

11-17-2023

## Review: Expanding Writing Center Research with Discourse Analysis

Sara Swaim

*Northeastern State University, swaim02@nsuok.edu*

Randall W. Monty

*The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, randall.monty@utrgv.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/wcj>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Swaim, Sara and Monty, Randall W. (2023) "Review: Expanding Writing Center Research with Discourse Analysis," *Writing Center Journal*: Vol. 41 : Iss. 2, Article 13.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2832-9414.2020>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

## R E V I E W

## Expanding Writing Center Research with Discourse Analysis

Sara Swaim (Northeastern State University), Randall W. Monty (The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley)

**Abstract** Corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) is a growing field of study that provides for holistic understandings of written texts, spoken discourse, rhetorical strategies, and the people who use them. Organized as a discussion of the topics, methods, and their potential applications for writing center research, this essay reviews three edited collections, *Corpus Approaches to Discourse: A Critical Review* by Charlotte Taylor and Anne Marchi (Routledge, 2018); *The Routledge Handbook of Corpus Approaches to Discourse Analysis* by Eric Friginal and Jack A. Hardy (Routledge, 2020); and *Research Methods for Digital Discourse Analysis* by Camilla Vásquez (Bloomsbury, 2022). Each introduces a range of practices, insights, and concerns for combining corpus and discourse analysis, which can be useful for developing writing center research, consultant training, and administrative outcomes.

**Keywords** corpus studies, discourse analysis, second language writing, multimodality, writing center research

Review

—  
Swaim—  
Monty

## Introduction

Do you, writing centered person, want to start a fight? Ask your discourse analyst friend what “counts” as discourse, as in: What kinds of artifacts are suitable for discourse and corpus analyses? If you want to start two fights, ask them while you’re with your other friend, the linguist. You will all agree that words—spoken, written—are discourse. But a lot of other things count as discourse in writing center research: the talk between tutors and student writers (Denny, 2018), session reports and survey results (Hall & Ryan, 2021), content produced over social media (Hay, 2022), or anything that results in or from our “scholarship, practice, tutor education, and writing centre design and management” (Faison & Condon, 2022, p. 5). According to Mautner (2009), “Elements of textual design, including typography, colour and text-image relationships, are not merely embellishments, but play an integral role in making text functions as socially situated discourse” (pp. 129–130). This expansive definition of discourse should be inspirational for writing centers and

writing center researchers, as McGinnis and Gray (2020) argue that our centers facilitate restorative justice when they support multimodal writing because that kind of writing is meaningful to students, reflects their everyday literacies, and relates to their lives and future careers.

For much of the 21st century, writing center studies (WCS) has been driven by a meta-discussion of what it means to do research in writing centers, with a noticeable preference for replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD) research in writing center publications and quantitative data in local expectations (Buck, 2017). Although this shift in thinking has helped move writing center research away from, in Denny’s (2018) view, “relying on lore and anecdotal evidence to shape the field’s identity” (p. 55), it also, according to Hallman Martini and Webster (2017), “may inhibit identity-based research that recognizes how race, sexuality, gender, ability, privilege, and emotion impact our work.” Further, according to Lockett (2018), “The language of RAD tends to strip the human experience of its nuance,” and so, “When researchers use adjectives such

Review

—  
Swaim—  
Monty

as data-driven or evidence-based to make rhetorical appeals for the validity of their research, they unnecessarily create a rigid separation between RAD and other kinds of information” (p. 33).

Contemporary WCS researchers have created space for comprehensive methodologies that intentionally account for intersectionality (Denny et al., 2018) and justice (Banville et al., 2020) through approaches such as data mining (Salem, 2016), quasi-experiments (Raign, 2017), and practitioner inquiry (Nordstrom, 2020). Questions about what counts are functionally questions about what *should* count, and that “should” can be interpreted in different ways by writing center researchers. Primarily, what has our discipline determined to be important or relevant? But also: Who is and what perspectives are being represented in our work? What potentially useful information and data have we overlooked, ignored, or not considered yet? What are the ethics of conducting research in the contemporary digital and constantly online age? What should we anticipate that meaningful discourse will look like farther ahead?

Three edited collections, *Corpus Approaches to Discourse: A Critical Review* by Charlotte Taylor and Anne Marchi (Routledge, 2018), *The Routledge Handbook of Corpus Approaches to Discourse Analysis* by Eric Friginal and Jack A. Hardy (Routledge, 2020), and *Research Methods for Digital Discourse Analysis* by Camilla Vásquez (Bloomsbury, 2022) introduce a range of practices, insights, and concerns for combining corpus and discourse analysis, all of which are relevant for writing center researchers.

