 1998b, 2001) is enacted by a set of different language forms and b) the ways in which the various manifestations of this function perform in relation to the *multimodal co-text* in which they are produced. In so doing, it illustrates some of the benefits this approach brings to language learning and gives examples of teaching materials based on the ELLO film corpus which are designed to promote language learners' communicative competence.

1. Introduction

Johns' pioneering work (1991) on the use of corpora in the language classroom has aroused lively interest in the corpus-based approach to language teaching and learning: applications of DDL (Data-Driven-Learning) and its benefits are exemplified in works by Partington (1998), Thurstun/Candlin (1998), Gavioli/Aston (2001), Hunston (2002) and many others. In these studies, the language learner puts her/himself in

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the shoes of what Johns (1991: 2) calls a “research worker” and by deductive and inductive activities based on KWIC (Key Word in Context) concordances s/he discovers the behaviour of lexicogrammatical patterns.

The present article is informed by this research, but discusses some of the limitations of KWIC concordancing and word-based concordancers when investigating a corpus for language functions (Section 2). In furtherance of this goal, the article provides practical examples taken from the ELLO film corpus, a small corpus of film texts compiled with language learning purposes in mind (Cocchetta 2004, Ackerley/Cocchetta 2007b). In Section 3, it illustrates the online multimodal concordancer *MCA* and in Section 4 it exemplifies how this system was used to investigate the film corpus. In so doing, the article proposes a new concordancing approach, namely the *multimodal functional approach*, designed to promote communicative competence, and functional competence in particular. In Section 5, the article illustrates some classroom applications of the multimodal functional concordancing approach and in Section 6 it contextualises this approach vis-à-vis overall approaches to multimodal concordancing. Finally, in the concluding remarks, the article provides students’ feedback on this new approach to language learning.

2. Limitations of KWIC concordances and word-based concordancers

A KWIC approach is particularly useful when investigating the meaning of words and how they behave, but when the main focus of analysis is interaction, and language functions in particular, the language learner may run into some difficulties. Lists of language functions presenting the linguistic forms which realize them (see, for example, van Ek/Trim 1998a, 1998b, 2001) can be used as a starting point for the investigation of a corpus. Nevertheless, this might turn out to be an industrious and time-consuming process, the results of which might not be the ones the language learner required. For example, if s/he were to exploit a corpus for the various linguistic forms enacting the function “expressing intentions” following the indications given in *Threshold 1990* (van Ek/Trim 1998a: 34), the language learner would search for 1) *going to* and its colloquial variant *gonna*, 2) *will* and its contracted form, 3) the

verb *intend(s) to*, 4) and the expression *be thinking of*. Figure 1 shows the concordance lines for the word *will* retrieved with *AntConc 3.2.1* in the film corpus mentioned above.

Hit	KWIC	File
1	WAITER Non-smoking. Tanya will seat you. (to Tanya) Table fir	doubtfire_ea
2	is expecting me for dinner. Will you tell him that I'm running s	doubtfire_ea
3	gonna tell you a story that will make your balls shrink to the s	notting_hosp
4	MORNING THELMA Okay. I will, too, then. LOUISE (V.O.) And	thelma_arran
5	repes soufflé for dessert it will be a good idea to order now.	woman_eating

Figure 1. KWIC concordance for *will* retrieved with *AntConc 3.2.1* in the ELLO film corpus

In actual fact, the concordance lines do not provide every instance of *will* used to express intentions. What they present are a variety of uses of *will*: by analysing the co-text (Sinclair 1991), a language learner might deduce that *will* can be used to give a military-type order (Swan 1995: 601) (line 1), to express a request (line 2), a confident assertion (line 3), intentions (line 4) and to give advice (line 5).

