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## ***BOOK NOTICE***

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BOOK NOTICE of MCENERY, TONY, & BREZINA, VACLAV.  
*FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF CORPUS LINGUISTICS*. CAMBRIDGE:  
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*Fundamental Principles of Corpus Linguistics* is an investigation of the philosophical underpinnings of corpus linguistics by two experienced practitioners. McEnery and Brezina are admirably clear about the scope and limits of their project which, rather than being an articulation of widely accepted principles for carrying out corpus linguistics, as the title would suggest, includes claims about corpus linguistic practice, philosophical principles offered as foundations for corpus linguistic practice, and connections between the two.

The book consists of eight chapters and two appendices across 306 pages. The first chapter provides a helpful sketch of the position they will develop over the course of the book. This is followed by chapters building up from foundational principles in the philosophy of science (Chapter Two: 'What is Science?') through to more practical applications in corpus linguistics (Chapter Seven: 'Replication: Carrying out an Empirical Study'). Across the eight chapters, McEnery and Brezina iteratively develop forty-eight principles which encapsulate their view. As their iterative method suggests, the principles are open to future revision within their 'fallibilist' framework. The principles are listed in an appendix along with a helpful glossary.

The big picture is a 'critical realist' take on corpus linguistics inspired by the work of Karl Popper. It is 'realist' in that it believes analysis of corpus data provides genuine access to linguistic reality, however this might be understood. It is 'critical' in so far as it acknowledges a

series of limitations to our access to reality. We are limited, for instance, in the small sliver of language data we can sample and by the categories which we use to classify linguistic data. Nonetheless, careful use of corpora gets us some of the distance towards this reality. We have, in their term, 'quasi-contact' with reality. At the practical level, their picture encourages open and honest sharing of data and analysis and a preference for parsimonious, integrated, and precise hypotheses. In particular, they encourage hypotheses with maximal openness to falsification.

A particular strength of the book is its attention to Popper's thought on social science, and especially his discussion of 'traditions' and 'institutions', which are often left aside in accounts of Popper directed to the physical sciences (see esp. Chapter Four). This is absolutely vital for an application of Popper's thought to linguistics. However, there is a marked lack of clarity in the presentation of philosophical ideas throughout the book. For instance, an 'axiom' is a proposition with a certain status (e.g. as 'self-evident' or 'primitive') and/or a practical role (e.g., as a proposition from which arguments start). However, McEnery and Brezina suggest collocation is 'an axiom' of corpus linguistics and discuss the status of 'the axiom of collocation'. This leaves the reader in the dark about what the axiom actually is and thus unable to follow the wider discussion.

When they venture into metaphysics, McEnery and Brezina present their philosophical positions as prerequisites for a scientific attitude. They retell a joke about a 'guru' who claims that 'all of reality is an illusion', but then runs away from a charging elephant. They go on to reject 'idealism', understood as the claim that 'only the mind exists, and objects and actions are imagined by the mind' (Chapter One). However, depending on formulation, both views are compatible with scientific practice. In these sections of the book, the authors are, at best, tilting at windmills. At worst, they risk unnecessarily excluding researchers and students with a scientific attitude to corpus linguistics but alternative metaphysical commitments.

The book concludes with a welcome invitation for the reader to articulate their own version of "what it means to study language, with or without a corpus", and contrast it with their own. One hopes this invitation will be widely taken up.