Zimmerman’s (2018) review essay of writing research in the Middle East and North Africa in *Writing Center Journal* served as a helpful model for this review essay, where we focus our review of each edited collection on those sections, topics, and methods we anticipate will be most useful for writing center researchers. Rymer’s (2020) review of linguistic research in writing centers is another useful model and resource that shares our topics of interest. We organized this review essay to focus on those chapters in the edited collections that

we believe will be especially useful to writing center researchers—experienced researchers looking to hone methods, emergent scholars looking to expand their repertoires, students and consultants looking to break into writing center scholarship by finding connections between their own interests and ongoing disciplinary conversations. However, we encourage our colleagues to find opportunities for transfer and replication across the remaining chapters, as well. All in all, our essay will be less a recommendation for potential buyers and more a discussion of the topics, methods, and their potential applications for writing center research.

## Background

A corpus (or corpora in its plural form) is an electronically stored compilation of naturally occurring written or oral texts. Corpus linguistics is a field that dedicates itself to the use of a corpus as an instrument of research to extract information regarding linguistic patterns and tendencies within a specific context. In this sense, a corpus serves as a collection of representative texts by which an understanding about larger discourse patterns and preferences can be extracted. Corpus linguistics is largely centered around three types of data: frequency lists (keywords), lexical bundles (collocates), and contextual lists (concordances) (Reppen & Simpson-Vlach, 2019). These three features are quantitative in nature, yielding empirical data surrounding lexical and grammatical usage patterns. Baker (2006) asserts the validity of corpus studies, stating, “An association between two words occurring repetitively in naturally occurring language, is much better evidence for an underlying hegemonic discourse which is made explicit through the word pairing than a single case” (p. 13). Furthermore, corpora have been praised as effective pedagogical tools due to their exposure of authentic language and attention to syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features. Thus, in recent years, the field of corpus linguistics has served as both a “means to explore actual patterns of language use and as a tool for

Review

—  
Swaim—  
Monty

developing materials for classroom language instruction” (Reppen & Simpson-Vlach, 2019).

The emergence of corpus linguistics led to an increase in empirical data as a basis for discourse analysis as well as the integration and application of that information in discursive practices. Although using numerical data in a field that is typically qualifiable in nature, both in terms of scholarly and administrative outcomes, quantifiable data alone is not sufficient to form an accurate understanding of effective discursive practices (Cirillo-McCarthy et al., 2021). Egbert and Schnur (in Taylor & Marchi, 2018) note that corpora help increase generalizability of research findings and can offer increased efficiency, reliability, and objectivity; however, scholars have grown too attached to holistic results and distanced themselves from the original text, which is an essential part of discourse analysis. To achieve a more robust and comprehensive understanding of discursive habits, quantitative and qualitative information merge under the field of corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS). Within CADS, corpus applications lend invaluable data to highlight salient discursive features. A corpus can yield quantitative data, patterns, and observations that can support or challenge assumptions generated within typical discourse analysis techniques. Furthermore, corpus studies can highlight fluid, systematic changes over time, space, and genre with empirical evidence essential for discourse analysis (Friginal & Hardy, 2020). These data, however, do not become relevant until they can be contextualized. By looking at concordance lines or the context of specific features, discursive analysis practices related to sociolinguistic and/or pragmatic features such as moves analysis (Swales, 1990) can be conducted. This is relevant to writing center research of discourse and language, which, according to Thonus (2020), “can and should not be interpreted outside of a contextual frame” (p. 177). In short, the empirical data provided by a corpus can draw attention to recurring language forms, yet a manual contextual analysis is necessary to provide a better understanding of the function of those linguistic forms within a given context.

## Friginal & Hardy: Administrative Partnerships and Outcomes

*The Routledge Handbook of Corpus Approaches to Discourse Analysis*, edited by Eric Friginal and Jack A. Hardy (Routledge, 2020) is a massive collection primarily focused on spoken discourse in workplace settings, including academic and business contexts. Some topics are directly relevant to writing centers: undergraduate writing, multimodality, second language learning, academic discourse, language policy, as well as discourse of specific disciplinary areas like engineering, business communication, and history. Other chapters investigate topics of likely interest to writing center administrators and researchers, such as workplace discourse, spoken classroom discourse, political media discourse, and discourses of folks who identify as queer, speakers of World English and other global languages, and preservice teachers. Although each contributing author to the *Handbook of CADA* provides numerous examples of studies that could be ported over for writing center research and provides detailed explanations of their methods, this collection is still best suited for researchers who are already familiar with corpus and discourse analyses.

