Part 1

Introduction

The MICASE Handbook is designed as a companion to the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English and was born out of a multiyear team effort on the part of numerous research assistants and other key personnel. The heart of the *Handbook* consists of a set of abstracts of each of the 152 speech events in the original MICASE database. These abstracts, ranging from 150 to 350 words, were conceived of and written to provide contextual background on each of the speech events of the corpus so that researchers and teachers could get a quick overview of the content and salient interactional features of each event. These summaries are useful both for interpreting utterances or discourse segments in a transcript and in assessing the potential usefulness of that speech event for pedagogical or research purposes.

We envision two main categories of users for the *Handbook*. First and foremost, it is intended to be a tool for post-secondary level ESL/EFL/EAP teachers who have already used MICASE for classroom teaching activities or who are interested in finding ways to incorporate such a corpus into their teaching materials. Second, the *Handbook* is aimed at corpus linguists and discourse analysts who use MICASE for research purposes and want a bit more contextual information than is accessible from just a few concordance lines or short extracts. Additionally, this corpus is not only a linguistic and language teaching resource; it also provides an oral and written glimpse of a place and time in history. The contents of the various events recorded for the corpus comprise a valuable storehouse of late 20th century state-of-the-art knowledge and discourse on a variety of topics ranging from biotechnology, particle physics, and artificial intelligence to psychopathology, Christianity, and modern art. We hope, therefore, that the *Handbook* will also be useful

to scholars and students interested in American academic language and culture more generally, who would not otherwise be drawn toward a language corpus as a source of data.

This book provides an overview of the corpus holdings and serves as a reference manual to the corpus. By presenting easily accessible details unlike those usually available to corpus users, the *Handbook* enables teachers, materials writers, and researchers to further their own agendas by accessing the corpus in a variety of ways.

The abstracts and *Handbook* encourage in-depth, qualitative use of a single transcript or a select few, rather than the more common generalized cross-corpus use in which numerous shorter excerpts, word-frequency lists, or concordance lines constitute the primary entry into the corpus. Because the abstracts conveniently contextualize and summarize each of the speech events, much of the preliminary browsing has been done for users, saving them the time of reading through one or more entire transcripts and allowing them to direct their attention to specific transcripts that will be most relevant to their research agenda, pedagogical goals, or classroom needs. Moreover, because the abstracts were written after both reading the transcript and listening to the sound file, they often provide insights into some subtleties that might not be obvious from simply reading the transcript. The *Handbook* also facilitates utilization of the corpus for content-based language instruction in a wide variety of subject areas and sheds light on some of the ethnographic and cultural issues relevant to classroom culture and the academic community of practice.

We hope this handbook will encourage the use of existing MICASE-based teaching materials as well as the development of new materials by teachers who want to incorporate corpus-based lessons into their classroom teaching. We also hope that it will prove to be a valuable resource and reference book for researchers and students of corpus linguistics and American academic speech.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS HANDBOOK

The MICASE Handbook is divided into two introductory sections (Parts 1 and 2), four reference sections (Parts 3–6), and one pedagogical mate-

rials section (Part 7). Part 2 gives a description of MICASE, including the background to the development of the corpus; the structure of the corpus; transcription and mark-up conventions; and references to Web-based resources not included in this handbook, including information on accessing and obtaining copies of the corpus.

The first of the four reference sections (Part 3) is a set of five lists, each of which categorizes all the transcripts according to a primary criterion: (1) type of speech event; (2) academic division; (3) interactivity rating; (4) participant level; and (5) characteristics of the primary speaker. Each criterion is explained at the beginning of the list. Within the categories or subcategories related to each criterion, the speech events are listed in alphabetical order by title, along with the page of the *Handbook* on which an abstract of the event can be found. Although five different lists of the same speech events may seem a bit repetitive, this re-sorting allows readers to browse and zero in quickly on the speech events most likely to be useful.

Part 4 of the *Handbook* includes two reference charts: Table 7 (pp. 70–81) is the Pragmatic Features Overview Chart, which provides an inventory of some pragmatic features that have pedagogical potential. This chart offers an easy way to find the speech events in which various interesting phenomena are exemplified. Table 8 (pp. 83–98) is the Speech Event Overview Chart, which shows all the speech event and speaker information for primary speakers encoded in the header of each transcript.

Part 5 is the heart of the *Handbook* and is composed of an abstract for each of the speech events. Each abstract provides a general overview of the speech event, outlines its subject matter or conversation topics, and describes what transpired in that venue during the recorded period, including salient interactional and pragmatic features.

Part 6, a keyword index, provides a topical index to the corpus itself with reference to the abstracts. In many cases, these topics are mentioned in the abstract, but in some cases they may not be immediately obvious from glances at either the transcript or the abstract.

Finally, Part 7 offers some specific guidelines for using the corpus to create instructional materials and presents three sample sets of teaching materials derived from MICASE. The pedagogical guidelines include tips specifically for teachers on making the most of this handbook, a

detailed sketch of the process of creating MICASE-based teaching materials, and suggestions for integrating the materials into a complete lesson. This part is intended to provide examples and suggestions for using MICASE in the classroom, both for those practitioners who are new to the use of corpora as well as those already familiar with such resources looking for more specific ideas and guidelines.