Book Review


When offering advice, we aim to facilitate “future actions, thoughts, or behaviors” (p. 1) in others that will benefit them, irrespective of whether the advice is solicited. Despite the typically altruistic intention of helping the advisee, advice-giving is frequently met with resistance, rejection, or other unreceptive responses (such as silence), which, in the worst cases, can negatively affect the relationship between the interlocutors (Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson, 2022). At this point, how the advice is provided becomes crucial. The linguistic structures advisers choose (imperatives, interrogatives, etc.) can express varying scales of “communicative directness” (p. 48), allowing advice to be received and interpreted in different ways. Through these advice constructions, advisees can discern, on the one hand, the fluctuating degrees of deontic and epistemic authority advisers assume, which pertain to the deontic force of the advice and advisers’ conviction in its merit. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, these choices also indicate advisers’ openness to “alternative options and viewpoints” (p. 46) from advisees, rather than simply seeking “yes” or “no” answers. By observing the linguistic constructions employed by advisers, the advisees gain insight into the former’s concern for interpersonal relationships, in which both parties are involved, and the efforts advisors invested in upholding positive rapport (for example, face considerations).

In *Advice in Conversation*, Nele Põldvere, Rachele De Felice, and Carita Paradis demonstrate the importance of studying advice as a “directive-commissive speech act” (p. 2). Drawing on an integrated theoretical framework that combines Speech Act Theory with frame-based politeness theory, their work underscores both the multidimensional complexities of advice as a collaborative, context-dependent phenomenon, as well as the research value...
of advice acts from multiple analytical perspectives (theoretical, qualitative, quantitative, and statistical) within corpus pragmatics. Using data extracted from two diachronic spoken British English corpora, the London-Lund Corpus (including LLC-1, from the 1950s to 1980s, and the more recent LLC-2, from 2014 to 2019), the authors analyze how this speech act unfolds through constant dialogic negotiation in natural, spontaneous conversation. In particular, they focus on the potential of advice acts for usage-based, socio-cognitive, and diachronic analysis.

The book is divided into 6 sections. In Section 1 (Introduction), Põldvere et al. ground the book’s focus on the interplay of three elements: the linguistic structures chosen by the adviser across various discourse contexts when providing advice, the social-cognitive frame encompassing the interlocutors’ experiences and knowledge about how the advice should be given and negotiated, as well as the discursive frame requiring constant negotiation and adaptation of the interlocutors to find common ground.

In Section 2 (Background), Põldvere et al. further justify from a theoretical perspective the role of advice as a “broad network of instantiations of directive-commissive speech acts” (p. 2) and the importance of analyzing it within the “usage-based socio-cognitive framework” (p. 6) from a diachronic and synchronic perspective. Beginning with an identification of Speech Act Theory’s limitations, the authors redefine and expand the set of felicity conditions for advice acts. In critiquing the theory’s emphasis on decontextualized sentences or utterances as the primary unit of analysis, Põldvere et al. explain the need to explore advice linguistic constructions and their presence in authentic dialogic contexts. Then, guided by conversation analysis and interactional linguistics, they narrow the current research to examine advice-giving and uptake practices. Meanwhile, Põldvere et al. also provide a comprehensive review of linguistic structures available to advisers in various situations and contexts, along with their classification criteria. In closing this section, the authors more closely analyze the sociocultural and historical factors underlying advice sequences, referring to frame-based politeness theory. Here, they invoke “politeness conventionalization” to explain the value of studying diachronic perceptions of optimal advice-giving etiquette.

