

Multiple Voices in Academic and Professional Discourse

Multiple Voices in Academic
and Professional Discourse:
Current Issues in Specialised Language
Research, Teaching and New Technologies

Edited by

Sergio Maruenda-Bataller
and Begoña Clavel-Arroitia

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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2011

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2971-4, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2971-7

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are greatly indebted to the *Institut Interuniversitari de Llengües Modernes Aplicades (IULMA)* for sponsoring the publication of this volume. Our thanks also go to Dr. Francisca Suau-Jiménez, Dr. Barry Pennock and our colleagues at the *Universitat de València* for their advice and encouragement.

FOREWORD

The demands of today's society for greater specialization have brought about a profound transformation in the humanities, which are not immune to the competitive pressure to meet new challenges that are present in other sectors. Thus, lecturers and researchers in modern languages and applied linguistics departments have made great efforts to design syllabi and materials more attuned to the competences and requirements of potential working environments. At the same time, linguists have attempted to apply their expertise in wider areas, creating research institutes that focus on applying language and linguistics in different contexts and offering linguistic services to society as a whole.

In this arena, the study and analysis of academic and professional discourse deserves special attention and in fact nowadays we can find growing research interest in this topic. In particular, the discourse of different genres has been the focus of analysis and discussion in recent years. Several authors have opted for an interdisciplinary theoretical approach in order to reach an integral conception of specialized discourses (Parodi, 2010a). They accept the need to acknowledge the presence of social and semiotic factors and propose a theoretical framework and a definition which emphasizes a cognitive perspective and includes the subject's active role in its construction. Parodi (2010a), at the same time, advances a proposal for the construction of academic and professional genres in disciplinary domains. This author highlights that the issue of disciplinarity is increasingly salient in language studies and claims that the way university students construct disciplinary knowledge from the text included in the curricula and the ways in which the knowledge structure involved in those texts helps to shape educational experiences are, according to Parodi (2010a) the main focus of studies across a variety of disciplines and from a wide range of approaches.

The divergent theoretical conceptions underlying the term genre promote a diversity of options and thus, Parodi (2010b) proposes that approaches from New Rhetoric, Language for Specific Purposes, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Semiolinguistics, and Discourse Analysis, among others, are all options to be explored and discussed. He also claims that academic and professional genres involve a set of features which need to

be adequately described in order to help readers of such texts to achieve deeper levels of comprehension.

Other authors, for instance Bhatia (1997, 2004, 2008), develop this idea and propose a genre-based approach to the teaching and learning of specialist English. He states that the advantage is that in this way the learner will not learn language in isolation from specialist contexts, but he/she will be encouraged to make relevant connections between the use of language and the purpose of communication. He claims that in order to do so, the student or researcher will require input not only from linguistics, but also from sociolinguistic and ethnographic studies, psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology, communication research and studies on disciplinary cultures. Bhatia considers that genre analysis has evolved into one of the major influences on current practices in the teaching and learning of languages, in general, and in the teaching and learning of ESP and English for Professional Communication (EPC), in particular. Thus, Bhatia (2002) concludes that genre analysis can be viewed from two different perspectives:

- a) A reflection of the complex realities of the world of institutionalised communication,
- b) A pedagogically effective and convenient tool for the design of language teaching programmes, often situated within simulated contexts of classroom activities.

Even if those two perspectives might seem contentious, researchers and practitioners should try to resolve the tension among both of them.

All this leads us to the concept of interdisciplinarity: a factor that has evolved into a key aspect as a consequence of the current restructuring of knowledge. Lattuca (2001: 1) claims that in Western society our attempts to understand the world are discipline-based and that we tend to divide it into smaller and smaller units with the hope that if we understand the parts first, we will eventually understand the whole. In her own words, “those structural and operational realities link the fortunes of interdisciplinary research and teaching to the disciplines”. As Thompson Klein (1990: 11) puts it:

“New divisions of intellectual labour, collaborative research, team teaching, hybrid fields, comparative studies, increased borrowing across disciplines, and a variety of unified, holistic perspectives have created pressures upon traditional divisions of knowledge. There is a talk of a growing permeability of boundaries, a blurring and mixing of genres, a postmodern return to grand theory and cosmology, even a profound epistemological crisis.”

She explains that all these pressures, originating from different places, have one thing in common: they have all been, at some point, labelled “interdisciplinary”. This gives the term interdisciplinarity a universal and complex characteristic which makes it difficult to be defined. The common characteristic of all interdisciplinary activities would be the idea of unity and synthesis resulting in a common epistemology of convergence, as Thompson Klein (1990) explains. According to her, educators, together with researchers and practitioners have all turned to interdisciplinary work with the objective of accomplishing a range of objectives among which we find the exploration of disciplinary and professional relations and the solution of problems that are beyond the scope of any one discipline.

