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Job Interview Corpus

Data Transcription and Major Topics
in Corpus Linguistics



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EDITION

1. Introduction

Perhaps the greatest single event in the history of linguistics was the invention of the tape recorder, which for the first time has captured natural conversation and made it accessible to systematic study. (Halliday 1994: xxiii)

Spoken corpora provide a unique resource for the exploration of naturally occurring discourse; and the growing interest in the development of spoken corpora is testament to the value they provide to a diverse number of research communities. (Adolphs/Carter 2013: 5)

The aim of this book with its accompanying audio files is to make accessible a corpus of 40 authentic English job interviews. This would not have been possible without the consent of the interviewees to be recorded for research purposes. Thus, I am very much indebted to all of them and would like to thank them for their valuable support in my undertaking. Moreover, it was a great pleasure to meet and get to know each and every one of them during the course of the interviews.

The transcriptions of the interviews published here can be used by students, teachers and researchers alike for linguistic analyses of spoken discourse and as authentic material for language learning in the classroom. Various possibilities of using corpora in the classroom are, for example, sketched by Sinclair (2004), Mauranen (2004: 89–105), Bennett (2010), in the sections V “Using a corpus for language pedagogy and methodology” and VI “Designing corpus-based materials for the language classroom” of *The Routledge Handbook of Corpus Linguistics* (O’Keeffe/McCarthy (eds.) 2010), by Flowerdew (2012: 208–224) and Reppen (2012: 204–213). The benefits of using corpora in language learning contexts are summarized by Bennett (2010: 93), who states that “[a]ll language skills can be taught using corpora” and that “[u]sing corpora can provide a unique element of learning to your classroom”. She goes on:

(...) using corpora in the classroom can certainly facilitate language acquisition. More effective classroom materials engage learners in actual language use and in a variety of registers, which ultimately leads to increased motivation and more targeted learning. Used in conjunction with other materials (textbooks) and teaching approaches, corpora provide learners with the tools needed for language acquisition. (Bennett 2010: 93)

I started the recording and transcription of the job interviews while I was working on a project concerning the language use of women and men.¹ The first eighteen interviews were used for an empirical study of the sexes' language use in the context of the job interview. Its results are published in Wawra (2004). I became interested in the discourse genre 'job interview' because I believed this to be an area which would lead to major consequences for job applicants of either sex if their language use was preventing them from getting the job. While looking for research in the field, I was surprised to discover that there were almost no linguistic studies concerning job interviews. The few studies that had been done contained no authentic material at all or only a very small number of interviews.² However, particularly when studying job interviews, it is essential that we analyze authentic data and not the simulated conversations of mock interviews. The linguistic behavior of the applicants is likely to differ when they know that nothing is at stake and that the interview is in no way significant for their future lives. There are several reasons why up until now so few authentic interviews have been studied by linguists: One being that the job interview constitutes a very sensitive communication situation in which interviewers and applicants usually do not like to be observed. Since there are no universal rules as to how to conduct a job interview, interviewers fear they might be criticized by the researcher for their way of carrying it out. In the worst case they could be blamed for discriminating against certain individuals. Interviewers also fear that the applicant could be irritated by the presence of an observer and not behave in the same way as they would do without. Ultimately, interviewers do not want to risk being sued by applicants who did not get the job in the end, a possible argument being that they were not able to present themselves and their qualifications adequately due to the presence of the observer. This alone is reason enough to object to requests of researchers asking to record job interviews. On

1 Wawra, Daniela. 2004. *Männer und Frauen im Job Interview: Eine evolution-spsychologische Studie zu ihrem Sprachgebrauch im Englischen*. Münster. (The study explores the sexes' language use in general and in the context of the job interview in particular).

2 For an overview of linguistic studies on job interviews and more information on them see Wawra (2004:171).

part of the applicants, very much is at stake during a job interview, their future depends on it and they reveal much about themselves – personally and professionally. Therefore, it seems natural that some applicants might not be enthusiastic about another stranger being present in such a situation, someone who is not involved, learns much about them and causes them to be even more nervous than they already are.³

I was finally able to circumvent these problems when I was in a position to offer real jobs as English phonetics tutors to exchange students with English as a native language at the University of Passau. With the consent of the interviewees I was able to tape authentic job interviews without any third party having to be present as an observer. I decided against video and opted for audiotaping, as the latter could be done without drawing much of the applicants' attention to it and thus not distracting them from the task at hand. Thanks to this arrangement, I managed to record 40 authentic job interviews. Still, the task required patience, since I only interviewed those exchange students that were genuinely interested in getting the job. During some of the semesters I interviewed only three or four students which is why it took three and a half years for a corpus of this size to be compiled.

The following section 2 provides a short introduction to corpus linguistics. Major characteristics of corpora will be discussed and different kinds of corpora will be introduced, including a classification of the job interview corpus. Section 3 will outline major characteristics of the discourse genre 'job interview'. Section 4, then, contains more detailed information on the job interview corpus published in this book. Section 5 explains the transcription conventions used. You will find a bibliography in section 6 and section 7, finally, contains the transcriptions of the 40 job interviews.

3 cf. also Wawra (2004: 172) for a discussion of the obstacles researchers encounter when they want to study authentic job interviews.