Table of Contents

Preface

Discovering English with Sketch Engine has been written for anyone who would like to extend their understanding of how English works through a guided discovery approach. This involves sending queries to carefully designed databases of texts and drawing conclusions from multiple examples sampled from many speakers and writers. This book is also for anyone who would like to know what questions can be asked about language and how to ask them.

These databases are referred to as corpora (singular *corpus*). One of the leading researchers in the field of corpus linguistics, John Sinclair (1933–2007), defined a corpus as "a collection of pieces of language text in electronic form, selected according to external criteria to represent, as far as possible, a language or language variety as a source of data for linguistic research". Geoffrey Leech (1936–2014), one of England's leading 20th century grammarians, briefly defined a corpus as "a helluva lot of text, stored on a computer" (1992:106). Corpora allow users to ask questions of thousands of native speakers whose language has been sampled and stored.

To search a corpus, we use concordancers. These are programs which search corpora and return data which can be processed in many ways to reveal linguistic regularities or otherwise. This book uses Sketch Engine exclusively for these purposes. On every page, we see how patterns of normal language emerge as we convert data into information through a combination of analytical tools and intuition. This process often answers more than the original question. When information is integrated into one's thinking, knowledge is created as indicated in the diagram on the next page. In terms of pedagogy, this is referred to as Knowledge Creation, and derives from the work of Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) and Jerome Bruner (born 1915 and still going). These ideas are pursued throughout this book.

Readers whose English is good enough to use this book do not need a language course that takes them on a graded, step-by-step march through the use of articles, conditionals, passive voice, discourse markers, question tags, modal verbs or any of the many etceteras that make up traditional grammar-oriented course book syllabuses. We use most of these along the way, somewhat kaleidoscopically, but at the same time, cyclically. A quick look at the Index of Names and Notions gives some idea of the coverage of such features of language.

In fact, this book focuses on words in their patterns as they appear in corpora across all levels of the 'Hierarchy of Language' as introduced on p.31. We explore words in constructions, from morphology to discourse. We investigate many of the aspects of words, phrases and clauses that are involved in forming sentences, paragraphs, texts and discourse. There is also a Word Focus Index.