From a more practical point of view, Tait & Lyall (2007) define interdisciplinary research as that which occurs when the contributions of various disciplines are integrated in order to provide holistic or systemic outcomes as opposed to multidisciplinary research, where each discipline works more independently and with little cross-fertilisation or synergy in the outcomes. According to these authors interdisciplinary research can be situated within the social sciences or between the social, natural and life sciences and can in turn be divided into research whose focus is to further the expertise and competence of academic disciplines themselves and research that is problem-focused and which addresses issues of social, technical and/or policy relevance with less emphasis on academic outcomes.

Also core to the concept of interdisciplinary production is the contribution of translation studies, lexicography and terminology as true scientific disciplines, on the one hand, and practices dealing with social needs, on the other (see Cabré 1999). This dual nature has manifested itself in a wealth of research on knowledge transfer and also on the design of syllabi for translator training courses at university. Growing markets demands in terms of competence and specialisation have spurred research institutes to create specialised corpora, dictionaries and terminological databases in specific areas within science and humanities (and trades in general), where their contribution has a notable influence on workers and the workplace. In this scenario, work on the teaching and acquisition of work-specific skills must necessarily find their way into translator training programmes and teaching methodologies. From this perspective, course syllabi must implement, in addition to proficient language command in the working languages, cross-disciplinary knowledge and skills such as documentation, terminology, correcting/editing, ICT, etc (Aula.int 2005).

Another important topic worth mentioning is ICT research and teaching of specialized languages, a burgeoning field that has been the focus of growing current research (Maruenda-Bataller & Clavel-Arroita,

2011). Its scope includes aspects such as the dichotomy between learning and acquisition (Zaragoza-Ninet & Clavel-Arroitia, 2008), studies of how the use of new technologies can improve the acquisition of meaningful knowledge (Mayer, 2003), the new teaching approach found in higher education classroom that promotes a major change in the teaching learning process (Clavel-Arroitia & Zaragoza-Ninet, 2010) and of course the possible drawbacks the implementation of new technologies can bring (Pennock-Speck, 2009). We must not forget here that the notion of competences and its implementation is undoubtedly an important factor in the context of “the incorporation of previous degree structures in the European Space for Higher Education consolidation process” (Maruenda-Bataller & Clavel-Arroitia, 2011: 1). We need to find out what the most appropriate competences to be developed by our students are and include them in higher education curricula since according to Pérez Cañado (2009) we sometimes have to face a situation in which competences including critical thinking skills, creativity, problem solving or the capacity to adapt to new situations, all of which are crucial in university students’ educational development, are the ones least developed and assessed in Higher Education language degrees.

This book, then, attempts to provide a global view of the multiple voices involved in interdisciplinary research and innovative proposals in teaching specialized languages while offering contributions that attempt to fill the demands of a varied scope of disciplines such as the sciences, professions, or educational settings. The chapters in this book are made up of current research on these themes: discourse analysis in academic and professional genres, specialized translation, lexicology and terminology, and ICT research and teaching of specialized languages. In the first section the reader will find topics such as the analysis of different types of corpora (including web pages, compilation of scientific research articles, written advertisements, professional blogs among others) from different perspectives, namely, gender studies, politeness theory, multimodal analysis, just to mention a few of them; the study of the suitability of the use of corpora in the teaching of languages; the implementation of Collaborative and Content and Language Integrated Learning teaching approaches and the integration of research and didactics of specialized registers.

The second section includes topics such as the use of the internet as a tool for translating; the analysis of terminological variation; the measuring of the degree of specialization of a textual sample using TTR (Type Token Ratio); the analysis of problematic areas in the field of translation; the study of the appropriateness of the use of on-line platforms and social networks in the teaching of translation and the description of the

COMETVAL (Corpus Multilingüe en Turismo de la ciudad de Valencia) research group and their creation of bilingual dictionaries project.

Finally, the third section deals with the use of different on-line platforms in different degree programmes; the implementation of blended-learning methodologies; the use of specific ICT tools such as, for instance, digital storytelling, social networks, online discussion forums, web pages, etc; and other interesting projects developed with a view to promoting the implementation of new technologies in the classroom.

