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Corpus-Based Linguistics and Language Education (CbLLE) at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

External assessment by Bernd Heine

The present assessment is based mainly on an evaluation of the publications emanating from the above-mentioned project, referred to henceforth in short as “CbLLE2“. These publications consist most of all of the following collective volumes:

- Kawaguchi, Yuji, Makoto Minegishi and Jacques Durand 2011. *Corpus-Based Analysis and Diachronic Linguistics*. Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Studies in Linguistics, 1. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Hieda, Osamu, Christa König and Hiroshi Nakagawa 2011. *Geographical Typology and Linguistic Areas*. Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Studies in Linguistics, 2. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Kawaguchi, Yuji, Makoto Minegishi and Wolfgang Viereck 2011. *Corpus-Based Analysis and Diachronic Linguistics*. Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Studies in Linguistics, 3. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins.

The volumes will be referred to below as Volume 1, 2, or 3, respectively.

1) Project planning

The explicit goals of the project are located squarely in promoting research on education on the one hand and languages and linguistics on the other. To this end, corpus-based analysis of linguistic data is recruited as the primary research technique. Corpus analysis is a relatively new, quantitative paradigm that offers an enormous potential for studying natural phenomena from a variationalist rather than a prescriptivist perspective.

More implicit goals of the project are to stimulate scholarship of an international, if not world-class standard, to enhance academic creativity, to support younger scholars in getting optimal access to highly demanding research and field work, and to strengthen international cooperation.

It would seem that the project was diligently planned, involving a good mix of basic research, data collecting and academic communication with distinguished scholars from overseas. And as far as these publications suggest, the goals set have overall

been achieved.

2) Originality

That the project is overall characterized by some degree of originality can be seen in the strategy to combine locally available scholarship with high-powered internationally recognized expertise in order to achieve as much scientific cross-fertilization as possible. A survey of the nature and the quality of the contributions of the publications submitted suggests that this strategy was overall successful: Especially the work of younger Japanese researchers reflects the impact of new directions in the analysis of linguistic variation and in such cases, cross-fertilization between local research traditions and international scholarship yielded some remarkable findings.

3) Scientific quality

The scientific quality of the outcome of research varies greatly within the three volumes published. There are on the one hand authors who present findings that one would have expected anyway without there being an overarching project architecture and project theme. This applies in much the same way to Japanese and to foreign scholars. On the other hand there are also researchers who address the needs of the project and incorporate theoretical concepts of others in an attempt to achieve new insights in linguistic variation.

The content of the contributions in all three volumes is generally satisfactory. This, however, does not always apply to the formal shape of some contributions, especially of Volumes 1 and 3. Shortcomings concern on the one hand the presentation of texts. For example, it is generally expected in international publishing that text pieces in languages other than English should have English glosses and translations. This convention is not always obeyed: In a number of chapters, one finds text examples from French or German that are presented without glosses and translations. Furthermore, there are illustration figures that are hardly, if at all legible and, hence, are not of much use (examples are found e.g. in Volume 1, p. 72, figure 3 or p. 226, figures 3 and 4, or Volume 3, p. 167, "Facsimile" and other appendixes). Here one might have expected slightly more careful editing to make the chapters fully intelligible to the reader. But as observed earlier, the scientific quality of all three volumes is on the whole good.

4) International Contribution :

The colleagues responsible for the running of the project have made great efforts to attract leading scholars from a variety of countries, such as the USA, Germany, Great Britain, France, and Australia, and they have made on the whole good choices. But there are also a few researchers from overseas that are not necessarily of a highly competitive quality.

The contribution of foreign scholars was most of all of two different kinds. On the one hand it enabled Japanese scholars that are so far not yet well established beyond

their own country to participate in world-wide research activities. On the other hand, having chapters by leading scholars in all three volumes makes these books attractive for a readership across the world, and it also helps making this readership aware of the potential that Japanese linguistics in all its manifestations can offer.

5) Feasibility (Results)

I am satisfied, and I think that most of my colleagues will agree with me, that CbLLE2 is a fully feasible project. Both the contributions to corpus-based analysis (Volumes 1 and 3) and to typological variation (Volume 2) provide new insights into linguistic behavior. While Volume 1 and Volume 3 are concerned with the analysis of corpus data, each offers a different perspective of human behavior: Volume 1 highlights the synchronic patterning of linguistic phenomena as they surface in frequency distributions, whereas Volume 3 demonstrates that quantitative, in particular corpus-based approaches can shed new light on how human behavior changes.

The stance taken in Volume 2 is of a different nature. The main subject of the researchers that contributed to it is African linguistics. And since there is virtually no appropriate corpus data for any of the 2000-odd languages of this continent, the focus of contributions in this volume is on variation in relation to geography, that is, in what is commonly called areal linguistics. There are in fact a number of findings that make this endeavor fully feasible (see below).

6) Scientific results

It would be beyond the scope of an assessment to summarize and evaluate all the results that have come out of CbLLE2. I will rather describe the findings in more general terms. The work based on corpus research in Volumes 1 and 3 resulted generally in revealing the potential of this framework for understanding language structure. Most of all, it demonstrates how and why linguistic generalizations based on quantitative distributions are superior in a number of ways to orthodox linguistic methodology. This is a point made in a number of the chapters of the two volumes.

The results presented in Volume 2 provide a different perspective. They show that languages are not monolithic entities or systems. Rather, language structure and linguistic behavior are shaped on the one hand by interaction with other structures and on the other hand by areal-geographical forces. Thus, like the other two volumes, Volume 2 also has an innovative perspective – one that is likely to generative further research both in Japan and beyond.

7) Fostering young researchers

On the basis of the information available to me I do not feel qualified to assess the contribution of CbLLE2 to this issue. This would have required in particular detailed biographical information on the members of the project. It is only three younger members of the entire project personnel where I dispose of appropriate data, and in

at least two of the cases there is reason to argue that their participation in CbLLE2 has definitely contributed both to their research success and their academic career; both have subsequently found tenured employment at the professorial level.

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