A methodological commonality in many of the studies provided in Friginal and Hardy (2020) is the implementation of corpora studies to extract empirical data indicative of salient discursive features followed by a qualitative analysis to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the rhetorical function of those features (e.g., lexical bundles, gestures, hedges/boosters, phrasal verbs). This collection offers explicit considerations for a mixed methods approach to discourse analysis. Most notable for researchers new to corpora are the recommendations for building a corpus or choosing an already existent corpus to use (e.g., diachronic corpora (Stratton), multimodal corpora (Chen, Adolphs, & Knight), and discipline-specific corpora (Partington and Duguid; Leung). While there are important methodological considerations presented in this collection, we believe that results and implications are more geared toward writing center

Review

—  
Swaim—  
Monty

practitioners. These studies emphasize the importance of combining both the form and function of language to understand communicative practices. Drawing attention to *both* these features is essential in guiding emerging participants to be successful within their target genres.

We're going to focus on the research with implications for three writing center populations in particular: undergraduate writers, second language (L2) writers, and emerging writers within a specific discipline. Jack Hardy's chapter on undergraduate writing explores the production of emerging participants in a discourse community. By comparing the work of experts to novice or "marginal participants" (e.g., graduate or undergraduate students), both similarities and differences in texts can be identified, which may lead to direct pedagogical implications for tutors and educators alike. Hardy explains that undergraduate writing is often neglected as participants of a discourse community because they "are not seen as being indicative of genres or registers because they have yet to learn how to play the game" (p. 238). Nevertheless, Hardy asserts that it is essential to learn more about how novice participants write and in what ways their textual patterns vary from their target genres as a means of informing pedagogical practices. Therefore, writing centers may consider the value of participating in research of novice writers as well as the importance of utilizing previous research and open-sourced corpus materials (e.g., the Corpus of Contemporary American English, aka COCA) to better guide writers to assimilate their writing to their target discourse communities.

There are several chapters dedicated specifically to second language discourse, which is increasingly a concern of writing centers. For instance, Swaim's writing center offers tutoring in English and in Spanish, while the writing center at Monty's institution asks students to select a preferred language for their consultation (English, Spanish, bilingual English/Spanish, or "Other"). Lake and Cortes acknowledge a disparity in information available regarding graduate-level writing trends in English compared to other world languages. Evidence in this chapter suggests

that rhetorical moves in research writing (specifically in the methods section) were significantly different between English and Spanish texts. Other chapters indicated that there were clear discursive differences with respect to linguistic features such as morphological complexity (Tywoniw and Crossley) and tense usage (Collentine and Asención-Delaney) in L2 production between novice and more adept L2 learners. Understanding these differences can play a role in anticipating needs and facilitating support for an increasingly multicultural and multilingual student population.

Several contributors in the collection provide insight on discipline-specific corpus work such as business (Mautner), engineering (Leung), and legal (Cunningham & Egbert) discourse. These studies and others assert that while academic writing may be categorized by a specific register and shared linguistic commonalities, there is still a great deal of discursive variance across disciplines. It would be impractical to assume that each tutor in a writing center be well versed in the preferences of each major discipline. Instead, writing centers can employ corpus-based studies and corpus data to enhance their understanding of preferential variances across disciplines. This is of particular importance to graduate-level writers who are looking to situate their own texts within a more restrictive discourse.

While writing centers are naturally most concerned with written texts, Lee's chapter on classroom discourse highlights the importance of spoken discourse within the learning process. Lee focuses on the pragmatic features of the phrase "you know" (and accompanying gestures) in a classroom setting. In addition to highlighting the value of multimodal corpus analysis, this chapter provides additional information to an ongoing discussion on teacher or tutor talk and the impact it may have on learner uptake. These studies are vital to writing centers because as Bleakney and Pittock (2019) note, "the empirical evidence to understand whether and how tutoring strategies influence the writer's 'next steps' is limited" (p. 128). Writing Center administrators may wish to consult this chapter as well as other experts in the field for information regarding consultant training and an

Review

—  
Swaim—  
Monty

approach to effective oral communication for providing feedback, negotiating meaning, and establishing rapport with writers.

