

REVIEWS

APPOSITION IN ENGLISH

Apposition in Contemporary English. Charles F. Meyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, xiv + 152 pp.

Reviewed by RICHARD D. CURETON*

Charles Meyer's *Apposition in Contemporary English (ACE)* is the second volume in the Cambridge series *Studies in English Language*, edited by Sidney Greenbaum. The series is devoted to original empirical studies of varieties of contemporary English and at the moment also includes Christian Mair's *Infinitival Complement Clauses in English* (1990) and Jan Firbas' *Functional Sentence Perspective in Written and Spoken Communication* (1992).

Summary

The goal of *ACE*, M tells us, is 'to clarify the confusion surrounding the category of apposition, by both defining apposition and detailing its usage' (viii). To do this, M describes the structure and use of apposition in a corpus of 360,000 words selected equally from the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken British English (LL), the Survey of English Usage Corpus of Written British English (SEU), and the Brown University Standard Corpus of Present-day American English (Brown). The LL corpus provides spoken usage; the SEU and Brown corpora, written usage. The LL and SEU corpora provide British usage; the Brown corpus, American usage. Equal proportions of journalistic, learned and fictional writing in his selections from the Brown and SEU corpora provide contrasts in genres. And equal proportions of conversation among disparates, equals, intimates, and intimates and equals in his selection from the LL corpus provide contrasts in speaker-audience relations. M tags the appositives in his corpus on thirteen parameters and then submits the tagged corpus to a social science statistical package to produce frequency counts.

Following studies such as Quirk *et al.*'s *Comprehensive Grammar of English*, M's approach to apposition is prototypical and gradient. Instead of setting firm (but arbitrary) limits to apposition as many grammarians have (1–5), M uses his statistical modeling to define (1) the prototypical appositive and (2) the coherent structure of more peripheral appositives, as these less central forms spread out from the prototype and eventually merge with other grammatical forms (complementation, modification, coordination, etc.).

M's frequency counts indicate that an appositive prototypically involves two juxtaposed, referentially related noun phrases (usually in a syntactic relation promoting end-weight), with the second noun phrase adding new information to the first. Of the appositives in his corpus, 67 percent contain only nominals (11); 89 percent are juxtaposed (38); 62 percent are referentially related (58); 65 percent have syntactic functions promoting end-weight (35); and 86 percent present new information alone (93).

*Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Michigan, 7611 Haven Hall, Ann Arbor, MI, 48109–1045, USA.

These frequencies fall far short of 100 percent, however, requiring M to spend most of his effort analyzing the structure of the relation's gradient periphery. Between short introductory and concluding chapters ('Apposition as a Grammatical Relation' (1-9) and 'Apposition in the Grammar of English' (123-134)), M presents this analysis in the three central chapters of the book, each of which confronts a major linguistic dimension of apposition: 'The Syntax of Apposition' (10-56), 'The Semantics of Apposition' (57-91) and 'The Pragmatics of Apposition' (92-122). Each of these chapters explores its topic both conceptually and statistically, arguing for a certain array of subcategorizations on the linguistic dimension being considered and then documenting and motivating how often these subcategorized forms/functions appear in various linguistic varieties (written vs. spoken, British vs. American, learned vs. journalistic, etc.).

M distinguishes appositives syntactically from other constructions by their structural independence: items in central appositives can be alternately deleted and reversed without changing the meaning of the construction or altering grammaticality. These criteria distinguish central appositives from various related constructions, such as subject subjuncts (e.g., *A habitual criminal, Ed Lynch was sentenced to life in prison*), which cannot be reversed, and institutionalized and pseudo-titles (e.g., *Dr. Clark, trainer Jack Marsh*), which cannot be reversed or have their head nouns deleted. M provides a detailed discussion of more complex and ambiguous cases as well, carefully charting the gradience between apposition and coordination (43-45), peripheral elements (45-47), modification (47-51), and complementation (51-54).

M tags his corpus for 78 different syntactic forms, ten different syntactic functions, and five different linear orderings, providing a wealth of information about the use of appositional syntaxes: nominal vs. non-nominal vs. mixed; juxtaposed vs. non-juxtaposed; in subject vs. object functions; with vs. without obligatory markers of apposition; and so forth. He presents this information using both charts and discussion in an ordered series of subsections; proceeding from forms used more frequently to forms used more rarely, and from considerations of syntactic form to considerations of syntactic function, marking and linear relation.

M's treatment of the semantics of apposition confronts three issues: (1) semantic *relations* (57-73), (2) semantic *integration* (i.e. restrictive vs. non-restrictive, 83-91), and (3) semantic *function*, what M calls semantic *class* (73-82). M finds most appositional those items related by a congruence relation of identity (i.e., coreference or synonymy), but he also admits as appositional items in relations of semi-identity (e.g., cataphoric reference) and inclusion (attribution, hyponymy and part/whole relations). He also recognizes a range of semantic functions for appositives, grouping these functions according to the relative specificity of the second unit with respect to the first - more specific (identification, appellation, particularization and exemplification), less specific (characterization) or equally specific (paraphrase, reorientation and self-correction).