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PART 1.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC GENRES

CHAPTER ONE

CONCORDANCING TOOLS IN CROSS-CURRICULAR LEARNING: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND LEXICOLOGY

ROSANA DOLÓN HERRERO
AND MIGUEL FUSTER MÁRQUEZ
IULMA-UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA

1. Introduction

Student's autonomous learning has become a buzzword in pedagogy at least during these last decades. Bernardini (2004, 27-8) detects autonomous learning and self-direction as parts of a general trend in language learning. Autonomous learning is indeed a major methodological objective at university level, not just narrowly with reference to language degrees, but across degrees. Precisely, in this university context, we contend that corpus analysis is a very suitable approach to the study of language and linguistics, since this notion of autonomous learning is clearly promoted. We may single out the introduction of *Data Driven Learning* methodology pioneered by Tim Johns, which has helped create that more democratic and less authoritarian learning environment, where the students' role as researchers becomes a priority (Johns 2002). When properly introduced by experienced teachers, this one or closer methodologies like that of "learning by discovery" described by Bernardini (2004) may eventually lead to the students' greater responsibility in designing their own research goals through the examination of authentic language samples. Likewise, a more collaborative behaviour between teachers and students, between students and between teachers is thought to enhance learning benefits. In this vein, it is essential that the tasks which students are invited to perform are adequate to their background knowledge and language proficiency at every developmental stage. For instance, at the University of Valencia we offer a course called *English Lexicology* during the second year, whereas a

subject like *Discourse Analysis* is taught during the fourth year of the English major. A discipline like *Discourse Analysis*, addressed to advanced learners, makes students aware that words, the object study of lexicologists, are hardly ever meaningful in isolation, they become meaningful or unambiguous when examined in discourse.

One insightful method that allows the student to grasp this co-dependence between lexical meaning and discourse is by exposing them to corpus linguistics. At this later stage of their development, students have become acquainted with basic corpus tools through consultation of some general public corpora, so a further step might be to teach them the benefits of building their own corpus. For this purpose, a freeware concordance tool like *AntConc* 3.2, designed by Laurence Anthony, is introduced—which can be easily downloaded from http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc_index.html. Whereas other software might be more resourceful, *AntConc* has the necessary features to carry out this type of research. Our aim is now that students learn through the close inspection of concordances, word frequencies, semantic profiles, patterns, etc. provided by small specialised corpora. Without denying other possible options in the use of Data Driven Learning (DDL) (see Boulton 2009), we believe that at least some of these activities are best addressed to advanced learners. The pedagogical objective which underlies this study is that, after experiencing with corpus analysis through this guided study, students may acquire the necessary knowledge of corpus software and learn about its descriptive power so that at a later stage they may become fully equipped to design their own corpus projects through the autonomous or unguided use of corpus software tools. From a more purely discourse perspective a well-designed corpus may help them build a linguistic picture where they become aware that word choices may also reveal ideological choices, the naming or wording serving particular purposes and interests.

2. Discourse analysis and Corpus linguistics

Admittedly, discourse analysis and corpus linguistics are closely related disciplines, which share mutual interests. On the one hand, the interests of discourse analysts typically revolve around three thematic clusters: (1) *language use*, (2) *linguistic structure* ‘beyond the sentence’ and (3) *social practices* and *ideological assumptions*, which arise from the communicative nature of language. On the other hand, corpus linguistics views language from the perspective discourse. For Teubert (2004, 100), the examination of samples of extant texts allows corpus linguists to see *language as it is used*. Or, as McEnery and Wilson (1996, 1) put it, corpus

linguistics “[studies] language based on examples of real life language use”. While corpus linguistics has successfully made its way in the design of new dictionaries and grammars, its basic underpinnings are to be found in this close association to discourse analysis, where “[...] systematic patterns of language use across discourse contexts” (Biber 2007, 3) are revealed.

Among its strengths, corpus analysis provides the researcher with systematicity in the observation of language variation and use. Thus, for Teubert (2004, 100), the examination of suitable samples of discourse provided by a corpus uncovers recurrent behaviour, which is context appropriate, while making less representative variants conspicuously stand out as particularly revealing uses which the researcher needs to take into consideration. Baker (2006, 13) suggests that it is the discourse analyst’s task “to reveal underlying discourses.” Corpus tools are suitable when applied to discourse understood as social practices, where the description of linguistic forms in their own contexts, the display of typical collocates, or the distribution and variation of forms are not sought simply as a validation of authentic language use, but as ideological products associated with communication that should be brought to the surface. This is precisely where *Critical Discourse Analysis* largely benefits from the tools provided by corpus methodologies: by revealing those *other* discourse meanings underlying the discourse object under study (see Baker 2006, 13).

3. Our case study: the treatment of swine flu pandemic in the British digital press

The current study has set out to investigate differences and similarities of lexical behaviour in journalistic discourses in their treatment of *swine flu*. In order to do this a small specialised corpus has been designed. Flowerdew (1993; quoted in Partington 1998, 5) finds that specially designed corpora “are far more relevant to many sorts of language teaching than larger general corpora.” Partington (1998, 5) mentions relevant work performed on mini-corpora, and Stubbs (2002, 224) underscores that the results obtained in such specialised corpora collected and designed by individual researchers are checked against independent and/or larger corpora. We decided that our corpus should be restricted to the information offered in some of the most representative British newspaper articles in the Internet during a specific time span: the month of July 2009. This was the time when the *World Health Organization* declared swine flu to be a pandemic. The proximity of holidays and subsequent mobility of