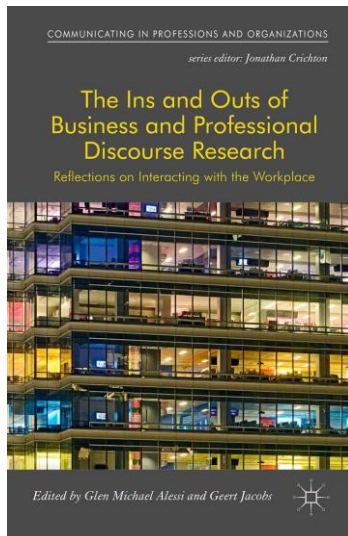# BOOK REVIEW

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN ACADEMIA AND THE WORLD OF WORK

Glen Michael Alessi and Geert Jacobs (Eds.). THE INS AND OUTS OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE RESEARCH. REFLECTIONS ON INTERACTING WITH THE WORKPLACE (2016), Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 296 pp., ISBN 978-1-137-50767-9.

The edited volume *The Ins and Outs of Business and Professional Discourse Research. Reflections on Interacting with the Workplace* represents one of the latest attempts to cast light on the pervasive synergy between academic research in language-focused disciplines and business and professional communication which pivots on the linguistic interaction between practitioners in the workplace. Hence it clearly resides in Gotti's view on specialised discourse as "the specialist use of language in contexts which are typical of a specialized community stretching across the academic, the professional, the technical and the occupational areas of knowledge and practice" (Gotti, 2008: 24). Both the theoretical and empirical foundations of the book directly demonstrate that academic discourse research and professional discourse research are highly complementary and need to be regarded as two sides of the same coin.

The book opens with an introductory section (pp. 1-10) where the editors, Glen Michael Alessi and Geert Jacobs, offer an overview of theoretical underpinnings of business and professional discourse research, together with quoting important scholars, publications and journals in this rapidly growing area. In addition to providing a short account of the chapters included in the volume, the editors also reflect on the IN/OUT approaches to professional discourse research: the IN approach "explores the challenges, processes and methods for gaining

access to and collecting data in professional settings" (p. 6), while the OUT counterpart investigates how theory-informed descriptions of language-in-use may help practitioners in the workplace upgrade their language practice and implement it in the professional communication to "achieve company objectives that relate to or depend on language choices" (p. 7).

The IN part of the volume (pp. 13-138), which consists of six contributions, begins with Dorte Lønsmann's chapter on researcher positionality and identity in business ethnography. She draws on various parameters – power, status, age and gender that impact on negotiating the researcher positionality in interaction with informants. Upon exploring ethnographic interviews, field notes from informant observation, email correspondence, etc., the author argues that positionality is not stable but dynamic and that, depending on multiple identities which may be at work at the same time or in the course of the same interaction, positionality can also be multifaceted.

In a very interesting paper which focuses on the work spaces-professional communication interrelationship, Deborah C. Andrews considers how the dynamic, interactive communication emerges from a particular physical environment as well as how different work spaces are shaped to enable business communication practices. Drawing on a broad ethnographic approach which integrates insights from material culture studies with rhetorical and genre theory, the author thoroughly describes how she has adopted various identities to gain access to a particular site of professional communication. In a comprehensive and theory-laden fashion the author shows that the 21st-century "company messaging" (p. 59) does not emerge only from its oral and written communication, in print and in electronic way, but also from its physical environment which underpins such communication.

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In another 'insider' study, Annelise Ly lays stress on two main issues: methodological character of workplace studies and the obstacles the researcher faces when collecting empirical data, such as the aspect of confidentiality, access, or permissions concerning data recording. As regards methodological issues, the chapter first addresses the advantages and limitations of the two methods, naturally occurring data and interviews, and then points out the benefits of role enactment as an improved version of a role-play method. The author stresses the importance of this simulation technique to both enhance linguistic competence and overcome confidentiality issues which usually hamper research in workplace settings.

Carmela Briguglio's chapter examines multilingual communication practices of two multinational companies. Apart from reflecting on the strategies resorted to by the author to find the companies willing to participate, the chapter is a meticulous view on the instruments typical of an ethnographic research – field visits, the employee survey, interviews, companies' correspondence. Although field visits and interviews have proved to be particularly valuable, it is argued that using varied and numerous instruments to collect data will provide a more comprehensive picture of the professional communication practices in a given workplace setting.

Astrid Vandendaele, Tom Bruyer and Geert Jacobs write about interfaces between learning, research and practice in the case study of a student research project on employer branding. The chapter reports on efforts how to bridge the gap between learning and practice by sending the students out of the classroom and giving them a chance to work with practitioners in the work field (the IN side), and by reviewing the challenges and problems the students encounter when asked to provide recommendations for their clients on the basis of the data collected (the OUT side). The authors reflect on valuable suggestions: to students who should have showed more independence in their research; to teachers so as to redefine their role and some teaching practices; and, to companies regarding their openness and building trust with outside researchers.

The final chapter of the IN part of the volume deals with a different professional domain and research question – translation of written legal discourse. In the chapter which occasionally takes on critical overtones, Juliette Scott thoroughly investigates the commissioning of translated written legal discourse from freelance workers by law firms and in-house counsel. Drawing on a number of strategies needed to examine the issue, the author looks at academic channels, professional bodies, online channels, the aspect of serendipity, and suggests ways how to increase collaboration between translators (academia) and lawyers (the workplace setting).