In order to extract linguistic information, a corpus can be annotated. Among the various types of corpus annotation are POS tagging for parts of speech, lemmatization for lemmas, semantic annotation, pragmatic annotation, and so on. Even though corpus annotation for language functions may sort out the problem described above, another question needs to be considered, namely context. As Halliday (1989: 10) states, language is context-dependent. For example, with the utterance “Tanya will seat you” (line 1 in Figure 1) it is the context that reveals the meaning of *will*. The utterance in question is taken from the film *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Columbus 1993). In this sequence Mr. Lundy goes to the Bridges Restaurant to have a business meeting with Daniel. As soon as Mr. Lundy enters the restaurant (see the transcription of the entire phase below), the head waiter, who is standing behind the reservation desk, welcomes him and orders Tanya, one of the waitresses, to seat him. The man’s linguistic choice for a military-type order reflects the power his

status of head waiter gives him over Tanya. The video reveals that this is also reflected in the different kinesic actions the head waiter and Tanya perform: the man is the one who performs the honours of the house and engages in the conversation with Mr. Lundy, while Tanya silently watches the verbal exchange between the two men.

WAITER: Good evening, Mr. Lundy.

MR. LUNDY: I'm meeting someone. Has he arrived yet?

WAITER: No, I'm sorry, he hasn't arrived yet, but we can seat you. The smoking or non-smoking?

MR. LUNDY: Non-smoking, please.

WAITER: Non-smoking. Tanya will seat you. (to Tanya) Table fifteen.

TANYA: This way, please.

This example shows the importance of the video to get the overall picture of the meaning of the concordance. However, software tools that provide access to the original text for each concordance are far from being abundant. A tool capable of doing this is the multimodal concordancer *MCA*, illustrated in the next section.

3. Exploiting the ELLO film corpus with MCA

The ELLO film corpus was made accessible to language learners through the online multimodal concordancer *MCA*. The concordancer allows the retrieval of recurrent patterns in a tagged corpus of multimodal texts, such as spoken texts (Cocchetta in press, Dalziel/Metelli in press), advertisements delivered by every major medium (Baldry/Thibault 2006), websites (Baldry/O'Halloran forthcoming) and so on, and for each concordance it provides access to the original multimodal text. The availability of the original text is of particular benefit for the language learner, because s/he can see how the searched-for pattern interacts with the other semiotic resources in the text. Through the ELLO film corpus, s/he gets examples of language in context thus gathering information about the setting where the interactive event is taking place, the participants, their roles and relations, their moods, and so on. What is more, s/he can analyse what Baldry (in press) defines as the

multimodal co-text: s/he can see how language intertwines with other resources such as gaze, facial expressions, gesture and so on.

For a corpus to be searchable, it needs to be associated with the set of parameters that describe its features. The parameters are selected from those constituting the tagging system, or *grammar*, for the corpus. The *grammar* developed to annotate the texts in the ELLO film corpus is based on van Ek and Trim's functional model (van Ek/Trim 1998a)¹, which lists the language functions that learners at the B1 level of the *Common European Framework of Reference* (Council of Europe 2001) should be able to express in order to deal successfully with transactional situations in everyday life.

The following section exemplifies how the ELLO film corpus can be exploited for language functions and the kind of information the language learner can gain.

4. Multimodal functional concordancing

As shown above, investigating a corpus with a text-based concordancer to see if a language function is enacted is a time-consuming process and the hits the language learner retrieves may not meet her/his requirements. On the contrary, to do this in *MCA* s/he simply selects the language function from a drop-down menu in the search engine included in *MCA*. Table 1 presents some of the concordances for the function "expressing intentions".

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1. | I was going to go to the Holliwell Bridge and do some shooting over there. |
| 2. | I'll make something nice we can warm up when you get here. |
| 3. | I'll drive my pickup and meet you there. |
| 4. | She's runnin' away with me. |
| 5. | I'm just gonna bring everything. |
| 6. | I'll deliver the message personally, sir. |
| 7. | I'm not, I'm not pulling over now. |
| 8. | I have no intention of moving, Officer. |

Table 1. Some results for the function "expressing intentions" retrieved with *MCA* in the ELLO film corpus

¹ In order to be applied to the corpus, van Ek and Trim's functional model required some changes. For an account of these changes see Coccetta 2004 and Ackerley/Coccetta 2007.

The concordance shows the different set of linguistic forms that enact the function “expressing intentions”: NP + be + going to + VPinf, NP + will + VPinf, NP + be + VPgerund and NP + intend(s) to + VPinf. As each concordance is provided with a *Media Player* button that gives access to the associated film clip, the language learner can investigate the context and deduce the meaning each form expresses. For example, in “I’ll deliver the message personally.” (Columbus 1993) *will* expresses a decision taken at the moment of speaking.

