



Text at Scale: Corpus Analysis in Technical Communication

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Stephen Carradini and Jason Swarts' (2023) *Text at Scale: Corpus Analysis in Technical Communication* presents a practical and comprehensive examination of corpus analysis as a significant method for reflecting on large-scale practice and texts developed by the field of technical communication over time. This large-scale reflection, they posit, is critical to the development of a deeper awareness of the field's disciplinary identity (p. 4). The authors focus their discussion on four key areas of the field: practice, research, pedagogy, and program administration, demonstrating how each area has contributed to the maturation of the field of technical communication through practices and material texts. They further make a case for how texts produced in these four domains can be productively studied through corpus analysis to yield data-driven insights needed for further development in the field. The authors' call for methods of scale in arriving at disciplinary awareness echoes previous calls made by scholars like Benjamin Miller in his 2022 book where he also conducted a corpus analysis of thousands of doctoral dissertations to investigate what they reflect about the identity of writing studies as a discipline. Unlike Miller's work, which does not go in-depth into corpus

Book Review: Afimaa on Carradini & Swarts

analysis as a method, Carradini and Swarts zero-in on the method itself, discussing its theoretical and practical aspects more broadly.

The authors adopt a balanced approach in their exploration of corpus analytic methods, highlighting both affordances and limitations of the method, while providing strategies to mitigate its challenges. Using numerous research examples in areas like user experience, genre analysis, and theory-building, the authors offer a practice-oriented discussion of corpus analytic techniques and key theoretical assumptions. This approach effectively bridges the gap between the technical concepts of corpus analysis and its practical applications, providing readers with a robust understanding of the method, its functionality, and possible applications in technical communication practice, pedagogy and research.

The book is structured into seven chapters. Chapter 1 establishes a rationale for using corpus analysis in technical communication, providing an overview of the scale of text being produced across the field, and the relevance of large-scale examinations of such texts as the field matures and charts a way forward. Chapter 2 introduces key assumptions, approaches and techniques of corpus analysis, outlining its theoretical underpinnings and procedures for interpreting data. Chapter 3 discusses the types of research questions best addressed by corpus analysis and the role of theoretical frameworks in shaping those questions. Chapter 4 then outlines strategies for building a representative and reasonably sized corpus, with particular attention to ethical concerns. Chapter 5 explores different approaches of analyzing a corpus, including discussions of specific corpus analytic tools like Lancsbox and Antconc, and the types of analysis their features support. Chapter 6 details how to present results obtained from corpus analysis. Here, in keeping with the practical approach applied throughout the book, the authors present an actual report of a corpus analytic project they conducted themselves, providing a model for readers. Finally, Chapter 7 shifts focus from methodological discussion to advocacy, calling for greater institutional and disciplinary support—linguistic, educational, financial, and computational resources—for corpus analytic research in technical communication.

The thorough examination of both the essence and applications of corpus analysis across technical communication practice, research, pedagogy, and program administration makes the book a valuable resource for technical communication practitioners, instructors, researchers, and graduate students alike. However, this review specifically focuses on the pedagogical contributions of the book, particularly in curriculum development and assessment.

In the area of curriculum development, the book answers questions on the kinds of topics to include in a corpus analysis methods course. Each chapter touches on unique corpus topics like assumptions, approaches and techniques of analysis, research question development, theoretical frameworks, construction, analytical approaches, ethical considerations, and sampling, among others. With these topics, instructors could easily create a 15-week course on corpus analysis, something the

Book Review: Afimaa on Carradini & Swarts

authors themselves call for (p. 124). In doing this, instructors could draw from the numerous resources and extensive literature referenced in the book. In addition to serving as a good reference material for curriculum content development, *Text at Scale* could also be an assigned reading for the class. The authors' use of both real and hypothetical examples along with the breakdown and step-by-step explanations make complex concepts and theories of the method accessible, making the book an excellent addition to a reading list for a methods class.

While the book presents corpus analysis in distinct sections related to technical communication practice and pedagogy, its discussion of the corpus analysis applications in professional practices present similarly relevant curriculum development insights. The authors' discussion of analysis applications in Technical Communication jobs like technical editing, content management, user experience research, among others, grounds the method in practice. This can be particularly helpful to technical communication instructors seeking to situate methodological discussions within specific aspects of the field. For example, an instructor teaching a user experience class will be able to draw on this book to demonstrate how corpus analysis can help uncover patterns in usability test transcripts.

Beyond aiding new curriculum development, *Text at Scale* also provides insight into assessing already existing curricula. Carradini and Swarts provide examples on how to assess the curriculum of courses like first-year writing, as well as the kind of texts to be investigated in the case of such studies. The authors point out how instructors and program administrators, using corpus analysis to study pedagogical materials like course syllabi, and student writing, among others can identify critical patterns and gain insights into how courses are shaping student development. For instance, the authors reference Laura Aull's (2017) study, which analyses argumentative and explanatory writing to identify what rhetorical moves students employ in those writings. A study like this could provide an understanding of how writing genres are being taught, what conventions are being emphasized, and areas needing refinement, ultimately yielding more effective curriculum updates.

Finally, a particularly strong aspect of this book is its consistent discussion of ethical considerations in corpus analysis. Carradini and Swarts raise critical concerns about ethical issues on internet-based research methods like corpus analysis and their tendency to be exclusionary. Beyond addressing ethical issues in the research site, the authors also touch on other important ethical considerations like representation, balance, and access, offering guidelines for dealing with the ethical dilemmas of corpus analysis (p. 73). These ethical considerations, though they are discussed in the context of corpus analysis, pertain to all types of research methods, whether internet-based corpus analysis or not.

Altogether, Carradini and Swarts' *Text at Scale: Corpus Analysis in Technical Communication* delivers on its promise by presenting a tailored discussion of corpus analysis situated in the field of Technical Communication, outlining critical and engaging ways by which the field can capitalize on the method to reflect on its past

Book Review: Afimaa on Carradini & Swarts

and chart a way for the future. This book is an invaluable addition to the literature on research methods in technical communication with relevance across all areas of the field and beyond.

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