

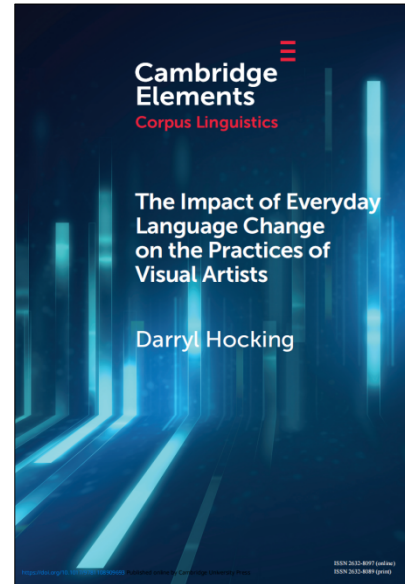
Darryl Hocking, **The Impact of Everyday Language Change on the Practices of Visual Artists**, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 96 pp., \$20.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by

Qiuying Zhao¹

Xi'an International Studies University

A visual artist's work is inextricably linked to language. On the one hand, artists frequently discuss their creative processes with their audiences, peers, collectors, dealers, critics, and friends. These interactions influence or even mold the work that they produce. On the other hand, broader social discourses also shape the artist's understanding of artistic practice. ***The Impact of Everyday Language Change on the Practices of Visual Artists***, by Darryl Hocking, describes the diachronic changes in contemporary artists' language use, conceptualizing their artistic practice from 1950 through 2019. It uses a diachronic corpus of 235,000 words, drawn from interviews and statements by artists. To determine whether these changes are coherent with one another, they are compared with those in the general English lexicon. The goal was to discover whether there is any correlation between changes in everyday language use and the aesthetic and conceptual changes that occurred over time in the art world. Through a case study, the author examines the links between the specialist language that mediates professional, institutional, and cultural community practice and general language use. This book illustrates how language conceptualizes artistic practice. To my knowledge, this issue has never been addressed before.



The first chapter provides a brief overview of the language function in contemporary art practice and summarizes some of the literature on the topic. Particular attention is paid to the different discourse types that influence the conceptualization of artistic practice. In chapter 2, the artists' language corpus (ALC), used throughout this book, is described in detail, along with the methods, analytical procedures, and statistical measures used. Chapter 3 identifies the primary diachronic shifts in the ALC using corpus analytical tools. To determine whether these changes align with those found in general language use, these shifts are compared to those in the corpus of historical American English (COHA) in chapter 4. Chapter 5 ends with a list of suggestions for further research.

There are two subsections in chapter 1. The belief that language is a part of creative practice is established at the start of the book, following a brief introduction of the main idea and the book's goals. Through various conceptualizations, the first section offers historical examples of the kind of language that artists use. The second section briefly reviews studies that address the connection between language and art. These studies range from Blunden's (2020) explanation of how language affects how we interpret art and Roy Harris's (2003) historical analysis of traditional Western artspeak, to Kester's (2011) critique of

¹ This research was supported by Xi'an International Studies University Doctoral Program (No. 2021BS001).

contemporary art writing. This demonstrates the necessity of further investigation into the connection between language and artistic practice.

The methods, as well as the related procedures, are described in chapter 2. After discussing the significance of corpus analysis to the study of artists' language, attention is paid to the methodology, the Sketch Engine corpus software, and other techniques for corpus analysis. Next, the author describes the ALC, which consists of 337 interviews and artist statements dating from 1950 to 2019, totaling 235,392 tokens. He then describes Sketch Engine, a language analysis tool available online. In the final section, the author turns to his corpus analytical approach. Modern Diachronic Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies, or MD-CADS (Partington & Duguid, 2008), refers to a variety of studies that use corpus analytical tools to analyze language change over time. To conduct diverse discourse analyses of large diachronic and historical corpora, this method adopts the most typical approach, trend mapping, supported by Sketch Engine, and more traditional corpus tools like frequency, concordance, and collocation analysis.

Hocking examines the trends in how artists conceptualize their creative processes in chapter 3. He uses the Sketch Engine Trends function to identify the ALC's high-frequency lemmas, which appear at least 50 times in the corpus and show the most notable increases and decreases over the course of 70 years. Next, the author divides these lemmas into eight semantically related groups to study increasing and decreasing trends. These groups are media and modes, practice, constitutive verbs, absoluteness and high modality, themes, language, artistic choice, and rhetorical forms. The following sections provide a detailed description of the first six groups.