## Taylor & Marchi: Expand and Augment Your Research

Charlotte Taylor and Anne Marchi's (Routledge, 2018) edited collection *Corpus Approaches to Discourse: A Critical Review* initially reads as an introduction to terms and concepts used in various forms of corpus analysis, and then it unfolds as an extended demonstration of the malleability and adaptability of corpus linguistics and discourse studies. The ability to modify your approach to meet the needs of your research, rather than changing your objectives to fit into a prescribed set of methods, is a factor that writing center researchers will find appealing about these approaches. Likewise, corpus and discourse analyses' natural suitability for collaboration and layering on qualitative methods and theories are also useful characteristics.

Although a mixed methodological approach of CADS is gaining popularity, there are practical concerns with respect to application that must be addressed. Taylor and Marchi (2018) argue that although the corpus approach to discourse analysis has been praised for its statistically rooted, unbiased efforts, they also identify evidence of shortcomings within its application while simultaneously providing guidance in mitigating those impacts. These challenging notions can be categorized in three major areas of concern: "blind spots," "dusty corners," and research design. Of particular interest to writing center researchers are the "dusty corners," or the previously neglected or understudied topics or texts, and the "blind spots," which reflect the necessity of triangulation within approaches.

For potential researchers, the "dusty corners" highlight a range of underinvestigated areas in which CADS could yield critical insights. These areas include cross-genre commonalities (Taylor), absence-based studies (Duguid & Partington), and even neglected text types (Lischinsky). First, Taylor asserts that corpus-based research focuses largely on

identifying contrastive features in comparative corpora yet identifying similarities can be essential in understanding shared discourse features across contexts. This expands on prior research in which it was determined that "the search for similarity can also be profitably expanded beyond the corpus selection/reaction stage into the discourse analysis" (Taylor, 2013). By repurposing corpus software tools such as keyness searches or collocates, patterns of constants and trends can be revealed. For writing centers, data regarding sameness across genres and registers can help highlight fundamental lexical, grammatical, and discursive traits necessary for novice writers independent of their target discourse.

Another area of increased interest is the absence of specific features in areas where they might be expected. Duguid and Partington encourage researchers to investigate "relevant, salient, or meaningful" absences. These absences, revealed in a comparative corpus-based analysis, can divulge a series of critical implications including (yet not limited to) a gap in production across two writers, bias in writing, and diachronic shifts in lexical preferences. In-house corpus-based absence investigations can highlight specific lexical and grammatical features consistent within "expert" or "proficient" texts (e.g., publications) that novice writers have yet to acquire. By identifying these inconsistencies, writing centers can better address the shortcomings of students and draw attention to clear and quantifiable differences between their production and their target genres.

The final overlooked theme addressed is the notion of understudied text types. These texts, outlined in Lischinsky's chapter, demonstrate that real-world rhetorical interactions are not always represented due to the presence of systematically ignored texts. Namely, fiction and imaginative genres are often neglected due to their vast variation in terms of both content and accessibility. Nevertheless, Lischinsky asserts that bias in "representative corpora" can be avoided through a more purposeful inclusion of such texts. Researchers may consider the necessity of including these texts to create a more holistic and representative corpus for sociolinguistic purposes.

Review

—  
Swaim—  
Monty

Taylor and Marchi assert that active implementation of triangulation within CADS can yield more precision, richness, and awareness within discourse. To deter the presence of “blind spots” and promote a more aggregate approach, *Corpus Approaches* advocates for three sound triangulation practices: multimodal analysis (Cagle), the implementation of multiple data sets (Jaworska & Kinloch), and interdisciplinary studies (Ancarno). Through these practices, discourse analysts can achieve increased transparency and consistency as well as an elevated sense of accountability in analytic practices.

### Vásquez: Reconceptualizing Writing Center Research

*Research Methods for Digital Discourse Analysis*, a collection of methodological essays curated by Camilla Vásquez (Bloomsbury, 2022), helps new researchers—and researchers new to discourse analysis and/or digital research—conduct “discourse-analytic treatments of digital phenomena” (p. 12). This involves applying concepts from corpus linguistics and discourse studies to research in emergent digital and visual modalities like the kind increasingly used by writing centers and encountered by tutors in writing center consultations. As McGinnis and Gray (2020) detailed, having consultants working with students on multimodal writing projects is not just important because of the increased number of projects that students are asked to do, but because multimodal work better reflects everyday and professional writing, allows students greater opportunities for conceptualizing and responding to audiences, and is the work of restorative justice that gives students more ownership of their voices as scholarly writers.

