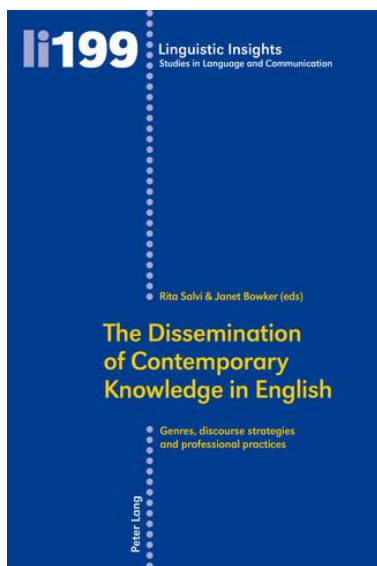


BOOK REVIEW



GENERALITIES AND PARTICULARS OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Rita Salvi and Janet Bowker (Eds.). THE DISSEMINATION OF CONTEMPORARY KNOWLEDGE IN ENGLISH: GENRES, DISCOURSE STRATEGIES AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES (2015), Bern etc.: Peter Lang. 171 pp., ISBN 978-3-0343-1679-8.

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Knowledge and information are the two most significant and valuable commodities in contemporary society, and it is almost superfluous to state that the today's digitized world is organized around and driven by vast amounts of easily accessible information. Therefore, how these are obtained, classified and distributed, is of utmost importance to both experts and lay population alike. Knowledge transfer has always been a burning issue within the global academic community, and the ways in which it is now repackaged and tailored to suit a myriad of specific demands by its end users occupies a crucial position in the process of the dissemination of contemporary knowledge. Given the current status of the English language as the *lingua franca* of the modern world, and the fact that the vast majority of electronically stored information is in English (e.g. Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2009; Mauranen & Ranta, 2009), further considerations of the global dissemination of knowledge simply have to take its role into account. Thus, we arrive at the common background behind the articles found in the presently reviewed publication edited by Rita Salvi and Janet Bowker, *The dissemination of contemporary knowledge in English: Genres, discourse strategies and professional practices*.

The book is part of the *Linguistic insights: Studies in language and communication* series published by Peter Lang, and it comprises 171 pages, with a preface by Marina Bondi, an introduction penned by the collection's editors, and six articles on various topics primarily dealing with knowledge communication in English. The preface (pp. 7–9) offers an initial insight into the importance of the research contained within the book, drawing particular attention to the complex contribution of language to knowledge creation, construction and dissemination. It is followed by the introduction (pp. 11–17) which sets the tone of the whole book and provides glimpses into the works by different authors which constitute the main body of this collection of studies. Here, the editors emphasize the generalizable discursive strategies, which roughly fall under the following three categories: 1) *(re)contextualization*, 2) *re-conceptualizations*, and 3) *trans-mediation and en-textualization*. Both the preface and the introduction emphasize the need for the democratization of knowledge and the hope that open institutions and organizations can enable effective and equal participation in our knowledge-based society. What follows are six articles theoretically based in various explanatory and analytical frameworks. Conveniently, the first study in the book is by the first editor, Rita Salvi, while the last is the contribution of the second editor, Janet Bowker.

As mentioned above, the first article in the collection, *Re-contextualizing specialized English: From legislation to business* (pp. 19–46), is written by Rita Salvi. The study deals with the manner in which specialized English is recontextualized when being transferred between different discourses, in the case at hand, from legislation to business. The author forms a corpus which consists of examples taken from the EU and UK legislation and regulations on energy and electricity, on the one hand, and the information gathered from the web portals of the Six Big Energy Suppliers in the UK, on the other. Based mainly on phraseology, the quantitative part of analysis is supplemented by a qualitative framework grounded in intertextuality and interdiscursivity, with the ultimate aim of tracking the movement of concepts and principles through the two different genres and between different participants. The study finds that both domains, legislation and corporate language, are characterized by the features which stem from their specific contexts and prospective participants. The article also sheds light on the commodifying effects of commercialization discourse, where sufficient information is conveyed to the general population, and both legal and corporate ideological stances are revealed, along with their social and cultural meanings.

The second study, *Unbottling the truth about water: The discursive construction of water as a 'strategic' resource* (pp. 47–71), written by Ersilia Incelli, employs a genre-based approach in the analysis of the discourse and narratives concerning water resource management and ownership. The author uses a corpus comprising documents from different discourse communities, which is then scrutinized by implementing the basic tenets of discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics. The examination leads to the

identification of two key discourses, the first dealing with water as a commodity possessing certain economic value, and the second treating water as a fundamental human right. It shows how scientific knowledge is recontextualized from its original setting to other contexts and genres, depending on the needs and objectives of the strategic discourses and ideologies of the actors possessing a vested interest in the topic, e.g. the attempt of the corporate sector to present privatization or public-private discourses as better solutions to the problems of water supply, which only triggers particular resistance actions observed in the NGO corpus analyzed in the present study.

The next chapter in the book, authored by Renzo Mocini, is entitled *Evidential devices in English medical journals* (pp. 73–97). The study employs the principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics to explore, via quantitative data and qualitative analysis, the distribution and pragmatic functions of the evidential markers used in a range of specialized medical journals, with evidentiality itself understood both as a mere matter of information sources and the specific types of knowledge contained within. Based on a relatively large corpus of authentic texts from medical journal articles, the study discovers an important distinction between the source to which its writers attribute a certain propositional content and the evidential basis used as the foundation for the content in question. The final goal of such analysis, where different evidential strategies are laid bare, can be very useful in teaching medical English to students, enabling them to acquire a variety of rhetorical devices that they can use in reading and critically interpreting medical literature, but also when creating specific vocational texts of their own.