M's chap. on pragmatics also examines three issues: (1) the flow information within an appositive, (2) the frequency of optional marking and (3) the distribution of semantic classes across genres and speaker-listener relations. This final chap. contains some of the most discursive argumentation in the book, as M moves from documenting what appositives are to explaining *why* they are used in certain contexts rather than others.

Evaluation

The major strengths of *ACE* are its wealth of detailed factual information and its succinct and accessible presentation. As M points out in his conclusion (134), the first of these

virtues is the general strength of corpus-based grammatical studies. Working from a detailed documentation of formal variation within a corpus, a grammarian is naturally challenged to produce a delicate description, and in presenting this description the grammarian is never at a loss for a good example to illustrate a formal/functional distinction. Corpus-based studies also permit a controlled, empirical examination of differences in usage across genres (and other contextual factors), something that other grammatical studies often neglect. As M points out, it would be very useful to have corpus-based studies of other grammatical relations (such as coordination).

Credit for the second of these virtues, however, goes to M (and perhaps also to Greenbaum, as the series editor): while the intrinsic strength of a corpus-based study is its factual detail, this detail can also be its nemesis. Unless the presentation of detail in a corpus study is highly organized and strongly argued, this detail can overwhelm the reader and submerge significant findings in a wash of textual documentation. *ACE* not only avoids this danger, it achieves a highly readable texture. In each of his major chaps., M precedes his discussion with a summary table and then molds his more discursive comments to the top-to-bottom ordering within this controlling table. Within this framework, M then introduces and supports more detailed points with further tables, with this further discussion being guided visually in a similar manner. Unlike many corpus studies, *ACE* contains no blizzard of charts and tables and no voluminous appendices presenting raw, uninterpreted statistics. M integrates his statistics into his discussion and segments his discussion into a readable, accessible format. The two appendices in the book are short (135–42) and present only a full catalogue of his grammatical tags (very useful, non-statistical information) and a chart of appositional frequencies within subsections of his corpus (information relevant to variations in usage within and across genres).

The factual information presented in *ACE* is rich and engaging and represents a clear contribution to knowledge. For instance, M finds that almost half of the nominal appositives in his corpus contain proper nouns but that these appositives occur almost exclusively in writing rather than speech (11–13); that proper nouns and definite noun phrases are more common in an appositive than proper nouns and indefinite noun phrases (17); that noun phrases headed by common nouns in appositives are usually both indefinite or both definite rather than mixed (18); that extraposed clauses in apposition to pronouns occur almost exclusively in speech (24); that there are more obligatory markers of apposition in speech than in writing (24–25); that non-nominal apposition is most frequently sentential, then phrasal, then clausal (31); that, of phrasal appositives, prepositional phrases and adjective phrases predominate (31); that only a few non-nominal appositives mix syntactic forms (34); that most appositives serving as subjects are journalistic (36); that single appositives are twenty times more frequent than multiple appositives (38); that old information in an appositive occurs more often in speech than in writing (35); that juxtaposed appositives are ten times as frequent as unjuxtaposed appositives (38); that there are almost no attributive appositives in speech (69); that an appositive paraphrase is more common in speech than in writing (81); that fiction and conversation are similar in having few appositives, while journalistic and learned writing are similar in having many (98); that there are fewer appositives in the speech of intimates than in the speech of strangers (100); that appellation and characterization are more frequent in journalism, while reorientation, particularization and exemplification are more frequent in fiction, conversation and learned writing (103) – and so forth. Some of these results are surprising, some not; but each of

these results is significant. Each result either establishes as fact what has previously been thought or offers as fact something that invites further thought.

ACE also presents some conceptual advances, although these seem less frequent and significant than its descriptive achievements. In his analysis of semantic relations, M isolates cataphoric reference as a separate type of semantic relation and makes use of the interesting distinction between absolute synonymy and speaker synonymy. As a result, his typology of semantic relations is somewhat more delicate conceptually than that of previous studies. Compared to previous studies, M's explicit consideration of thematic structure (i.e., new and old information) and other pragmatic considerations is also a conceptual advance, adding a new linguistic dimension to the definition of apposition (which has usually been defined only syntactically and semantically).

