Reseñas/Book Reviews

Metadiscourse in Academic Speech: A Relevance-Theoretic Approach

Marta Aguilar.
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Even though metadiscourse has recently received considerable attention (Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen, 1993; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Hyland, 2005; Ifantidou, 2005) most research revolves around written, not spoken, metadiscourse. This book studies spoken metadiscourse in two academic genres within the engineering field, the lecture and the peer seminar. It examines how engineering academics use metadiscourse when speaking to two different audiences and what motivates it, and based on Relevance Theory (RT) it provides a socio-cognitive framework for its analysis. This theoretical perspective provides a novel insight into motivations, abilities and preferences of engineering academics when using metadiscourse in the two aforementioned genres, as stated in the book introduction.

The aim of chapter one, "Exploring Discourse", is twofold. First, it acts as an introductory overview on discourse analysis. In order to achieve this goal, it studies three relevant issues in this field: communication, meaning and context, and cohesion and coherence to then discuss the core properties of language and discourse. Secondly, it critically examines RT. After dealing with the two Principles of Relevance (PR), the author goes on to remark the major weaknesses of Sperber and Wilson's approach, mainly based on the neglect of social and emotional elements of verbal communication, such as time, "the kind and amount of information, the degree of alertness, the relationship between communicator and audience, the circumstances and social occasions" (page 42), and speaker's purposes, preferences and abilities.

While it is true that some of these aspects may need more fleshing out – for instance, the role the speaker plays in guiding the hearer through the inferential process or their preferences and abilities –, it is also true that most of those aspects have been thoroughly discussed in some papers such as

"Pragmatics and Time", in which Sperber and Wilson "sketched an inferential account of the causal and temporal connotations of utterances" (Wilson & Sperber, 1998: 297), or some others dealing with mind-reading (Sperber, 2000; Origgi & Sperber, 2000; Wilson, 2000 & 2005) or with the speaker's purposes, preferences and abilities (Sperber & Wilson, 2002; Wilson & Sperber, 2002). Strangely enough, none of these papers can be found in the extensive bibliography at the end of the book. In my opinion, one the major shortcomings of this book is that, even though it analyzes spoken metadiscourse from an RT perspective, the latest findings and studies of the theory are not considered in the bibliography. The same happens with the aspect of the explicature and the implicature, whose updating of the latest directions and developments for this issue (see Carston, 2002 & 2004, amongst others) would enrich much the present work, especially since the explicit and the implicit side of communication is constantly present in the analysis of the lecture and the seminar genres.

Chapter two, "Exploring Metadiscourse", largely reviews most noteworthy research on metadiscourse from the early to the later studies. Furthermore, it offers a broad account of the most important findings regarding the effort-effect variables in processing metadiscourse, to rightly dovetail those RT notions with its analysis. The chapter concludes with the author's proposal for a graphically integrated model of discourse and metadiscourse, according to the innovative conceptualization of the latter as the outcome of the PR and thus of the axes: effect/effort, preferences/abilities. Hence, this model's flexibility allows incorporating fuzziness and multifunctionality.

In chapter three, "The Scientific Community: Situating Cognition", the author draws on RT's concept of cognitive environment to describe the academic context. This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first and second sections contextualize the study by portraying the scientific community and examining how scientific communication takes place respectively, i.e. scientists' preferences and abilities in RT terms. Finally, in the third section the author expounds the goals and hypotheses of the present work that could be summarized in the attempt to demonstrate that Berkenkotter & Huckin's (1995) socio-cognitive account of "situated cognition" can be applied to and even complement RT's concept of "cognitive environment", so as to gain some more insight into the metadiscourse used in lectures and seminars.

The longest chapter of the book, "Two Forms of Communication in the Academia", closes with a collection of the ideas and assumptions scattered in the three preceding chapters and applied in a qualitative and quantitative analysis. As stated by the author, the aims of this chapter are, on the one hand, integrative as previous claims are taken up and re-examined, and, on the other hand, interpretive because the analysis and interpretation of the data are done from a socio-cognitive perspective. The chapter is divided into four parts. The first one describes the method followed for the analysis, that is the subjects and the corpus studied in this work. The second part pins down the two genres under study, mainly lectures and peer seminars, from a socio-cognitive point of view. In the third part, metadiscourse is interpreted from an RT perspective first by providing an explanatory and then a classificatory account of metadiscourse. Finally, the results of a quantitative analysis of metadiscourse use in lectures and seminars are presented and discussed in the fourth part.

The book concludes with some general conclusions on the study of metadiscourse in lectures and seminars according to the four axes mentioned in chapter two: effect/effort and abilities/preferences. Both genres share the same situated cognition (rhetoric, conventions, assumptions, expectations, etc.), which paves for certain two-way porosity between lectures and seminars; yet they differ in certain aspects because of audience and purpose, i.e. speakers' preferences are dissimilar.

Even though this book has the merit of constituting an unprecedented study on spoken metadiscourse in the engineering field from a socio-cognitive point of view, there are a couple of aspects that could be fleshed out to enrich the overall approach. First, the concepts of the speakers' "abilities" and "preferences", and how the different factors relating to them influence the degree of relevance should be further studied, because no explanation is offered as to how the PR guides constraints on speakers' abilities and preferences. Moreover, much attention is devoted to speakers' abilities and preferences in this approach; but I feel that the role the listener plays needs more consideration in this approach, as its study may shed some light on how audience modulates to certain extent and sets some important constraints on speakers' preferences. Finally, further quantitative analyses with a larger number of samples would help support the results obtained in this first study. Nevertheless, *Metadiscourse in Academic Speech* provides an innovative and promising framework for metadiscourse analysis, as it points to some pedagogical and research implications that can be of much interest

for scholars and students involved in the study of metadiscourse, RT and academic genres.

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