Multiple authors in *Research Methods* include actionable heuristics for research through digital discourse analysis, which can be extremely helpful for researchers needing a semi-bird’s-eye-view of how to start: Vásquez’s own “Theory Checklist” (p. 58), Pihlaja’s process for sampling data in digital discourse (p. 99), and the Association of Internet Researchers’ “reflective ethical judgment”

(Tagg & Spilioti, p. 134). Two chapters provide models for ethnographic approaches to discourse analysis: Bolander details how to use ethnographic approaches to analyze online discourse created by writers, while Thompson uses “interviews and observations to gain insight into their digital practices” (p. 355). We see these as grafting naturally onto Miley’s (2017) concept of institutional ethnography, which “widens the focus of writing center research, potentially bringing into focus the disconnect between writing center scholars’ own understanding of others within the academy” (p. 103). Bolander details how to use ethnographic approaches to analyze online discourse created by writers, while Thompson uses “interviews and observations to gain insight into their digital practices” (p. 355).

*Research Methods* also confronts some of the ethical concerns that emerge from these new research commonplaces. Primary among these concerns: Working with digital discourse necessitates discussions of the ethics of co-opting publicly available, user-created content, which often links to individual users’ identities. As Vásquez notes, “actions, identities, and ideologies are constructed in online spaces,” and as a result, “digital contexts vary in terms of sensitivity of topics discussed as well as with respect to users’ assumptions of privacy, among other considerations” (pp. 37, 18). In response, authors in this collection speak to the complexity of conducting digital discourse analysis while also ensuring writer autonomy. Kiesling provides an expansive definition of stance that accounts for “how speakers come to indicate or claim a position or attitude with respect to things being talked about, people in an interaction, and the talk itself” (p. 68). Meanwhile, Lee draws attention to “the blurred boundaries between the so-called online and the offline,” where “online practices are embedded in people’s offline lived experiences” (p. 214).

Other contributors, such as Pihlaja, turn their critical lenses to the modalities themselves and raise questions about accounting for “specific linguistic features as they relate to specific platforms” (p. 90). Brunner and Diemer on mixed-method, cross-platform analysis can be useful for studying the various kinds of

Review

—  
Swaim—  
Monty

content that writing centers produce, in terms of student writing, session outputs, and their own professional discourses (websites, social media, handouts, etc.). With the increase of video conferencing and centers creating video resources, Bhatia's chapter on analyzing online videos as "interdiscursivity: mixing of genres, voices, and discourses" will no doubt prove to be increasingly useful (p. 267). Taken together, we see *Research Methods* as presenting a promising combination of relevant topics, replicable methodologies, and socially just rationales for applying digital discourse analysis to writing center research.

## Recommendations

These three collections add to the growing conversation that confirms the importance of corpus-based investigations within the field of discourse analysis. Moving forward, we want to highlight three major takeaways for writing center researchers:

1. It is imperative that writing centers engage with current literature to become aware of trends, practices, and concerns within the rapidly growing field of CADS. Specifically, as discourse is changing to encompass more multimodal facets and technology is enabling us to analyze data more efficiently, we need to approach discourse studies with a more critical eye to ensure that data reflect real-world occurrences. Similarly, we feel that a strong awareness of CADS literature will be necessary to keep up with future trends of writing centers as they relate to both training and support. Within WCS, the edited collection *Theories and Methods of Writing Center Studies: A Practical Guide* (Mackiewicz & Babcock, 2020) details numerous approaches to researching with corpus data and applying discourse analysis, while Rymer (2020) provides a detailed accounting of research on textual analysis of writing center discourse.
2. Writing centers should utilize CADS data to inform practices and guide writers. Prior research has indicated that the
3. Writing centers should strive to contribute knowledge to the growing field and utilize preexisting corpora to research or compare discipline-specific practices. Leung (in Friginal & Hardy, *Handbook of CADA*, 2020) notes, "research utilizing profession-specific corpora allows for both frequency analysis and detailed examination of items at their context of use" (p. 390). Additionally, consider building your own corpus whose results would be most impactful within your own institution. For example, you may seek to better understand the metadiscursive practices within your tutoring sessions. Mackiewicz and Thompson (2016) assert that "combining corpus analysis with discourse analysis helps to unfetter the research questions that we can ask about