In *MCA* two or more parameters can be combined. As far as this study is concerned, it is possible to combine two language functions, thus allowing the analysis of adjacency pairs (Schegloff/Sacks 1973). Table 2 shows some of the results retrieved for the sequence of functions “introducing people to others” ^ “replying when someone is introduced to you”.

1.	introducing people to others replying when someone is introduced to you	May I introduce my friend, Harry... Hallo, Harry. How are you?
2.	introducing people to others replying when someone is introduced to you	And Miss Billie Dawn. Billie Dawn. What a beautiful name.
3.	introducing people to others replying when someone is introduced to you	This is my wife Beatrice. Mmm. Charmed.
4.	introducing people to others replying when someone is introduced to you	This is Senator Down, and his wife, Lily. Pleasure to meet you.
5.	introducing people to others replying when someone is introduced to you	And over here is Senator and Mrs. Hedges. Senator. Good to see you.
6.	introducing people to others	Carla, Louanne Johnson.
7.	introducing people to others	This is Kathleen.

Table 2. Some results for the sequence of functions “introducing people to others” ^ “replying when someone is introduced to you” retrieved with *MCA* in the ELLO film corpus

The multimodal co-text reveals the kinesic actions that co-occur with the introductions. For example, it shows that the person performing the introduction gestures in the direction of the person being introduced; people shake hands once they have been introduced; and in certain circumstances a man might bow while shaking hands with women as a

sign of respect. This turns out to be of particular use to raise the learners' intercultural awareness. In addition, the multimodal co-text is useful to understand why in lines 6 and 7 the utterances do not form a complete adjacency pair. As to "Carla, Louanne Johnson." (Smith 1995), it may seem that Carla is impolite because she does not reply to the introduction. However, the video reveals that this is not the case: Carla shakes hands with Louanne and she even smiles at her.

The second utterance – "This is Kathleen." – is taken from the film *You've Got Mail* (Ephron 1998). In this sequence, the night before Thanksgiving, Kathleen is at the cash desk in an overcrowded supermarket. When the cashier totals up her purchases, she hands over her credit card, but the annoyed cashier refuses it as she is standing at a cash-only desk. Kathleen's insistence on paying with her credit card puts the people behind her in the queue in a bad mood and they start complaining. Luckily, Joe, an acquaintance of Kathleen's, turns up to help her. What follows is the beginning of the sequence where Joe charms the cashier, Rose, and makes her accept Kathleen's credit card.

JOE: Hi. (off her nametag, big smile) Rose. That is a great name, Rose. This is Kathleen, I'm Joe.

HENRY: And I'm Henry.

JOE: Henry, how are you? Happy holidays. This is a credit card machine?

Rose just stares at him.

JOE: (cont'd) Happy Thanksgiving. It's your turn to say 'Happy Thanksgiving' back.

CASHIER: Happy Thanksgiving back.

Joe looks at her, winks.

The transcription shows that Joe and Henry, one of the annoyed customers standing in line, do not give the cashier the time to reply to the introduction. On the other hand, the multimodal co-text displayed by the video reveals that the woman is so charmed by Joe's good manners that she is unable to utter a word. We can conclude that the multimodal co-text can help clear up doubts that unclear concordances may raise.

5. Multimodal corpus-based teaching materials

The film corpus and *MCA* were used to develop teaching materials which analyse language, and language functions in particular, in relation to their context and multimodal co-text. An example is given in Figure 2 (Cocchetta 2004: 179).

What follows is a list of utterances taken from the corpus. Identify not only all functions they express, but specify also their **intended function**. When you do the exercise do not forget to take into consideration the context in which the utterances are produced. To view the clips follow the instructions given on the first exercise.

[...]

3. You may, sir. (Clip 7, Phase 7, Utterance 2)

- Denying permission to do something.
- Accepting assistance at the restaurant.
- Giving permission to do something.
- Answering questions for confirmation.

