

Reseñas/Book Reviews

Professional Discourse

Britt-Louise Gunnarsson.

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In an increasingly specialized society in which professionals are required to have an effective grasp of the discourses generated by their occupation, these forms of communication are constantly evolving and undergoing social and cultural change. *Professional Discourse* is the result of several years of research into this field. It is largely a collection of papers published by the author, Britt-Louise Gunnarsson, offering the reader a detailed study of the discourses which are present in different professions. More specifically, the aim is to explore text and talk occurring in different environments in order to deepen our understanding of what professional discourse is, how and why it has changed over time, and how it is likely to change in the future.

One of the main strengths of this book is its comprehensive scope giving us an interesting analysis of different professional discourses in areas such as science, medicine, technology, education, bureaucracy, legislation, the workplace and discourse in large business organizations. For each of these professions, the book studies the dual relationship between discourse and context, outlining how professional discourse is continuously reconstructed in relation to changing contextual frameworks. The case studies discussed in the book are based on authentic texts and spoken data, and the theoretical basis for their discussion derives from a range of disciplines, including textlinguistics, pragmatics, genre studies, sociolinguistics, interactional sociolinguistics and sociology, psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology.

The general structure of this academic book is clear and comprehensive. It is divided into 6 sections and contains a great number of bibliographical references and graphics. The book begins with an introductory section comprising three chapters. In Chapter 1, the author arouses the reader's interest by formulating and answering a number of questions related to the topic of professional discourse and thus offering an accurate description of

the state of present day discourse. Chapter 2 analyses the construction of professional language in relation to cognitive, social and societal dimensions and its continuous reconstruction within contextual frames on three levels: the situated communicative frame at a micro level, the environmental framework at a macro level (close-knit groups, the workplace, organization/the discipline) and the societal frameworks at a supra level (legal-political, technical-economical, socio-cultural and linguistic). This theoretical model, the basis for empirical studies, is very useful since it helps us understand how and why professional discourse in different domains and for different purposes varies and changes constantly. Chapter 3 introduces a multidimensional, textlinguistic methodology whose aim is to analyze the dynamic relationship between text and context. This methodology examines texts at cognitive, pragmatic and macrothematic levels and enables an in-depth analysis of diachronic and synchronic variation and change. It has been applied to several large text corpora and has also been used for contrastive comparisons, for instance between English, German and Swedish.

Section 2 comprises three chapters which analyze the process of scientific discourse within medicine, technology and economics. Chapter 4 focuses on the diachronic analysis of contextualized historical discourse. The aim is to bridge the gap between the historical and the discursive perspective in the study of language. The author gives us an insight into the socio-historical construction of medical written discourse. Chapter 5 studies non-verbal representation, graphics, formulas and tables in 90 scientific articles about technology, medicine and economics from different periods. Chapter 6 discusses the academic writing of economists from internationalization and globalization perspectives. The author claims that when science adopts English as an international *lingua franca*, scientific journals in the national language (such as Swedish) have to find another aim and a different content. They are obliged to change the design, the general outline of their articles and to alter the textual patterns scientists use. This can also be a threat to the national language in terms of domain loss. An example is given of articles by Swedish economists during the period 1955-1985. This chapter is particularly relevant to the topic of this special issue.

In Section 3 the author analyses the different communicative processes found in laws and their varied uses from different perspectives: a function-oriented, or pragmatic perspective, a psycholinguistic perspective and a sociolinguistic one. Chapter 7 presents a theory of the functional

comprehensibility of legislative texts and acknowledges the results of an experiment designed to test this theory. The author looks at the functional perspective of the text, whether a citizen perspective or a court perspective is adopted. In Chapter 8 problems of law text comprehensibility are related to the legislative writing process. Texts reflect the conditions under which they are produced and this means that the writing process can favor or counteract a comprehensible text. Three pieces of consumer laws at different stages are presented in relation to the stages of the writing process, the professional composition of the committees involved, the various contextual frameworks and the targeted readers. Thus, comprehensibility issues are part of text content which ought to be dealt with in the lawmaking process.

In Section 4, Gunnarsson deals with workplace discourse in two chapters. This section is very relevant since research into the language of workplace English is becoming an established and important area of applied linguistics. Chapter 9 elaborates and evaluates a sociolinguistic framework for the study of communication at a local government office. There are two key concepts to evaluate this framework: communicative community and professional group. With a survey and in-depth interviews, Gunnarsson studies the organization of writing within a small workplace; she emphasizes the interplay between speech and writing as well as the frequency and type of writing collaboration. The social dimensions of writing are analysed in relation to structural hierarchy and centrality, the density of the group, group norms, attitudes and identity. This study sheds new light on the social organization of writing within a monolingual workplace. Chapter 10 recognizes the multilingual workplace by analysing two different multilingual working environments: a public hospital and an international company. All over the world, there are workplaces where some employees, mostly immigrants, have to use their second, third or fourth language. Knowledge of the dominant local language is necessary for a good career and also for social integration within the working group. Humour and jokes form part of workplace discourse. The daily communicative situation of immigrants employed in different working environments is investigated by means of observations, interviews and analyses of spoken and written discourse. From a sociolinguistic perspective, communicative practices are further analysed in relation to the organizations' policies on language and diversity issues.

In section 5, discourse in large business organizations is analysed in two chapters. Chapter 11 focuses on the fact that in order to understand

enterprise discourse we must consider its complexity. An organization functions within social frameworks, with different hierarchical structures, different values, different knowledge and in a different culture. The sociolinguistic order of the organization must be analysed both at a local and distant level and so explore the multilayered structure of enterprise discourse. Gunnarsson provides an example of the simple sociolinguistic order of discourse in close-knit workplace groups. She highlights that language is an element in the build-up of the social group identity and culture. Chapter 12 deepens the complexity of internet discourse. Gunnarsson analyses company websites from a diversity perspective, a key term in the modern business world. Gunnarsson presents a study of the language practices of the websites of five transnational companies: ABB, Astra Zeneca, Electrolux, Ericsson and Scania. She analyses the customer-related and career-oriented websites from a sociolinguistic perspective.

The concluding section pulls together the ideas put forward throughout the book and presents topics for future research on professional discourses.

In my view, the current volume is well worth reading since it provides a solid and up-to-date situation of the field of Professional discourses and points to interesting and relevant ways ahead for further development in this field. This book provides tools for exercises and future studies for advanced students, novice and experienced teachers, as well as researchers in applied linguistics.

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