integration of corpus-based approaches can have a positive impact on student understanding of both specific linguistic features (Garner, 2013; Larsen-Walker, 2017) as well as academic register (Ha, 2016; Liu, 2008; Miller, 2011). Additionally, Bolton (2009) asserts that implementing corpus-based tools serves a wide population of learners including those with no background with corpus tools, stating, "As with dictionary use, explicit training would no doubt be of use to many learners, but the absence of such training does not mean the tool should be abandoned altogether" (p. 51). This is to say that, while there is indeed a learning curve to these practices, it is not always as daunting as it might seem. Writing centers should serve as guides in implementing these tools to better understand target discourse communities. Dove notes the responsibility of institutions to promote "the metadiscursive support made available to students and instructors to enhance the quality of language and literacy socialization in their midst and to accommodate and support newcomers—from all language backgrounds—within these discourse communities more satisfactorily and seamlessly as well" (as cited in Lake & Cortes in Friginal & Hardy, *Handbook of CADA*, 2021).



Review

—  
Swaim—  
Monty

the talk that goes on in writing centers” (p. 219). Beyond that, new corpus creation can contribute to the understanding of undergraduate writing and the acquisition of academic or professional discourse. In all these endeavors, content from these collections provides a sound methodological framework in which investigative efforts can be based.

## Potential Constraints

Stratton (in Friginal & Hardy, *Handbook of CADA*, 2020) argues that “a corpus is only as effective as its user, to the extent that the user is acquainted with its structure, design, and the historical period in question” (p. 213). Indeed, noted across these collections are various ethical concerns and practical limitations to researching with corpus and discourse analyses. Four that we want to draw attention to are (1) concerns of what counts as natural language use, (2) ethics of working with online data, (3) ethics of using student-created content, and (4) material and time costs of corpus and discourse approaches.

1. Corpus and discourse analyses typically work with instances of “real” or “naturally occurring” language. But conversations that take place in the writing center or student academic writing, which is almost always the product of assignments mandated by an instructor and is being made by novice and emerging writers and speakers, bend the parameters of what we might consider to be “real” or “naturally occurring.” Therefore, a slight modification in terms of what counts as discourse is in order. Across these collections, many of these authors urge researchers to construct learner corpora with artifacts for analysis that exemplify individuals learning to write and communicate in certain registers and genres. These recommendations reflect Aull’s (2017) call for a focus on the genres students write in, which have an impact beyond classroom and professional contexts and “shape the rhetorical citizens

they become, of academic, professional, and other discourse communities” (p. 3). Such corpora would not necessarily be representative of the “natural” language of a particular discipline, but they would be representative of a kind of discrete natural language that can, according to Aull (2017), “help identify patterned discourse that (1) highlights examples of discursive adaptation to particular genres, and (2) explicitly links writing goals with specific writing choices students make” (p. 33). Every writing situation has contextual and situated motivating factors, and so researchers need to critically consider how to account for, control, and study those discrepancies. Aggregating and comparing data collected at individual writing centers is one way to do this, which is one benefit of projects like the cross-institutional Writing Center Data Repository Project, which was awarded a 2019 International Writing Centers Association Research Grant.

2. There are research limitations resulting from the broader technological contexts that we and our students come from and are entering. For starters, when collecting online data, there is a greater likelihood that the researcher will also harvest personal information and traceable metadata, especially when researching social media. As Pihlaja put it, “There is never a “neutral” version of online data, and data sampling online needs to consider not only the explicit choices of researchers, but also the implicit decisions that are made by the technologies underlying the data being used in research” (p. 105). Working with publicly available content is more ethically complicated than some researchers might recognize, and researchers who grew up in an internet-mediated world might think that they are naturally inoculated from the biases of, and deceptive tactics employed by, digital content creators.
3. Following those, researchers need to be considerate about the extent to which students knowing they are contributing to data for research affects how students write and how they act during

Review

—

Swaim

—

Monty

a consultation (Tagg and Spilioti, in Vásquez). Writing centers are dynamic spaces that require risk mitigation (Lambert, 2022) and the tutor acting as an “unintended reader” (Brown, 2010). Asking students and consultants to participate in studies and contribute their work for analysis shifts the writing center dynamic and could make students more anxious about their writing and behavior. Simply put, a research space is different from a consultation space. We’re already obliged to use data created by students who were coerced to do that work; especially as data becomes easier to collect, we should be extremely careful before shifting the writing center lest it become another edtech data mining company. For these reasons, and although it will make data collection even more time consuming, we support research models that require individuals to assent to participate and have their data used versus models that require would-be participants to opt out, as advocated by Gonzales et al. (2020).