Intended function: _____

Figure 2. Exercise focusing on the meaning of language functions in relation to their context (Cocchetta 2004: 179)

In this exercise the language learners are given some utterances taken from the ELLO film corpus and they are required to identify the functions they express. They are then asked to watch the video in which the utterances are uttered and decide the function they express, namely what the speakers intended when they produced them. For example, the utterance “You may, sir.” (Brest 1992) can be used to give permission to do something and to answer questions asking for confirmation. However, it is by analysing the context that the intended function the speaker wants to express can be understood, namely “accepting assistance at the restaurant”. The utterance is taken from the sequence of the film *Scent of a Woman* (Brest 1992) where Frank and Charlie are at the restaurant having dinner together. When the waiter approaches their table he says: “May I tell you our specials?”. By saying this he is offering Frank and Charlie assistance with their choice of dish.

Figure 3 shows another sample activity (Cocchetta 2004: 160) which focuses on three of the linguistic forms that realize the function “expressing intentions”. The learners are given three utterances taken from the ELLO film corpus and are required to identify the meaning each utterance expresses. To do this, they are asked to watch the phase (for *phase* see Thibault 2000 and Baldry/Thibault 2006) in which they are uttered.

Exercise 1: Focus on grammar

In everyday communication the same language function can be realized by different grammatical structures according to the specific meanings speakers want to express.

Match the utterances on the left with their correct meaning on the right.

1. 2. 3.

<u>Utterances</u>	<u>Meanings</u>
1. I'll drive my pickup and meet you there. (<i>Clip 1, Phase 6, Utterance 2</i>)	A. Expressing a future decision, intention or plan made before the moment of speaking
2. She's running away with me. (<i>Clip 3, Phase 1, Utterance 4</i>)	B. Expressing a decision taken at the moment of speaking
3. I'm going to let you go on one condition. (<i>Clip 16, Phase 5, Utterance 1</i>)	C. Expressing a planned future arrangement

Figure 3. Exercise focusing on the linguistic forms that realize the function “expressing intentions” (Cocchetta 2004: 160)

As regards the utterance “I’ll drive my pickup and meet you there.”, taken from the film *The Bridges of Madison County* (Eastwood 1995), the context (see the transcription of the phase given below) reveals that Francesca’s decision to meet Robert is taken at the moment of speaking: Francesca pauses for a long time before taking her decision thus indicating she is considering it very carefully.

ROBERT: You know, it’s just a thought. Maybe you’d like to come along with me.

FRANCESCA: (long pause) Yes, I would like that, but I’ll drive my pickup and meet you there. All right?

ROBERT: All right.

FRANCESCA: What time?

ROBERT: How 'bout six?

FRANCESCA: O... Ok... Okay.

ROBERT: Great. Okay.

However, one single example might not be sufficient for the learners to identify the meaning each linguistic form expresses. In that case, they can retrieve other utterances in the corpus where the linguistic form under analysis is used to express an intention. Table 3 shows some a concordance showing how the function “expressing intentions” is realized by both *will* and its contracted form.

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I will, too, then. 2. I'll do my best, sir. 3. I'll just take my one chance to say it. 4. I'll wait outside. 5. Miss Johnson, I... I'll cut to the chase. 6. I'll be right with you. 7. I, I, I'll show you some I.D. But I'm not gonna spread 'em. 8. I'll do the talkin'. 9. I'll just stay here until your friend gets here. |
|--|

Table 3. Some results for the function “expressing intentions” realized by both *will* and its contracted form retrieved with *MCA* in the ELLO film corpus

What is striking about the concordances presented in Table 3 is that there is just one example of *will* in the full form (Concordance 1). Moreover, it is followed by ellipsis of the verb. This was taken as the starting point for a series of exercises on the difference between *will* and its contracted form where the language learners are asked to reflect on their different pronunciation, their frequency, and on the fact that, unlike the latter, the former can be followed by ellipsis of the verb.

As a first step, the learners are given a grammar box pointing out that *'ll* is never stressed, because if it *were* stressed contraction would not be possible. Then, to check if the statement is true, they are asked to search the corpus for all the occurrences of *'ll* and watch some of the clips at their will. Finally, they are instructed to use the corpus to see if,

on the other hand, *will* is stressed. The last exercise and its key is given in Figure 4.

