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## **Workshop**

### **Critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics: An exercise in reflexive methodology**

In the past few years, analytical techniques developed by corpus linguistics (CL) have been edging their way into the methodological canon of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Hardt-Mautner 1995, Stubbs 1996, Baker 2006, Mautner 2009a and 2009b). They allow researchers to work with larger data volumes, complementing and triangulating other forms of analysis, and thus making results more reliable. Three types of approaches have proved to be especially fruitful for CDA: (i) investigating large, computer-held corpora to extract linguistically encoded social information and, in particular, to study linguistic phenomena that crystallize around key words; (ii) tapping into such corpora for the comparative evidence needed to put qualitative findings into perspective, and (iii) applying concordancing software to purpose-built corpora which may be small enough to be handled manually, but where computer support facilitates discovery.

On the basis of examples from recent projects, we will discuss not only the potential synergies to be gained by combining CDA and CL, but also the tensions, challenges, and pitfalls involved. While a good case can be built to show that CL is extraordinarily useful for critical research, it is equally important to self-reflexively confront the method's limitations, and to remain suitably modest about its potential as a heuristic tool. Crucially, the more solid empirical grounding that CL undoubtedly allows should not lull us into a false sense of security, or tempt us to draw rash conclusions from language data. On the contrary, Alvesson and Skölberg's warning (2000: 5) that "an assumption of a simple mirroring thesis of the relationship between 'reality' or 'empirical facts' and research results (text) has to be rejected" appears to resonate particularly strongly when technology allows us to access, gather and process data in such deceptive abundance. Thus, like all other methods, the CDA/CL partnership is perhaps best approached with a healthy mix of enthusiasm and skepticism.

#### References

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Gerlinde Mautner is Professor and Head of the Institute for English Business Communication at WU (*Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien*), the Vienna University of Economics and Business. She regularly spends extended research periods at the linguistics departments of British universities, including Birmingham, Lancaster, Cardiff and King's College London. Since the 1990s, Gerlinde has published widely on the use of corpus linguistics in critical discourse analysis, and on the influx of marketised language into a variety of lifeworlds, including higher education.