4. Even after determining whether corpus or discourse analysis are the appropriate methods or approaches for your question of inquiry, applying them to your research is more than just a matter of simply starting the work. Appropriate software and access to data can cost a lot of money that writing centers and student researchers might not have to spend. Although there are numerous freeware options (we’d recommend AntConc and Sketch Engine), they can require steep learning curves before productive use. Even if you have access to the tools and data, both corpus and discourse analysis are time-intensive methods (although the next wave of AI-assisted instruments might alleviate some of that work).

An effective corpus is determined by the specificity of text type and the quantity of words. Some of the most utilized corpora like the COCA and the British National Corpus boast more than 100 billion words each. While not all corpora are this large, it is important that a corpus be large enough that findings

are truly indicative of the language used by the intended population (as opposed to the trends happening in one particularly large text within the corpus). When working with student assignments or a student population, building a sizable corpus can be time consuming. The initial corpus compilation requires IRB approval and student consent even though subsequent work with the corpus does not. Therefore, obtaining consent and compiling similar texts is often an ongoing process. Depending on the size of your participant population, creating a corpus large enough to yield reliable and significant data may take years. Once a corpus achieves a satisfactory size, quantitative data can be extracted relatively quickly. Qualitative data, however, typically requires manual analysis, which can be time consuming and laborious, but as Page noted, “For many research projects, it may not be possible to use inter-rater reliability procedures. Intra-coder testing is an alternative process. It involves the researcher repeatedly coding the data over a period of time, with periods away from the data” (p. 237). Despite its rigor, this manual analysis is of vital importance for an accurate understanding of discursive habits.

## Closing

Each of these collections has something to offer the writing center community. We predict that Taylor and Marchi will be the *most useful* for experienced researchers looking for ways to modify and specialize their methods and studies, Frigal and Hardy will be *most useful* for writing center administrators interested in expanding their efforts in interdisciplinary collaboration, and Vásquez will be *most useful* for tutors, practitioners, and emergent researchers enthusiastic about expanding the scope of what writing is and what writing centers are capable of doing.

As is common with most edited collections, our recommendation is that researchers pick and choose the chapters from each

collection most relevant to their work. When doing so, writing center researchers should follow Hallman Martini's (2022) partnership approach and collaborate with trained linguists, discourse analysts, and quantitative researchers, and writing center administrators can recruit tutors, staff, and other would-be practitioners with these areas of expertise.