Exercise 5: Exploration of the corpus

Carry out the following search:

1. Select the EXPRESSING INTENTIONS parameter from the first "Select the parameter" menu.
2. Write the word WILL in the empty box at the end of the first line.
3. Click Compact Search.

1. *I will, too, then.*

In the sentence you got the verb is omitted: this is an example of **verbal ellipsis**.

View the clip and decide if the following statement is true or false. To view the clip you must click the *Windows Media Player* button placed on the left side of the clip number.

The auxiliary verb *will* is stressed. True False

Figure 4. Exercise focusing on the pronunciation of *will* (Cocchetta 2004: 163-164)

Notice that exercises focusing on pronunciation, such as those described above, are possible because *MCA* allows the user to gain access to the original file for each concordance.

Experimentation carried out on university students (for a detailed report on the experimentation see Cocchetta 2004) demonstrated that the learners noticed the difference in pronunciation between the contracted form and the full form. They also concluded that in "I will, too, then." (Scott 1991) *will* recovers the verb used in the previous utterance:

LOUISE: I'm just gonna bring everything.

THELMA: Okay. I will, too, then.

Finally, they concluded that when the verb is omitted the contracted form cannot be used.

6. Discussion

Multimodal concordancing is an umbrella term for a variety of different options available in the investigation of multimodal corpora with

MCA. These options are sketched out by Baldry (in press) and Baldry/Thibault (forthcoming) in a *Concordance Matrix* that combines four concordance types with four concordancing procedures (see Table 4).

Concordance types	Concordancing procedures
1. monomodal form-oriented concordances;	a. default type (KWIC concordancing);
2. monomodal meaning-oriented concordances;	b. media-indexed type;
3. multisemiotic form-oriented concordances;	c. tabulated type;
4. multisemiotic meaning-oriented concordances.	d. overlay/captioned type.

Table 4. *Concordance Matrix* providing a series of options to investigate multimodal corpora within the *MCA* project (Baldry in press, Baldry/Thibault forthcoming)

This article has given examples of Option 2b in the *Matrix*, namely the *monomodal meaning-oriented, media-indexed* concordance. This concordancing technique is *monomodal* because it focuses on one semiotic resource, in this case language, and *meaning-oriented* because it provides information about the functions different language forms have in specific contexts. However, because of the *media-indexed* procedure which links each concordance to its associated film sequence, it has a *multimodal co-text*, i.e. a co-text that extends to resources other than language. Therefore, in the expression ‘multimodal functional concordancing’ the word ‘multimodal’ refers essentially to the extended co-text.

The possibility of combining two or more parameters provided by *MCA* is stimulating research into *multisemiotic* concordances, namely concordances that explore the relationship between two or more resources (Baldry/Thibault 2006, forthcoming). For example, if the ELLO film corpus were tagged for kinesic actions, language learners could explore the different kinesic actions that accompany introductions. However, further research into this area of multimodal concordancing needs to be carried out in particular in relation to classroom applications.

7. Conclusions

The study presented in this article has illustrated how some of the problems which tend to arise when investigating a corpus for language functions can be overcome by the use of the multimodal concordancer *MCA*. In so doing, the article has introduced the concept of *multimodal functional concordancing* and has exemplified some classroom applications of this concordancing approach.

Experimentation carried out with university students (Cocchetta 2004, Ackerley/Cocchetta 2007b) has shown that students were enthusiastic about this new way of accessing film texts as exemplified in the feedback given by one of the students who participated in the experimentation:

I think that using MCA is really useful to improve our English because I think it is more important to learn spoken English instead of just knowing the “rules”!

I didn't find any particular difficulty in using the system... except the connection is quite slow because I'm using it from home!

The exercises were great and funny because I had to do searches and discover the correct answer by myself, not just by listening and repeating what somebody else says!

Not surprisingly, these promising results are encouraging further research including research into multimodal functional concordancing (Ackerley/Cocchetta 2007a) and a further development: *multimodal functional-notional concordancing* (Cocchetta in press).

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Software

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