**“Looking for a good laugh”: Using ontologies to access pragmatic phenomena through spoken corpora**

In this paper, we focus on the phenomenon of ‘embarrassed laughter’ as a case study of one approach to corpus pragmatics. We construct a set of interlinked ontologies by comparing the transcription practice of various collections of data as summarised by Hepburn and Varney (2013), making explicit the implied knowledge underlying those transcription practices about the characteristics of laughter which have been treated as interactionally relevant. These ontologies allow us to see the essentially combinatorial nature of certain pragmatic phenomena and therefore also allow us to develop strategies for searching for relevant data. We then proceed to illustrate how such search strategies can work with the example of ‘embarrassed laughter’. Such laughter often occurs early in an interaction (especially first encounters) and following long pauses. We can therefore establish a set of search criteria (laughter AND (start of interaction OR long pause) to try to find possible instances of this phenomenon in varied collections of data such as those which form part of the Australian National Corpus. Our approach acknowledges the complexity of the factors which may be relevant to the identification of any pragmatic phenomenon without relying on the prior identification of instances in any specific dataset, and has the capability to generate candidate sets of examples across varied data sets while relying on features which are annotated in standard practice. We suggest that looking for clusters of features which characterize pragmatic phenomena and organizing our knowledge of the features with ontologies constitutes a very promising approach in the field of corpus pragmatics.

Reference

Hepburn, Alexa & Scott Varney. 2013. Beyond ((Laughter)): Some Notes on Transcription. In Phillip Glenn & Elizabeth Holt (eds.), *Studies of Laughter in Interaction*, 25–38. London: Bloomsbury Academic.