## References

- Aull, L. (2017). Corpus analysis of argumentative versus explanatory discourse in writing task genres. *Journal of Writing Analytics*, 1(1), 1–47.
- Baker, P. (2006). *Glossary of corpus linguistics*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Banville, M., Dibrell, D., & Gonzalez, L. (2020). Letter from the editors. *Peer Review: Featured Issue: Researching and Restoring Justice*, 4(2).
- Bleakney, J., & Pittock, S. P. (2019). Tutor talk: Do tutors scaffold students' revisions? *Writing Center Journal*, 37(2), 127–160.
- Boulton, A. (2009). Testing the limits of data-driven learning: Language proficiency and training. *ReCALL*, 21(1), 37–54.
- Brown, R. (2010). Representing audiences in writing center consultation: A discourse analysis. *Writing Center Journal*, 30(2).
- Buck, E. H. (2017). *Open-access, multimodality, and writing center studies*. Palgrave Pivot.
- Cirillo-McCarthy, E., Del Russo, C., Fields, A., & Leahy, E. (2021). Writing center reporting strategies that subvert institutional absurdities. *Peer Review*, 7(1).
- Denny, H., Mundy, R., Naydan, L. M., Sévère, R., & Sicari, A. (2018). *Out in the center: Public controversies and private struggles*. Utah State University Press.
- Denny, M. (2018). The oral writing-revision space: Identifying a new and common discourse feature of writing center consultations. *Writing Center Journal*, 37(1).
- Faison, W., & Condon, F. (2022). *Counterstories from the writing center*. Utah State University Press.
- Friginal, E., & Hardy, J. A. (Eds.). (2020). *The Routledge handbook of corpus approaches to discourse analysis*. Routledge.
- Garner, J. R. (2013). The use of linking adverbials in academic essays by non-native writers: How data-driven learning can help. *Calico Journal*, 30(3), 410–422.
- Gonzales, L., Leon, K., & Shivers-McNair, A. (2020). Testimonios from faculty developing technical & professional writing programs at Hispanic-serving institutions. *Programmatic Perspectives*, 11(2), 67–93.
- Ha, M.-J. (2016). Linking adverbials in first-year Korean university EFL learners' writing: A corpus-informed analysis. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 29(6), 1090–1101.
- Hall, S., & Ryan, H. (2021). The neglected "R": Replicability, replication and writing center research. *Writing Center Journal*, 39(1–2), 211–232.
- Hallman Martini, R. (2022). *Disrupting the center: A partnership approach to writing across the university*. Utah State University Press.
- Hallman Martini, R., & Webster, T. (2017). Writing centers as brave/r spaces: A special issue introduction. *Peer Review*, 1(2).
- Hay, A. (2022). On networking the writing center: Social media usage and non-usage. *Writing Center Journal*, 40(2), 70–84.
- Lambert, R. J. (2022). Write or flight in extreme situations: Instability, creativity, and healthy risks. In S. P. Alvarez et al. (Eds.), *Literacy and learning in times of crisis*. Peter Lang.
- Larsen-Walker, M. (2017). Can data driven learning address L2 writers' habitual errors with English linking adverbials? *System*, 69, 26–37.
- Liu, D. (2008). Linking adverbials: An across-register corpus study and its implications. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 13(4), 491–518.
- Lockett, A. (2018). A touching place: Womanist approaches to the center. In H. Denny, R. Mundy, L. M. Naydan, R. Sévère, & A. Sicari (Eds.), *Out in the center: Public controversies and private struggles* (pp. 28–42). Utah State University Press.
- Mackiewicz, J., & Babcock, R. D. (Eds.). (2020). *Theories and methods of writing center studies: A practical guide*. Routledge.
- Mackiewicz, J., & Thompson, I. (2016). Adding quantitative corpus-driven analysis to qualitative discourse analysis: Determining the aboutness of writing center talk. *Writing Center Journal*, 35(3), 187–225.
- Mautner, G. (2009). Checks and balances: How corpus linguistics can contribute to CDA. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. Sage.
- McGinnis, M. F., & Gray, J. P. (2020). Multimodality and the writing center's role in restoring justice for "bad writers." *Peer Review*, 4(2).
- Miley, M. (2017). Looking up: Mapping writing center work through institutional ethnography. *The Writing Journal*, 36(1), 103–125.

- Miller, D. (2011). ESL reading textbooks vs. university textbooks: Are we giving our students the input they may need? *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 10(1), 32–46.
- Nordstrom, G. (2020). *A writing center practitioner's inquiry into collaboration: Pedagogy, practice, and research*. Routledge.
- Raign, K. (2017). Cinderella's slipper: Research, quasi research, rad research, small scale evaluations and the search for the right fit. *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, 14(2).
- Reppen, R., & Simpson-Vlach, R. (2019). Corpus linguistics. In N. Schmitt & M. P. H. Rodgers (Eds.), *An introduction to applied linguistics*. Routledge.
- Rymer, M. (2020). The linguist in the writing center: A primer on textual analysis in writing center studies. *Writing Center Journal*, 38(1).
- Salem, L. (2016). Decisions . . . decisions: Who chooses to use the writing center? *Writing Center Journal*, 35(2), 147–171.
- Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, C. (2013). Searching for similarity using corpus-assisted discourse studies. *Corpora*, 8(1), 81–113.
- Taylor, C., & Marchi, A. (Eds.). (2018). *Corpus approaches to discourse: A critical review*. Routledge.
- Thonus, T. (2020). Discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, and conversation analysis. In J. Mackiewicz, & R. D. Babcock (Eds.), *Theories and methods of writing center studies: A practical guide*. Routledge.
- Vásquez, C. (Ed.). (2022). *Research methods for digital discourse analysis*. Bloomsbury.
- Zimmerman, E. (2018). Review: *Writing centers in the higher education landscape of the Arabian Gulf*, edited by Osman Baranwi; and *Emerging writing research from the Middle East–North Africa region*, edited by Lisa R. Arnold, Anne Nebel, and Lynna Ronesi. *Writing Center Journal*, 37(1).

Review

—

Swaim

—

Monty