In the first group, the three related lemmas, *performance*, *technology*, and *medium*, and the other two, *painter* and *canvas*, show some of the strongest increasing and decreasing trends in ALC. The concordance lines of *medium* and *painter* are also looked at to consider the implications of the changes in usage. The lemmas *project* and *exhibition* are considered professional practices, and the concordance lines of the noun *project* are discussed, showing how this lemma has an explicit connection with the viewer. It is also suggested that *project*, *exhibition*, *practice*, and *viewer* show a close lexical and conceptual synergy. In the third group of constitutive verbs, *allow*, *involve*, *create*, *explore*, *read*, and *choose* are discursive facilitators of visual arts practice. In the next group, related to absoluteness and high modality, items such as *true*, *nothing*, *must*, *certainly*, *no*, *only*, etc., which indicate a robust overall decrease in the ALC, are typically used in the early decades in proclamatory statements about visual artists and art practice.

Memory is the only lemma in the group of themes figuring in the list of the eighth strongest increasing high-frequency words in the ALC. It is frequently regarded as a thematic catalyst for the artist's creative practice. The final language group examines four lemmas. *Language* and *read* show an increase over time, while *word* and *statement* decrease.

Organized along the same lines, chapter 4 focuses on a statistical comparison of the words used by artists over seven decades in the ALC with their occurrence in COHA. This is to further evaluate the relationship between the language used by artists to conceptualize their practices and the kinds of discursive shifts that occur over time in general English. The aim is to ascertain whether there is a statistical relationship between the diachronic changes of these words in the two corpora. It could show that, in the

English context, the changing conceptualizations in the artists' practice were influenced by the more extensive general lexicon. Based on the results of the correlation analysis, this chapter looks more closely at a few COHA words identified as trends in the ALC, attempting to explain their increase or decrease over time. These findings unequivocally demonstrate that the changing trend in artists' language over the ALC's 70-year history is consistent with that found in COHA.

Finally, in chapter 5, the author presents his conclusions and the implications for further research. The main finding is that artists use language to conceptualize and legitimize their creative process, which is determined partly by the evolution of language use. However, artists contribute to broad lexical changes as members of a larger community. Changes in artists' usage of specific, specialized art terms have occasionally had an impact on the frequency with which those terms are employed in general. In COHA, for instance, the decline of the noun *painter* is likely a reflection of the same decline in the art world. This shows how language and artistic practice are complementary. Hocking also points out the implications of the study for future research. However, comparisons with other diachronic corpora and other languages would be necessary to prove a close connection between these specialized languages and the larger everyday lexicon.

The artists' language corpus used in this study was relatively small. A larger one should provide more conclusive results and even out the peaks and troughs of particular lemmas over time in the ALC. Caple, Huan, and Bednarek (2020) also used corpus linguistics to draw conclusions about discourse analysis from image data. Indeed, a multimodal analysis based on corpus tools would have ushered in a new era for corpus linguistics and discourse analysis.

Despite a few limitations, this book is an eye-opener. It investigates the relationship between language and visual arts through a diachronic and corpus-based analysis. This book will be helpful for those who want to integrate language and artistic change. It is also useful for postgraduate students and researchers who wish to use the MD-CADS approach in their own research.

References

- Blunden J. (2020). Adding "something more" to looking: The interaction of artefact, verbiage and visitor in museum exhibitions. *Visual Communication*, 19(1), 45–71. doi:10.1177/1470357217741938
- Caple, H., Huan, C. P., & Bednarek, M. (2020). *Multimodal news analysis across cultures*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Harris, R. (2003). *The necessity of artspeak: The language of arts in the Western tradition*. London, UK: Continuum.
- Kester, G. H. (2011). *The one and the many: Contemporary collaborative art in a global context*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Partington A., & Duguid, A. (2008). Modern diachronic corpus-assisted discourse studies (MD-CADS). In M. Bertuccelli-Papi & S. Bruti (Eds.), *Threads in the complex fabric of language: Linguistics and literary studies in honour of Lavinia Merlini* (pp. 269–277). Pisa, Italy: Felici Editori.