



## Discourse and Identity in the Professions. Legal, Corporate and Institutional Citizenship

**Vijay K. Bhatia, Paola Evangelisti Allari (eds).**

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*Discourse and Identity in the Professions* is the 149th volume to appear in *Linguistic Insights*, a European series which specialises in research monographs and collected papers in linguistic theory and applied linguistics.

The contributions to this volume are based on papers originally presented at a conference held in Rome in 2007 under the aegis of the Italian Ministry for Higher Education on *Issues of Identity in and across Cultures in the Professional World*. This explains that, if the contents reflect preoccupations with the dominant countries of the Anglosphere – the USA, Australia, the UK – and resulting issues in the EU, the majority of contributors are affiliated to Italian universities. As such, this volume provides a stimulating insight into the dynamics of current ESP research in Italy.

In spite of a number of residual typographical errors and the, at times, disconcerting inclusion of tables of raw data in the body of the text instead of the appendices, the research discussed in the different chapters is otherwise methodically presented and in keeping with the genre conventions of research articles.

The volume investigates how specialised discourse generates and vectors professional identity or, as the opening lines of the introduction indicate, “the ways in which profession-shaped identities manifest [themselves] in and through discourse produced in documents and texts with the business, legal and institutional spheres of action” (page 9). The fifteen contributions which comprise the volume are divided into three sections according to the subject domains specified in the title: six relate to the notion of “corporate citizenship”, five to that of “legal citizenship” and the remaining four to the “socio-political” domain.

The analysis is, for a large part, corpus-based and applied to a variety of documents both traditional (corporate annual reports, legal sentencing,

advertisements or the written press) and digital (websites and weblogs). The corporate subject domain section deals essentially with the areas of marketing (advertising), official (annual reports) and “personal” (weblogs) communication pertaining to such well-known organisations as Coca Cola, McDonald’s, Boeing, GM, Sun Microsystems, Novartis, Harley-Davidson, Vespa and Kawasaki, with the exception of one contribution devoted to the analysis of the advertising discourse of a bakery and a manufacturer of stone fireplaces in Finland, which presents a more “homely” analysis in contrast.

With regard to the legal subject domain section, four out of the five articles presented focus on the relatively unexplored field of arbitration, the result of research arising out of a project entitled *International Commercial Arbitration Practices: A Discourse Analytical Study* led by Prof. Vijay Bhatia of Hong Kong City University. The remaining chapter in this section pertains to differences perceived in the discourse of Common Law and Civil Law experts.

The third section, a more nebulously defined area entitled “Identities in Institutional and Socio-political domains” moves away from the more classic areas of specialised discourse *per se* to cover such diversified but nevertheless individually interesting subjects as migration legislation, the role and identity of a White House communication strategist, a neo-conservative American view of European identity and, last but not least, the gardening metaphor as applied to socio-psychological analysis in journalistic discourse.

Although a major part of the research published in this volume originates from one homogenous context (Italian academia), one of the striking aspects of the collection is the cross-cultural/intercultural comparative approach which characterises the different studies. Most<sup>1</sup> of the discussions straddle two or more subject domains and/or genres, underlining the inherently exogenous and centrifugal dimension of English Studies today, an epistemological phenomenon further enhanced, it must be mentioned, by the rich substratum of the source language and culture of European scholars: PAOLA CATENACCIO and CHIARA DEGANO analyse the Basel-based pharmaceutical company Novartis’ CSR reporting with regard to its (mis)deeds in India; PAULA MARY HICKEY contrasts the transnational social identities generated by the advertising spin of three such culturally distant motorbike manufacturers as Harley-Davidson, Vespa and Kawasaki; MICHELE SALA examines the professional identity discourse traits of Common Law and Civil Law experts writing for law reviews; PAOLA

VIGNATI's study compares UK, EU and US migration legislation; PAOLA DONADIO and ANTONELLA NAPOLITANO analyse the often explicit anti-EU discourse of the American neo-conservative think-tank *The Heritage Foundation*; and finally, SUSAN KERMAIS provides a thought-provoking analysis of “the tall poppy syndrome” as interpreted across three English-speaking countries, the UK, the US and Australia.

The first two sections of the volume focus on different aspects of professional identity and discourse with regard to two prominent areas of research in specialised discourse and culture, business and law. The different conclusions converge to foreground the fundamental paradox underlying most forms of specialisation today, that is to say, its inherently multidimensional and interdisciplinary nature. If, by their very nature, studies in specialised discourse and ESP necessarily span at least two disciplinary loci – the language and the subject domain –, the complex and hybrid nature of professional expertise today has led to an ever-increasing blurring of the theoretical boundaries which originally delimited disciplinary subject domains. As a result, there has been a correlated shift away from the concept of expertise – and naturally, its modes of expression and circulation – as a monolithic and linear domain of specialised knowledge towards that of a constantly evolving, multidisciplinary and hybrid one.

The contributions confirm this phenomenon of disciplinary overlap by highlighting the concurrent occurrence of discourses belonging to multiple related but nevertheless, distinct subject domains and/or genres within the same textual artefact: VIJAY K. BHATIA analyses the concomitant discourses of accountancy, finance and communication as present in corporate annual reports; in the legal section, four contributions authored respectively by PAOLA EVANGELISTI ALLARI, GIULIANA LADOMERY, MAURIZIO GOTTI/PATRIZIA ANESA and STEFANIA M. MACI all focus on a comparative analysis of arbitration – whether related to the world of sports or corporations – and legal discourse and highlight the “colonisation” (page 190), of the former by legalese, leading to a form of *sui generis* hybridization.

To conclude, in the opinion of this reviewer, this volume highlights the dynamism of research being carried out in Italy with regard to specialised discourse and ESP studies and, in this respect, its exploration of such relatively uncharted domains of specialised discourse as arbitration is particularly noteworthy. As such, the research presented here makes a valuable contribution to the corroboration and advance of similar research

presented in other European countries today, notably with regard to the phenomena of disciplinary and cultural hybridization of specialised discourse – and in so doing, underlines the obvious and imperative need for greater liaising and synergy amongst European researchers working in the field of specialised discourse in English and ESP studies.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The two contributions presenting an endogenous approach are Tarja Salmi-Tolonen's "Clean Corporate Citizenship Identity" which discusses two Finnish advertising campaigns, and Stefania M. Maci's "Arbitration in Italy: Litigation Procedures in Arbitral Practices" which analyses the overlap between Italian legal and arbitration discourse.