



Scientific Discourse and the Rhetoric of Globalization

Carmen Pérez-Llantada.

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Against the backdrop of increasing globalization, the English language enjoys a unique role as the world language of academic research and communication. This emerging scenario undoubtedly has consequences both for aspiring members of the world scientific community, and for the practices of professional communication in English. In a profound sense, scientific English is developing beyond the control of any one language group. Despite the broad consensus that this situation brings both opportunities and threats, we know much less about how these changes are working out in practice. The prolific work of the InterLAE research group at the University of Zaragoza has been fundamental in providing insights from the outer/expanding circle concerning the way L2 scholars and scientists have adapted to pressures to publish in English. In this book, Carmen Pérez-Llantada provides a thoughtful, well-documented overview of this situation on the basis of findings from InterLAE. Beginning with a discussion of the role of rhetoric in scientific discourse, within a Kuhnian understanding of disciplinary communities, she then develops a comprehensive framework which integrates the dynamics of scientific knowledge generation, the processes of text creation, the discourse organising patterns that frame these, and the community that produces and interprets knowledge.

This theoretical introduction is followed by two empirically-based chapters. The first provides a useful synthesis of many findings from the InterLAE corpus, most particularly those concerning the differences between the published texts produced by L1 and L2 writers. In particular, Pérez-Llantada focuses on salient features that L2 writers transfer into English from their L1, such as a denser or more convoluted style, or interpersonal devices reflecting a deferential relationship to the discourse community. From these, she concludes that the Spanish writers in her sample “retain part of their culture-specific intellectual style when they write in English”, and most

specifically, tend to “opt for less visible intersubjective stances” (page 104), which may represent the writers’ positioning outside the central core. The second empirical chapter provides valuable insights into the enculturation of L2 academics, comparing the experiences of interviewees from the universities of Zaragoza and Michigan. Those interviewed comment on the relative levels of difficulty experienced, and on their attitudes towards language when exercising “gate-keeping” functions as referees and editors. Both groups consistently prioritised content and rhetorical organisation over accuracy, but admitted that language sometimes influenced their decision not to publish.

In the three more theoretical chapters that bring the book to a close, Pérez-Llantada draws the different strands of the book together to weave a multi-layered picture of scientific discourse, taking in procedures, practices and texts, exploring how these are leading to the emergence of “international academic Englishes”. However, in this basically optimistic view, the author does not ignore the dangers of possible cultural mismatches which may lead to rejection of valuable research. She makes the important point that journals have not fully taken the changes of the last three decades on board: neither the instructions for authors nor the guidelines for referees cater specifically for the kind of issue specific to papers by L2 writers. Journals need to promote sensitivity to cultural and linguistic issues among reviewers, and also find ways of providing more focused help for non-Anglophone writers. The question of situated learning and mentoring also needs to be highlighted, since these play an important role in the socialisation of apprentice L2 writers into the target discourse community.

In her conclusions, Pérez-Llantada returns to the question of scientific rhetoric in changing contexts: the position of non-Anglophones will develop further as global power balances shift, and the ongoing changes may have consequences for scientific writing conventions, as well as for all participants. Education in cross-cultural awareness will help to ensure positive outcomes.

This book makes a major contribution to our understanding of developments in scientific publication and education, and is useful reading for anyone involved in teaching English at university level. However, it might also be felt that the book raises certain questions that it does not answer. First, although the author’s optimism is perhaps refreshing, it is by no means certain at what point an L2 writer’s divergent stylistic choices cease to be an admissible instance of hybridisation and start to jar with English-language

journals' conventions. It would be interesting to explore, for example, when writers can get away with being "digressive" and "over-elaborate" (page 154) in the name of cultural diversity, and when this actually prejudices their chances of being published. Since the examples of L2 writers' work are from a corpus of material that has already got past the gatekeepers, it is in some sense a self-selecting sample. It would be useful to analyse more examples of writing that has not reached this point. Second, the book's title strongly suggests that the emphasis is on the language of science, and yet the corpus data clearly cover all types of academic discipline. More could be made of the differences between fields of scholarship in the Humanities, Social and Hard Sciences. It would be interesting to take this line of enquiry further, for example by using ethnographic approaches or case studies. But even with these provisos, I can conclude that the book is rich, complex and carefully argued, and represents a genuine contribution to the field.

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