The OUT part of the book (pp. 141-294), which comprises seven chapters, begins with Elena Chiocchetti's chapter on multilingual knowledge management in a number of small and medium sized companies in South Tyrol. Upon analysing both quantitative and qualitative data, focusing on three aspects pertinent to multilingual communication in these businesses: knowledge sharing, language practices and translation management, she proposes several strategies with the aim of overcoming the noted shortcomings in the areas under scrutiny, such as investing in external providers of language services or systematically collecting multilingual company terminology.

Within a theoretical framework of conversation analysis, Chiara Ganapini reports results of a research project set up in collaboration with an Italian company, where she tests spontaneous talk between sellers and buyers on the topics evaluated along the two lines of action – either supporting buyers' actions which are found to conform to the sellers' policy, or re-orienting the buyers' actions towards the sellers' expectations. Naming the practice "testing the waters", the author plausibly shows how both sellers and buyers try to pursue relational and interpersonal goals by fostering what the company deems a positive outcome of these communication practices.

Peter Daly and Dennis Davy turn their research attention to a sub-genre important in professional settings but neglected in both the classroom and linguistic literature – making a pitch. After exploring various rhetorical and linguistic features of 13 texts from the famous BBC television programme *Dragons' Den*, they put forward an investor pitch process model, composed of contextual considerations, the dynamics of rhetoric, and linguistic features. The model may be

successfully utilised by business communication educators in both ESP and in-house classrooms, and by prospective entrepreneurs so as to be better prepared to pitch to potential investors.

Against the theoretical background of corpus-assisted discourse studies and genre-analysis methodologies, Cecilia Lazzaretti examines exhibition press announcements (EPAs) of the three British and five American highly reputable museums covering a time-span from 1950 to 2014. An ad hoc compiled EPA Diacorpus is both quantitatively and qualitatively analysed, the latter being organised around the diachronic change of the move structure of this genre, quotations, and its narrative and emotional language. Although the reported changes attest to lexical variety and an increase in length of EPAs, which runs counter to modern communication tools hinging on the brevity and conciseness of the message, they also indicate that EPA is not 'a dissolving genre' but the one which manages to stand out for its in-depth descriptions and evaluations of exhibitions.

Theoretically situated within critical genre analysis, computer assisted discourse analysis and ESP/EFL perspectives, Glen Michael Alessi's chapter analyses 10 internal investigative reports of a large multinational company, so as to first scan and describe the most pertinent discursive/textual practices in the company's reporting, and then provide informed measures and procedures for their improving. Exhaustively addressing seven areas considered to be of critical interest to the company, such as the aspect of legal meaning as opposed to ordinary meaning or intertextuality, the author proves how important and rewarding a feedback from academic research is to guide the company in its future reporting and thus make it better equipped to respond to external legal audiences of lawyers and paralegals.

Laura Di Ferrante, Walter Giordano and Sergio Pizziconi's study on international and cross-cultural advertising draws on an analysis of commercials aimed to communicate brand identity of four famous Italian companies in both home country of brands and outside of it, in the United States. Feeding as many as 24 variables into a model called Commercial Dissection Protocol, the authors identify a set of linguistic, sociolinguistic and semiotic tools according to which they determine that in all commercials run in the US, code switching, code mixing, and generally some degree of adaption of advertising message to the outside market compared to the brand's country and culture of origin are inevitable. Being a multimodal account of the selected commercials, the study has much to say to professional communicators as regards the accommodation of promotional campaigns to target international markets.

The final chapter of the volume is a small-scale study of 100 emails written in English, where Franca Poppi explores the differences and similarities of this genre to that of a business letter. Drawing insights from a previous study on business emails, where the communicative purpose of the message and its immediate context were the main genre criteria, the author matches the previously made classification of emails into noticeboard genre messages, postman genre messages,

and dialogue genre messages with the sub-genres she defined – 'business-letter email' and 'email-email'. The obtained findings have direct implications for both researchers as regards genre recontextualisation under the influence of computer mediated communication and practitioners so as to shape their business communication in the way that best suits their agendas and the intended audience.

The multidimensional nature of business and professional discourse central to this edited volume makes it valuable in many aspects. Firstly, the authors of chapters provide a panoply of methodological solutions, quantitative and qualitative, all firmly rooted in diverse disciplines ranging from applied linguistics, discourse analysis, LSP/ESP, ethnography to corpus linguistics, sociolinguistics or information systems. Thus an eclectic, interdisciplinary theoretical foundation of professional discourse research is consistently pursued and empirically documented throughout the volume. Secondly, the book not only provides ample evidence that language-based disciplines have entered various professional spaces seeking to gather data on language-in-use, but it also convincingly shows how these disciplines, upon analysing the obtained data through their respective theoretical apparatus, may inform and shape on-site language practice. Thirdly, this inter-relationality between academia and professional settings may significantly inspire ESP research and pedagogy. Studying oral and written language data gathered in different social contexts by mixed methodologies may induce ESP teachers to redefine some of the teaching practice and research and make them more aware of varied discourse practices and hybrid genres.

Overall, the interface between academic research and professional discourse research as reflected in the volume is aimed at numerous target audiences: applied linguists, ESP practitioners, ethnographers, discourse analysts, professional practitioners, LSP/ESP students, and all those interested to study the complex and dynamic relationship between disciplinary knowledge and methods and professional discourse.

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