Constructing Professional Discourse. A Multiperspective Approach to Domain-Specific Discourses

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Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. 235 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4438-3629-6.

The book explores professional, domain-specific discourse and suggests a model of analysis of the construction engineering discourse applying a corpus-based methodological approach. Drawing on the postulates of genre theory, semantic theory, computational linguistics, corpus linguistics and ontological engineering, the model moves from the analysis of text as a written product with specific lexico-grammar, semantic and rhetorical features to the analysis of text as a product related to the social context of production and interpretation. The author justifies this multi-perspective and integrative approach to construction engineering discourse on the grounds of the complexity of the genre as an interplay of individuals, communities and institutions linked to its twofold communicative purpose and the academic and professional profile of both authors and potential readers.

The volume is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the theoretical background. The study relies on Bhatias's (1993, 2004 & 2008) socio-constructionist theory of discourse, which views professional writing as the product of text-internal factors (lexico-grammar, discourse development and organization) and textual-external factors (disciplinary conventions, professional values and practices).

The next chapters examine construction engineering textbooks using two self-compiled corpora, a corpus of construction engineering textbooks and a corpus of online textbooks blurbs. Thus, chapter 2 deals with construction engineering textbooks and their social and historical implications. The aim is to provide a situational and contextual insight into the genre. The blurb corpus is analysed along four dimensions: authorship, readership, presentation of the textbook and promotion of the textbook (Swales, 1990). The analysis of the corpora shows the specific features of professional discourse (high lexical density of the domain, heavy use of nominalization,

use of specialized lexis) and the prevalence of the noun "building", the most frequent content word, whose semantic and lexical profile is investigated within the framework of semantic theory in chapter 3. In order to reach a full understanding of the concept 'building', the author addresses three issues:

i) Identification of the different meanings of "building", the most common one being "edifice".

ii) Analysis and formal representation of the hyponyms (for example, "house", "hotel", "center") and meronyms (like "wall", "window", "roof") of "building". The analysis is based on a view of building as an ontology which conveys the disciplinary knowledge about the concepts, attributes, relations and instances of buildings. The detection of new hyponyms, hypernyms and meronyms and of new patterns points to the limitations of existing databases and dictionaries in the coverage of specialized lexis.

iii) Description of the lexico-grammatical patterns of hyponymy (for instance, "such as", "other", "for example") and meronymy and the disciplinary and generic constraints imposed on those relations. Part-whole patterns are realised at a phrase level (N+N, 's genitive) or, less frequently, at a clause level.

A major claim of the author is that these semantic relations do not only offer the specificity required by the professional discourse but fulfill a rhetorical role in organizing the construction engineering discourse. On the one hand, hyponymic and meronymic patterns serve the function of classification and description, respectively. In addition, hypernym-hyponym pairs and holonym-meronym pairs are used in exemplification. On the other hand, they express two basic patterns of textual development in scientific and technological discourse – that is, the Generalization-Example and the Preview-Detail patterns (Hoey, 1983).

Chapter 4 focuses on the functional analysis of the construction engineering discourse, thus highlighting its socio-pragmatic basis. The lexico-grammatical features of "building" illustrate the informational density of the genre. This is followed by a discourse semantics analysis of the modifiers (descriptors and identifiers) of "building". The definition of building as an architectural and engineering creation, the description of buildings by means of modifiers and metaphors, and the evaluation of the building through

adjectives like "dangerous", "efficient" or "historic" create the image of the building and the image of the construction engineering discipline as a problem-solving discourse with a social compromise for the environment and the protection of the architectural heritage. In this way construction engineering textbooks are not merely a vehicle for the creation of disciplinary knowledge but also for the transmission of discourse values about the building.

The last chapter gives an overview of the three-step model of analysis of the construction engineering discourse developed in the book: discourse as genre, discourse as text, and discourse as social practice.

In summary, I believe this work constitutes a major contribution to genre studies and proposes a convincing model of analysis of professional discourse. It can be a valuable tool for linguists and researchers interested in domain-specific discourse.

[Review received 24 September 2012]
[Revised review accepted 30 January 2013]

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