If there is a weakness in the substance and organization of *ACE*, however, it might be exactly in its slighting of such conceptual considerations. M's opening and concluding chaps. are very brief indeed. Given the complexity of apposition as a grammatical phenomenon, his presentation spends little time considering previous treatments of apposition or the relative positioning of apposition in the grammar as a whole. This slighting of conceptual matters is also evident in M's ordering of material. M's first chap. presents its statistical profile of appositional syntax (10–40) *before* it explains in detail the conceptual foundations of the gradient relation between apposition and other grammatical relations (40–56) – an odd ordering, given that the former depends crucially on the latter. M also spends very little time discussing how he arrives at the conceptual distinctions he represents in his tagging procedure. Apparently, he adopts the results of his predecessors (in particular, Quirk *et al.*'s *Comprehensive Grammar of English*). But, given this dependence on previous work, I would have appreciated a detailed narrative of the relation between his conceptual innovations/borrowings and his empirical explorations. Did his conceptual innovations emerge from his data or derive from some other source? For instance, did his empirical results ever lead him to revise his tagging procedure, or did he derive the tagging procedure in some other way and simply impose it upon his corpus? At times, M's inattention to these matters makes it seem as though he 'discovers' his conceptual distinctions in the linguistic forms he counts and tabulates.

These problems of conceptual and methodological circularity bear most heavily on M's attempt to motivate the pragmatics of apposition: the thematic relations between apposed units and the distributions of appositives across genres. In these pragmatic arguments, M's general strategy is to assume a relatively transparent relation between (1) the textual pragmatics of appositives, (2) their semantic functions and (3) their ubiquity in certain contexts rather than others. For instance, he argues that appositives in the semantic class of appellation (which name and identify individuals) are frequent in journalism because journalists have more need to name and identify individuals.

While undoubtedly effective at times, this methodology is dangerous and, to be fully convincing, should be supplemented with other sorts of analyses. While it seems trivial that genres that contain many appositives of a certain semantic/prosodic type will have them because they have a special need to express that semantic/prosodic relation, it does not follow that genres that have a special need to express a certain semantic/prosodic relation will always express that relation with an appositive. Many of the semantic/prosodic relations expressed by appositives – identification, appellation, characterization, etc. – can be expressed by other grammatical relations as well. A fully convincing corpus-based analysis of the pragmatics of apposition would also need to analyze statistically the syntax

and prosody of semantics (not just the semantics and prosody of syntax). It would also need to document when (and how often) speakers choose to realize a given semantic/prosodic relation with an appositive rather than with some other syntactic relation. Such a semantically-/prosodically-based corpus study does not seem logically impossible, and it is clearly distinct from the syntactically-based study M executes in *ACE*.

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LEXICAL PHRASES

Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching. James R. Nattinger and Jeanette S. DeCarrico. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, xvi + 218 pp.

Reviewed by LAWRENCE F. BOUTON*

Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching is well named. In the first half of the book, the authors describe the structure and function of *lexical phrases*, e.g., *a _____ ago, for the most part, look before you leap*, and in the second half, they suggest ways in which these phrases 'can be utilized as practical instruments for language pedagogy' (xvi) aimed at developing in non-native speakers a greater skill in comprehending both oral and written communication in their second language. Furthermore, although they focus entirely on English, they argue that the same approach could be used in the teaching of any other language (66–70), and they offer a 14-page appendix consisting of examples of lexical phrases of various types in Russian, Spanish, and Chinese as evidence to support that claim (190–203).

The book is divided into 2 parts of 4 chaps. each, the appendix just mentioned, a bibliography and an index. Taken together, the chap. titles provide a brief sketch of what the authors have set out to do. Part One is entitled 'Lexical phrases in language description' and its chapters are 1) 'Introduction' (1–30); 2) 'Formal aspects of lexical phrases' (31–58); 3) 'Functional aspects of lexical phrases' (59–89) and 4) 'The organizing function of lexical phrases' (90–112). Part Two is entitled 'Applications for teaching' and contains 5) 'Teaching spoken discourse: conversation' (113–30); 6) 'Teaching spoken discourse: listening comprehension' (131–56); 7) 'Teaching written discourse: reading and writing' (157–73); and 8) 'Conclusion and prospects; (174–189).

Chap. 1, the 'Introduction', is unlike many chaps. with that title: it cannot be read over quickly. Rather, it is the place where the authors very carefully and methodically work out the features of *lexical phrases* and, where they discuss *lexical phrases*, how they should be accounted for by linguistic theory. They begin by defining *lexical phrases* as '*chunks of [prefabricated] language of varying length, phrases like as it were, on the other hand, as X would have us believe, and so on*' (1). Such phrases differ in their ability to permit expansion, substitution, commutation and other variations, some being rigidly resistant to such change and others permitting it quite freely. But the constraints controlling lexical phrases go beyond the mere form of the language, and for this reason, the authors argue, they are not

*Division of English as an International Language, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 3070 Foreign Languages Building, 707 S. Mathews Ave., Urbana, Illinois 61801, USA.