Medical discourse is the topic of the fourth study in this collection as well, and *On the state of public health: Discourse and sharing practices in Annual Medical Reports* (pp. 99–120), written by Chiara Prospero Porta, explores the discursive practices used in the dissemination of knowledge in the EU Annual Reports on diseases and emerging threats to human health. The author collects and compares two sub-corpora, Annual Epidemiological Reports published by the European Centre for Disease, Prevention and Control (ECDC), on the one hand, and the reports issued by the Chief Medical Officer of the British Department for Public Health, on the other. Here, narrative frames, metaphorical language, meta-linguistic moves and textual structuring devices are analyzed with the aim of emphasizing the proximal-distal stance in the discursive strategies one applies when exchanging and constructing expertise and benchmarking best practices. Results show that the smaller British sub-corpus displays a high lexical variety in the types/tokens ratio with a great amount of engagement and stance features by the authorship, as opposed to the larger European sub-corpus, where a lower types/tokens ratio is accompanied by a strict standardized format. Of note is that these features are also used differently, for instance, the British sub-corpus is directed towards both experts and professionals and lay people, while the EU sub-corpus is intended exclusively for an expert audience with a high degree of knowledge, making the former much more personalized in its nature.

The penultimate article, *Online knowledge dissemination: How to make the dismal science less dismal* (pp. 121–143), written by Judith Turnbull, deals with the manner in which knowledge is predominantly disseminated in our society nowadays, of course, through the Internet. The author examines how a complex discourse such as economics can be simplified and explained to lay population, and how online resources are employed in that process. A very interesting aspect of the study is the investigation of multimodal means of conveying messages to the younger audience, e.g. videos which combine visuals, sound and text, used to facilitate the understanding of rather difficult and abstract topics. The analysis is based on the educational material found on the websites of two central banks, the Bank of England and the European Central Bank. The author concludes that the most characteristic feature of these educational videos is the diverse contextualization of economic concepts maintained with a very specific audience in mind. It is also observed that metaphor plays a significant role in the intended representation of certain abstract economic notions and concepts.

Finally, this collection ends with the paper written by the second editor, Janet Bowker, entitled *Directive acts and narration in corporate training events: Framing structures and processes through language* (pp. 145–167). The analysis is directed towards the multi-layered discourse produced in training and development sessions, where certain company purposes aimed at employees are revealed. The author uses conversational analysis and framing theory to uncover both the macro-interpretative and the micro-interactional processes. The results show the intention of the involved interactants to create an organizational culture which will be marked by relevant, transparent, bottom-up communications, with the transformation of distributed information into knowledge being of crucial importance. The evolving language of authentic leadership discourse is, consequently, flagged as an important topic for further research, being a natural counterpoint to the analysis presented in this study. The book then concludes with notes on contributors, followed by a list of the previous and forthcoming volumes in the *Linguistic insights* series.

Considered as a whole, *The dissemination of contemporary knowledge in English* presents an interesting insight into the workings of knowledge and information transfer today, with a particular emphasis on the English language as the dominant vehicle of choice. The authors agree that there are strong connections and highly active interactions between language use, various types of discourse, and knowledge creation and dissemination. However, the book is not without its shortcomings. First of all, the studies mainly include rather small and uniform corpora, which somewhat leaves room for speculation on whether certain research results would still stand given a wider range of analyzed material. Another thing is that, although the collection does employ a number of different theoretical frameworks and approaches, the fact that all of the authors come from the same institution makes it highly possible that significant influence was exerted on certain authors in the process of preparing the volume. Naturally, this does not

mean that such input worked to the detriment of the studies collected here, but it would have certainly been better if differently affiliated researchers had been involved in the production of the collection, at least for the sake of institutional, and orientational, diversity. One last thing that seems lacking, even though it is not standard practice, is some sort of shared concluding remarks since it feels that the volume could have benefitted from such a section. The introduction does, indeed, cover some of the overlapping interests and findings, but, given the claim that the studies collectively present an important paradigmatic change in approach, more concrete evidence to this claim would have been welcome.

All in all, how does the present collection of studies contribute to the field of ESP/EAP? As clearly observable even from the titles of the six studies, ESP lies at the basis of the research presented in the book. The articles, which deal with various discourses and genres, both use ESP as the starting point for the formation of corpora and subsequent analysis of the pressing research problems and expand on its importance and application in examining how language for specific purposes is used in the process of knowledge creation, reshaping and distribution. This is particularly evident in the third and sixth study that deal explicitly with the pedagogical nuances of the dissemination of specialized information in English; however, the other articles are also very closely related to ESP through its interaction with multimodality, cognitive linguistic perspectives and corpus-based approaches. What ESP/EAP scholars can take away from this book is the confirmation that contemporary society, which thrives on vast amounts of information, definitely depends on ESP in its attempts to collect and distribute knowledge, regardless of whether said transfer is performed at the tertiary level, which is ESP's natural environment, or within other expert or non-expert contexts.

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