Section 3 (Data and Methods) explains the methodology adopted by the current study. Põldvere et al. first present the sources for the current corpus analysis, the two previously mentioned diachronic corpora (LLC-1 and LLC-2) from which private, face-to-face conversation samples were extracted. Specifically, the conversation samples selected can be categorized into two types: casual dialogues between social equals (e.g., friends, colleagues,
family members) and institutional dialogues featuring status disparities (e.g., employer-employee, teacher-student). As suggested by the book’s title, the authors then provide a comprehensive explanation of the three methodological pillars underlying the study: the “corpus pragmatics methodology,” “the mixed-methods approach,” and “the analysis of advice in conversations.” By integrating the “quantitative, qualitative, and statistical techniques” (p. 7), the analysis focuses on the advice sequences found in both casual and institutional conversations. It begins with the extraction of advice-giving utterances from a substantial corpus dataset (quantitative method). These utterances are then classified based on their communicative function (qualitative method). Subsequently, the classified utterances are annotated per factors such as forms of advice, (non-) solicitation of advice, or advisee’s response to advice (qualitative method) before undergoing statistical analysis (quantitative and statistical methods). In the final analytic stage of interpreting the results, a qualitative lens is re-applied, drawing insights from Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics.

Finally, Põldvere et al. present the study results, their theoretical and methodological implications, as well as the conclusions in Sections 4, 5, and 6. In this book review, I will first discuss the results (Section 4) and conclusions (Section 6) of the study, and then proceed to explore its contributions and implications (Section 5). By comparing advice patterns across a 50-year gap in different discourse contexts (casual and institutional conversations), in Sections 4 (Results and Discussion) and 6 (Conclusion), Põldvere et al. reveal an evolutionary trend toward greater acceptance of more assertive advice constructions over time. Furthermore, unlike previous advice-uptake studies that focused on the presence of advice solicitation, their corpus analysis validates “who gives the advice and how it is given” (p. 67) as stronger predictors of advisees’ responses. For example, they find systematic differences in advice provision and uptake between interlocutors situated as equals versus those in hierarchical relationships. In casual conversations between equals (who), advisers tend to use more direct forms (how) due to reduced face concern constraining the equals, compared to institutionally defined superiors and subordinates. However, the advice given by equals tends to face higher rates of rejection or resistance.

Progressing through these 6 sections of the study, Põldvere et al. provide a new paradigm for studying the multidimensional complexities of advice acts in natural conversations extracted from spoken corpora. From a theoretical perspective, Section 5 (Theoretical and Methodological Implications) concludes that this study’s principal contribution relies on the provision of a usage-based,
socio-cognitive approach to meaning-making in discourse, whose formation borrows insights both from Speech Act Theory and frame-based politeness theory. According to Põldvere et al., this approach, that is, accounting for dynamic and context-dependent meaning-making and negotiation, as well as examining entire discursive, socio-cognitive frameworks underlying advice acts, enables deeper insight into advisory acts. Specifically, this facilitates a better understanding of factors impacting effective advice uptake. Methodologically, this study reveals the potential of a mixed-methods approach for corpus pragmatics analysis by combining techniques that appear contradictory yet only result in better analytical precision. In particular, the authors stress the importance of complementing the conventional corpus qualitative corpus pragmatics with statistical modeling, which may lead to a better examination of the multiple factors shaping advisory exchanges across spoken corpora.

While the book has many positive values, I note some limitations. While the comparison of LLC-1 and LLC-2 spoken English corpus seems intriguing, I was left uncertain about the accuracy of dichotomizing conversations as either “casual conversations between equals” or “institutional conversations between disparities.” Moreover, some classifications based on descent (father-child, for example) or partnerships like marriage also fail to convince me, since previous studies have observed hierarchical relations between closely related family members such as spouses and parents-children. This limitation aligns with the authors’ appeal for future experiment-based corpus studies, where variables can be more strictly controlled among participants. Meanwhile, due to “politeness conventionalization,” further exploration of cultural considerations could also broaden the book’s application. Despite these limitations, Põldvere, De Felice and Paradis have done excellent work in constructing the multidimensional theoretical framework for research on the speech act of advice-giving, not to mention pioneering a mixed methods of corpus pragmatics analysis approach. In this book, readers can find detailed and structured guidelines for statistical, qualitative, and quantitative pragmatics corpus study. Students and researchers interested in investigating speech acts through spoken corpora may find this book extremely useful.

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References
